



2024 • Volume 5

JOURNAL OF
YOGA STUDIES

Journal of Yoga Studies

2024 • Volume 5

Electronic version

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34000/JoYS.2024.V5>

ISSN: 2664-1739

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COVER IMAGE

A Hindu ascetic seated under a tree, near Calcutta, West Bengal. Coloured etching by François Balthazar Solvyns, 1799. Wellcome Collection.



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EDITORIAL

Matthew Clark

Senior Editor

Dear Readers,

welcome to the fifth volume of the *Journal of Yoga Studies*. Our previous volume, no. 4, which was published last year (2023), contains fourteen articles, which comprise a wide variety of studies into yoga and bodily practices in South Asia and beyond, and illustrate the diversity of forms, styles and purposes inherent in the grand sweep of the history of yoga globally.

In this edition there are three articles, which similarly reflect the diversity of current research into yoga, in both the past and the modern era. The three articles examine primary sources in Bengali, Mandarin Chinese and Sanskrit.

The article by Ida Pajunen, “Yoga and *Vyāyāma* in New Bengali Sources,” explores the interface between yoga, health, bodybuilding and spirituality in the first half of the twentieth century in Bengal, and the role of particular women in the transformation of the practices and goals of yoga.

“‘Mother of Yoga’: Zhang Huilan, Chris Butler, and the Popularization of Yoga in the People’s Republic of China” by Marc Lagace is a novel exploration of how yoga practices became popular in China in the 1970s. He highlights the role of two yoga teachers in particular, Zhang Huilan and Chris Butler, in the dissemination of yoga practices in China.

Rocco Cestolo, in his article “Fading into Death through Pātañjalayoga: On the Apparent Dead-like State of the Yoga Practitioner Absorbed into Contentless *Samādhi*,” examines

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a crucial feature of traditional yoga practices, found in some commentaries on Pātañjala yoga and also in other sources: namely, the association between *samādhi* and a dead-like condition, in which the yogin appears to be dead, inert like a lump of wood, with no detectable breath. These insights reflect an important distinction between what might be called “traditional” and “modern” yoga, as practised outside South Asia in the twentieth century, as the goals of yoga practice are very different: either attempting to attain *samādhi*, employing various techniques, as in traditional yoga; or practising yoga for “spiritual” reasons, health or well-being, as in modern yoga.

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CITATION

Clark, Matthew. 2024. “Editorial” In *Journal of Yoga Studies* (2024), Vol. 5: 1-2. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34000/JoYS.2023.V5.000>





YOGA AND VYĀYĀMA IN NEW BENGALI SOURCES

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Abstract

This paper examines yoga *āsana* and *vyāyāma* instruction from Bengal in the twentieth century. It focuses on three themes as they appear in materials prior to the 1960s. These themes are the focus on yoga for health, the inclusion of *vyāyāma* in Bengali language sources and the introduction of women to yoga.

KEYWORDS

Yoga, *Āsana*, Body Culture, *Haṭhayoga*, Bengal, Modern Postural Yoga, *Vyāyāma*

1. Introduction

This paper examines Bengali yoga manuals from the twentieth century. While scholarship on modern yoga repeatedly looks to areas like Mysore and Pune, Bengali *āsana* manuals have not received the same attention. Furthermore, there is very little material published that highlights the work of female authors. Here I will begin to consider five books and forty-one newspaper columns published between 1930 and 1957. This material all comes from two locations in North Kolkata: Ghosh's College of Physical Education and Ironman Health Home & Yoga Therapy. Due to the scope of this paper, I will broadly highlight three main themes contained in this material. Future examination will be necessary to detail closely both the contents of the material, as well as to contextualize it further. However, any attempt to do that now would suffer from a lack of foundational analysis. This foundation is what I aim to present here.



The first theme is the health of the physical body. The Bengali material emphasizes the development of muscular strength. Bodybuilding and weightlifting practices have a strong presence in the earliest of the sources considered here. While maintaining a focus on muscle development, the materials evolve to incorporate “internal” health. This results in yoga postures (*āsanas*) as a means to cure physical ailments or prevent poor health.

The second theme is “*vyāyāma*.”¹ *Vyāyāma* (ব্যায়াম) refers to physical exercise. These practices often do not have specific names. They are usually done in motion, which is in contrast to *āsanas* that are held in stillness. I focus on *vyāyāma* because it appears at length in the material being examined here. More specifically, it is included in the Bengali language manuals and is notably absent from the English language manuals. This is the case even when the authors of the sources originate from the same institution. The term *vyāyāma* is used on its own or in conjunction with other terms. For example, “*yoga-vyāyāma*” refers to yoga postures.

New research suggests the influence of *vyāyāma* on modern *āsana* systems. Jerome Armstrong (2023) suggests that the intersection of *vyāyāma* with *haṭhayoga* gave way to popular *āsana* systems for practice, including *sūrya namaskāra*, Bikram Yoga, and *vinyāsa*. In this paper I will only examine the instruction for practising *vyāyāma* in the Bengali sources, not its long-term effect on shaping modern-day practices as Armstrong does.

I leave *vyāyāma* untranslated in this paper. Like *āsana*, *vyāyāma* refers to physical positions native to India. *Vyāyāma* can appear identical in form to callisthenics or gymnastics, which originate in Europe. The focus here is not on those similarities or examining where the true origin lies. Rather, the purpose here is to explore what role *vyāyāma* plays within the Bengali sources. *Vyāyāma* was practised in clubs and gyms often with the mission to enhance nationalism. For this reason, I will use the term *vyāyāma*.

The third theme in this article is women in yoga. In *haṭhayoga* texts, women were not included in the practice of yoga. Today, women frequent yoga studios more often than men. They also represent yoga in the modern age. Take *Yoga Journal* as an example. A man appeared on the cover of the magazine only three times in the one hundred and twenty issues printed since 2006.² The developments in early twentieth-century Bengal serve as a microcosm to illustrate this shift. Women began to be championed as yoga

¹ The term is transliterated as “*byāyām*,” “*byāyāma*,” and “*bayam*” within Bengal.

² Refer to the publications of *Yoga Journal* available at: <https://www.yogajournallibrary.com/browse/>.

teachers and practitioners. They were called on to take up the practices of yoga and *vyāyāma*. The work of Labanya Palit displays this. Her writing is far more extensive than that of her male colleagues. I do not claim that what happens in Bengal is the sole catalyst for women taking up yoga on a global scale. Rather, the Bengali materials offer a clear picture of how women were brought into yoga in one particular region. This illuminates how the status of women in yoga changed drastically in the first half of the twentieth century.

The Bengali yoga sources included in this paper originate from two institutions in North Kolkata: Ghosh's College of Physical Education, founded by Bishnu Charan Ghosh in 1923, and Ironman Health Home & Yoga Therapy, founded by Nilmoni Das in 1933. Research into the history of Ghosh's Yoga College as an institution and the life of Ghosh himself appears in *Calcutta Yoga* by Jerome Armstrong (2020). His publication also illuminates the life of Paramahansa Yogānanda, Buddha Bose, along with a wide survey of Ghosh's students. My goal in this paper is to examine texts on the practice of *āsana* and *vyāyāma*, not to present a biography of their personal lives as Armstrong does. Furthermore, I will focus on sources not examined in Armstrong's work, such as Labanya Palit's publications and the manuals of Nilmoni Das.

Nilmoni Das authored books and published charts on physical practice. His books are written in Bengali. These manuals include *Vyāyāma and Health* (ব্যায়াম ও স্বাস্থ্য), *Illustrated Yoga-Vyāyāma* (শচিত্র যোগ-ব্যায়াম), and *Women's Vyāyāma Health and Beauty* (মেয়েদের ব্যায়াম স্বাস্থ্য ও সৌন্দর্য). *Vyāyāma and Health* came out in 1950, *Women's Vyāyāma Health and Beauty* (WVHB) in 1954 and *Illustrated Yoga-Vyāyāma* (IYV) in 1957. All of these books have undergone further editions and printings. Das's charts are posters which illustrate around twenty positions each, with short captions for each position.³ I focus on Das's books as they provide more detail than the charts.

A fourth book, *Dumbbell-Barbell Vyāyāma* (ডাম্বেল-বারবেল ব্যায়াম) from 1962 displays how bodybuilding, weightlifting and muscle control were important elements of Das's teaching. *Dumbbell-Barbell Vyāyāma* (DBV) expands upon Das's "Barbell Exercises" chart which was first published in the 1930s. DBV does not contain *āsana*, nor does it focus on yoga. It is relevant in this paper only to illuminate the importance of muscle-building within Bengali material.

³ Das's charts include "Free Hand *Vyāyāma*," "Barbell Exercises," "Step By Step *Yogāsana*," and "যোগিক আসন (*Yogic Āsana*)." "Free Hand *Vyāyāma*" was first published in Bengali in 1935.





Bishnu Ghosh did not write as prolifically as Nilmoni Das. He produced two texts about physical practice. *Yoga Cure* was published in English in 1961. His earliest book is *Muscle Control and Barbell Exercises* (1930). This does not contain *āsana* but includes some elements of *haṭhayoga* that were repackaged as “muscle control.” Like Das’s DBV, it shows the importance of muscular health in the publications from this time period.

Two of Ghosh’s students wrote material included here.⁴ Buddha Bose wrote *Key to the Kingdom of Health Through Yoga (Vol. 1)*, published in 1939. This is an *āsana* manual written in English. *Path of the Body* (শরীরম্ আদ্যম্) was written by Labanya Palit and published in Bengali in 1955. Prior to the publication of her book, Palit wrote extensively in the Bengali newspaper *Jugantar* (যুগান্তর). Her columns were printed in the section “World of Women” (নারীজগৎ) from October 1952 into 1954. She published forty-one columns during this period.⁵ These columns include photos and instructions for *āsana* and *vyāyāma*. They also include discussion about how and why women should practise.

I provide my own translations of these materials.⁶ As the material covered is textual, I have sanskritised the transliteration for consistency. Where the sources use English characters, I maintain the source’s spelling.

All of the materials originate in Bengal, but there is a distinction between English language sources and Bengali language sources. The first theme of this paper—health through yoga—appears in the sources regardless of the language of their publication.

⁴ There are other notable publications from students of Bishnu Ghosh. I will not focus on these materials. They were either published outside India and geared towards a different geographical audience, or not published until later. They are worth noting here for documentation and to display the reach of Ghosh’s College students. They include Gouri Shankar Mukerji’s work *Yoga und Unsere Medizin* from 1963. This was published in Germany. There are also the works of Bikram Choudhury—the best-known link to Ghosh outside Bengal—but his first publication, *Bikram’s Beginning Yoga Class*, was not released until 1978 and was published in the United States. His second book *Bikram Yoga* was published in 2007. Two other books are currently in print in Bengal. They are *Cream of Yoga* by India’s first Mr. Universe, Monotosh Roy, (published in 1997) and *Yoga Panacea* by Dr. P. S. Das (published in 2004). With the exception of Mukerji’s German work, all of these are in English. Lastly, there are several works by Jibananda Ghosh which were published in Japanese. I have only seen reference to these.

⁵ These archives are available via the British Library as part of the Endangered Archives collection, in tandem with the Centre for Social Sciences in Kolkata. The archival dates have all been entered incorrectly. I will refer to the actual date that the newspaper article was published on.

⁶ Thanks to Aritra Basu and Reeswav Chatterjee for checking the translations and offering small edits where appropriate.

The other two—*vyāyāma* and women in yoga—appear in the Bengali language sources only. I believe this is, at least in part, due to their positioning within Indian nationalism.

1.1 Innovation In Bengal

Health is a primary focus in all Bengali materials considered here. Therefore, the sources describe particular health benefits associated with the practice of each position. The Bengali sources describe each *āsana* by explaining which muscles are required. While yoga as a health practice is common today, the focus on *āsana* for physical health was a key innovation of the twentieth century. This concept was pioneered not only by those in Bengal but by other figures such as Kuvalayānanda and Yogendra, who both worked near or in Mumbai.

The works of Ghosh, Das, Bose and Palit focus on health through *physical* yoga. Before considering the theme of yoga as a method for health, it is important to establish another point of innovation in Bengal: *spiritual* yoga. In yoga, the dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual is imperfect. Sources may refer to yoga as a practice to develop both physically and spiritually. However, it is useful here to differentiate between those which *primarily* focus on self/God realization and those which focus on the development of the physical body. The Bengali sources I consider in detail here primarily focus on physical development, yet Bengal was a place of spiritual innovation in yoga as well.

Elizabeth De Michelis (2004: 51) outlines what she calls the “religious foundations of Modern Yoga.” Figures who played a role in establishing this religious foundation include Ramakrishna, Rammohan Roy, Debendranath Tagore, Keshubchandra Sen and Swami Vivekananda, all of whom are Bengali. Both De Michelis and Singleton (2010) highlight the importance of Vivekananda in particular. De Michelis explains that Vivekananda was “the inheritor of the intellectual tradition of the Brahmo Samaj.” The Brahmo Samaj began as a means to “revive the Vedānta of the Upaniṣads from oblivion and to identify in it a religion that could both answer the challenges of modernity and provide new norms of collective identity” (Hatcher 2006: 62). From 1820 to 1930, they shaped religious, social and political movements in India. They were social reformers and pioneers of liberal politics and Indian nationalism (Kopf 1979). Vivekananda used the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj to start experimenting with yoga. This led him to produce “the earliest formulation of Modern Yoga in his *Rāja Yoga* (1896)” (De Michelis 2004: 12–13). Singleton echoes the importance of Vivekananda: “In the late 1800s, a mainly anglophone yoga revival began in India, and new syntheses of practical techniques and theory began to emerge, most notably with the teachings of





Vivekananda (1863–1902)” (Singleton 2010: 4). Vivekananda is a figure recognized globally. Yet he is not known for teaching *āsana*.

In his article “Uncovering *Vyāyāma* in Yoga: How *Vyāyāma* Intersects with *Haṭha* Yoga, and Foreran the Modern Yoga Formations of *Sūrya Namaskāra*, Bikram Yoga, and *Vinyāsa*” Jerome Armstrong (2023) writes about the attempt to revive indigenous exercises and bolster physical health in the nineteenth century. He explains that the first national gymnasium was founded in 1866 by Kolkata’s Nabagopal Mitra. This institution promoted health-based practices such as wrestling, martial arts and *vyāyāma*. The club’s location in North Kolkata was frequented by Vivekananda.

Health was of the utmost importance. Buddha Bose writes in *Key to the Kingdom of Health Through Yoga* (Vol. 1) (KKHTY) that “by mastering [the *āsanas*] the student will be rewarded by abundant health and long life” (Bose 1939: 8). It is the reward gained through yoga. Bose continues:

Good health is men's and women's greatest asset, their most valuable possession; with it, they find joy in the breeze and the blue sky, in all nature and in every phase of life, spiritual or material (Bose 1939: 9).

Nilmoni Das writes about the importance of keeping the body healthy. In IYV he states that if the body is not healthy, even saints and sages are unable to progress:

There are many ancient stories of saints and sages who went to worship God but saw that, without a healthy body, their mind collapsed and they were unable to reflect on God. Therefore, they began the ‘doctrine of the body as the path,’ the custom of practising many postures and *mudrās* for keeping the body healthy and able. In modern times, Svāmī Kuvalayānanda and Śrī Yogendra from Bombay preach this *āsana-vyāyāma* (Das 1957: 13).

সে আজ অনেক দিনের কথা—মুনিঝাষিরা ভগবানের আরাধনা করতে গিয়ে দেখলেন যে—শরীর নীরোগ ও কর্মক্ষম না হলে ভগবানের চিন্তা কেন, কোন কাজই করা যায় না— তাঁদের মনে প’ড়ে গেল ‘শরীরমাদ্যম্ খলু ধর্মসাধনম্’ তাই তাঁরা তখন শরীর নীরোগ ও কর্মক্ষম রাখবার জন্য কতকগুলি আসন ওমুদ্রা অভ্যাস করতে আরম্ভ করলেন। আধুনিক কালে আমাদের মধ্যে যাঁরা এই আসন-ব্যায়ামের প্রচার করেন—তাঁরা হলেন—বোম্বাইয়ের স্বামী কুবলয়ানন্দ ও শ্রীযোগেন্দ্র। (দাশ ১৯৫৭: ১৩)

Beyond the focus on health, there are two important points in this passage. Firstly, Das speaks of a “doctrine of the body as the path.” This is the same phrase that Labanya

Palit uses for the title of her book and newspaper columns: শরীরম্ আদ্যম্ (*śarīram ādyam*). It is also the name of one of the three branches of “yoga-science” according to Swami Shivananda Saraswati of Assam (1957: 2).⁷

The second important element in Das’s passage is his reference to the work of Kuvalayananda and Yogendra. As noted previously, their institutions are both near or in Mumbai and not in Bengal.⁸ Yet, they influenced Bengali yoga. Swami Kuvalayananda conducted scientific research on the benefits of yoga *āsana*. His goal was “to teach and train young people to practise Yoga in order to maintain *health*” (Alter 2004: 85, emphasis added). Kuvalayananda founded Kaivalyadhama, a school and research laboratory. Das received his formal education in yoga *āsana* from this institution shortly after Indian Independence in 1947.⁹

Kuvalayananda writes about the importance of scientific experimentation:

Swami Vivekananda and others, indeed, tried to explain some of its principles in the light of modern sciences. But as they never took to experimentation, it again remained exclusively subjective and they could not add the objective side to it (*Yoga Mīmāṃsā*, October 1924).

Vivekananda is acknowledged for bringing ideas of yoga to the public. Yet, the passage displays the shift toward the perceived importance of scientific analysis. Kuvalayananda’s publication states:

Although Yoga is mainly spiritual, it has two important minor aspects. It teaches excellent systems of physical culture and therapeutics (*Yoga Mīmāṃsā*, October 1924).

⁷ Though Shivananda Saraswati’s work is not the focus here, his ashram is also in North Kolkata. This is an area for further research. Shivananda Saraswati (different from Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh) founded “Yoga Training Centre” in 1932 in Kamakhya, Guwahati (Assam). According to a promotional packet for the ashram, his centre was the first of its kind. A second branch called “Shivananda Yogashram & Yogic Hospital” is in Baranagar, Kolkata. His publications, which were of a vast number, cover topics such as “yoga therapy, yogic diet, yogic *vyayam* and yoga science.” His publications are in English, Hindi, Bengali, Assamese and Odia.

⁸ Kuvalayananda’s Institute is called Kaivalyadhama and is in Lonavala (in Maharashtra). Yogendra’s centre, originally located in Versova, in Mumbai, is called The Yoga Institute. It later moved to Santa Cruz, also in Mumbai.

⁹ Interview with Swapan Das, 21st July, 2020.





These “minor aspects” become a major catalyst for yoga in the twentieth century. Ghosh writes in the introduction to KKHTY, “Yoga exercises combine the basic laws utilized by the ancient Yogis with the discoveries of modern physiological science” (Bose 1939: 1). Physical culture and therapeutics become the focus of Das, Ghosh and Ghosh’s pupils.

Nilmoni Das also mentions Yogendra as a leader of yoga. He writes in IYV:

Today *āsana-vyāyāma* has become widely practised in our country. Its leaders are Swami Kuvalayananda, Shri Yogendra, Shyam Sundar Goswami, Swami Sivananda Saraswati and Bishnu Charan Ghosh (Das 1957: 13).¹⁰

আজ যে আমাদের দেশে আসন-ব্যায়ামের এত প্রচলন হয়েছে তার মূলে হচ্ছেন—স্বামী কুবলয়ানন্দ, শ্রীযোগেন্দ্র, শ্যামসুন্দর গোস্বামী, স্বামী শিবানন্দ সরস্বতী ও বিষ্ণুচরণ ঘোষ ।
(দাশ ১৯৫৭: ১৩)

Like Kuvalayānanda, Shri Yogendra focuses on “providing scientific corroboration for the health benefits of yoga and with creating simplified, accessible *āsana* courses for the public” (Singleton 2010: 117). Yogendra writes:

Yoga, interpreted in rational synthesis, represents the way of life which endows perfect health—physical, mental, moral and spiritual—so that what is ignoble in man is sublimated to what is most noble in him (Yogendra 1928: 20).

Yogendra reframes yoga as a physical practice. He says that “ancient yogis of India” used physical education for health:

But the first to correlate physical education with health, hygiene, therapy, ethics, meditation, and higher purposes of life so as to associate such training with medical, social, mental, moral and physic education were the ancient yogins of India (Yogendra 1928: 34).

Setting aside whether or not this is an accurate historical statement, yoga continues to be framed as a historic practice today. The practice is backdated in order to provide a sense of authenticity or tradition.

¹⁰ Das is likely referring to Shivananda Saraswati of Assam, not to be confused with Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh, who is more widely known today.

Alongside Kuvalayānanda and Yogendra, Ghosh appears on Das's list of leaders in the field. Swapan Das, son of Nilmoni Das and heir to the Ironman institute, explains that Ghosh was a good friend of Nilmoni Das. Early in the 1940s, Ghosh convinced Das that the practice of *āsana* was essential for the health of the internal body. After returning to Kolkata from his studies at Kaivalyadhāma, Das taught and wrote about *āsana* more prominently (Interview, Swapan Das, 21st July, 2020). This shift toward *āsana* was significant for Das who, like Ghosh, started out as a weightlifter and bodybuilder. In their earliest works, Das and Ghosh focus on health through muscular development.

1.2 External Health Through Muscle Building

The earliest publication of Bishnu Ghosh is *Muscle Control and Barbell Exercises* (MCBE). It was co-written with Keshub Sen Gupta in English and published in 1930. It depicts muscular men (no women are included) doing weightlifting exercises and muscle isolation practices. It does not include *āsana*.

Bishnu Ghosh (1903–1970) was born into a family of Kriya Yoga practitioners (see Armstrong 2020). He was influenced by his older brother Mukunda Lal Ghosh, later known worldwide as Paramahansa Yogananda. Aside from his brother, Ghosh was inspired by popular physical culturists of the early twentieth century. In MCBE Ghosh writes:



Figure 1: Bishnu Ghosh showing “Isolation of the forearm muscles” (MCBE: Fig. 10).

I learnt muscle-controlling before all this, when I was very young, from my beloved elder brother, Swami Yogananda Giri B. A., the founder of the Yogoda system of physical culture [...] At the time when my brother was here, I was very young and thin and would never practise it. But after Thakurta's system had improved my health, one day I chanced to see Mr. Chit Tun controlling his huge and shapely muscles (Ghosh 1930: 52).

Ghosh saw the Burmese weightlifter Walter Chit Tun perform. Soon after, he began training with Prof. R. N. Thakurta at City College in Kolkata (Armstrong 2020: 57–60). This training improved his health. MCBE emulates the work of German bodybuilder Maxick. The titles of Maxick's *Muscle Control* from 1911 and Chit Tun's 1926 *Barbell Exercises* merged to yield Ghosh and Sen Gupta's *Muscle Control and Barbell Exercises*.

Nilmoni Das (1911–1990) started training in clubs and gyms as a young man. He gave public demonstrations of barbell exercises at shows and *pūjās*. This caught the attention of two figures. The Indian revolutionary Pulin Behari Das (1877–1949) bestowed upon



Figure 2: Portrait of Nilmoni Das “The author at 45 years of age” (লেখক ৪৫ বৎসর বয়সে).

him the title “Ironman.” Jaladhar Sen (1860–1939), who edited various newspapers, including *Monthly India* (মাসিক ভারতবর্ষ), encouraged Das to publish materials on physical training. He suggested that Das should include photographs of the exercises along with his written instruction. Photography was very expensive at the time. Das’s father was a teacher, the family was middle class. Without enough money to produce the photographs, Das’s aunt agreed to sell off her jewellery to pay for the photos. The first publication was a chart of barbell exercises. It quickly sold all 3,000 copies from the initial printing and was deemed a success (Interview, Das, 21st July 2020). The first edition of the Barbell Exercises chart came out in 1933, followed in 1935 by Dumbbell Exercises.¹¹

Das’s earliest book, *Vyāyāma and Health* (ব্যায়াম ও স্বাস্থ্য), also focuses on muscle development. It contains dumbbell exercises, barbell exercises, plus ring and bar exercises. *Vyāyāma and Health* was released in 1950 and did not contain *āsanas* in its first printing. However, *āsanas* were added to the second edition in 1954. When pressed for why *āsanas* were absent in the first volume, Das’s son and grandson explained, “Yoga wasn’t very popular at that time.”¹²

In their early publications, both Das and Ghosh are concerned with developing strength. Das writes on the Barbell Exercises chart that “Exercise with a barbell should not be called weight-lifting. It is a muscle-building and strength-producing exercise.” This distinction is clearer coming from Ghosh. Ghosh focuses on practices of “muscle isolation” and “muscle control.” He explains the latter:

Muscle-controlling makes the muscles shapely and increases the power of application of strength. But I would like to call it the second stage of development, for one should have big muscles before he starts controlling. Much has already been said about the development of muscles in the previous part [on barbell exercises] and to follow them closely is what is required (Ghosh & Sen Gupta 1930: 52).

The focus on musculature continues into *āsana* instruction. In 1939, Buddha Bose writes about the specific muscle engagement of each posture. In the cobra position (*bhujāṅgāsana*), the practitioners lie on the floor face down. They then lift their chest

¹¹ This information came from an interview with Swapan Das (son of Nilmoni Das), 21st July, 2020. Due to Covid-19, Swapan Das was unable to double-check the dates of the original charts and books which reside at his office and not at his home where I was able to reach him by phone.

¹² Correspondence with Soham Das, grandson of Nilmoni Das, 30th July, 2020 (WVHB: 4).





and bend their spine backwards. The position looks like a snake, hence its name. Bose lists the “muscles exercised” in this *āsana* as “Trapezius; Rhomboids-minor and major; Latissimus; Serratus posterior inf. Pectoralis major Gluteus Maximus” (Bose 1939: 20).

The focus on musculature continues in publications of Ghosh’s students well beyond the 1930s. For example, in 1963, Gouri Shankar Mukerji describes the muscles used in *Bhujāṅgāsana*. He writes that the back muscles engage and the abdominal muscles stretch: “Alle dorsalen Muskeln. Die Bauch-Muskeln werden gedehnt” (Mukerji 1963: 27). Bikram Choudhury writes in 1978 that “The Cobra strengthens the deltoids, trapezius, and triceps” (Choudhury 1978:125).¹³

Das does not focus on muscle use. Yet, he emphasizes strength. In regard to Cobra he writes:

This posture strengthens the spine and makes it flexible. It gives the spine plentiful blood and energizes the spinal nerves (Das 1954: 111, 1957: 75).

এই আসন মেরুদন্ডের কাঠিন্য দূর ক’রে একে নমনীয় করে এবং মেরুদন্ডের অধিক রক্ত পাঠিয়ে স্নায়ুমন্ডলীকে সতেজ করে। (দাশ ১৯৫৪: ১১১, ১৯৫৭: ৭৫)

Strength is a common focus in the Bengali sources. Strength and muscle control often work in tandem. Specific muscles are isolated to create specific muscular engagements. This concept ties in with the practice of *navli*. *Navli* is included in all of the sources examined here as well as in *haṭhayoga* texts.

1.3 The Evolution Of *Navli* And *Uḍḍiyāna*

Navli and *uḍḍiyāna* are abdominal control practices. *Navli* is performed with the breath held out. The practitioner engages the muscles of the ribs to lift the chest. This creates a cavity in the abdomen. If the practitioner stops at this point, it is called *uḍḍiyāna*. If they continue, they then isolate and engage specific abdominal muscles. If they engage the rectus abdominis, the middle segment of the abdomen sticks out. Alternatively, they can engage the external obliques, so the sides of the abdomen stick out. This is difficult to achieve. Ghosh, Das, Bose and Palit all teach both *navli* and *uḍḍiyāna*. Both also appear

¹³ Bikram Choudhury went on to found “Bikram Yoga” which became popular worldwide. He grew up in Kolkata and studied with Ghosh for a short period of time. His system includes postures from the Bengali sources and a health-based approach. However, “Bikram Yoga” is a set sequence of postures which never changes and is practised in a heated practice room. The method of practice in Bengal is individual, not set sequences for group practice. For more on this, see Armstrong (2020).



Figure 3: Buddha Bose performing *uḍḍiyāna bandha* (Bose 1939: 67).

in *haṭhayoga* texts and in experiments Kuvalayānanda conducted. These sources label them as seal (*mudrā*), lock (*bandha*), purifying *ṣaṭkarman*, *āsana* or muscle control.

In MCBE there are three photos of Buddha Bose in different variations of *navli*. Though they are called “muscle control,” the focus is health: “All these kinds of abdominal controlling is a sure cure to dyspepsia and improves the digestive power of a normal man” (Ghosh & Sen Gupta 1930: Fig. 23). Bose instructs *uḍḍiyāna* in KKHTY:

Stand erect, relaxing all the muscles....The abdomen should be relaxed. Then exhale thoroughly and suck in the upper part of the abdomen as much as possible, fixing the gaze on the abdomen (Bose 1939: 66).

This is standard instruction. In 1955, Labanya Palit’s is similar:

First, stand and relax your muscles. Bending over slightly, exhale as much as possible. Drag the upper part of the abdomen in (Palit 1955: 77).

প্রথমে শরীরের মাংসপেশীগুলিকে নরম করে ছবি অনুযায়ী একটু নীচু হ'য়ে দাঁড়ন। যতটা পারেন নিঃশ্বাস ছেড়ে দিন, এই অবস্থায় পেটের ওপর দিক্টা ভেতের টেনে নিয়ে পেটটা খালি করুন। (পালিত ১৯৫৫: ৭৭)



Figure 4: Labanya Palit in a variation of nauli. “Nauli - Ultimate Development” (নৌলি - চরম উন্নতি) (Palit 1955: 80).

Das instructs:

With the breath completely out, pulling the stomach cavity in is called *uddiyāna*. Practice *uddiyāna* in this way, as displayed in the image. It is better to learn this exercise by watching someone do it. Practise this

āsana in the morning with an empty stomach and you will easily progress (Das 1954: 140).

দম সম্পূর্ণ ছেড়ে দিয়ে পেট ভেতরে টেনে নিলে পেটের মধ্যে যে গর্ত হয় তাকে চলতি কথায় উড্ডীয়ান বলে। উড্ডীয়ান কি ভাবে অভ্যাস করতে হয়, বলা ও লেখার চেয়ে দেখান সহজ। সম্ভব হলে এই আসনটি কাহারও কাছ থেকে দেখে শিখে নিলে তাড়াতাড়ি ও সহজে শেখা যায়। ভোরবেলা খালি পেটে এই আসনটি অভ্যাস করলে সহজেই আয়ত্তে আনা যায়। (দাশ ১৯৫৪: ১৪০)

Das is aware that *uḍḍiyāna* and *navli* appear also in *haṭhayoga* texts. In a passage on *uḍḍiyāna* (উড্ডীয়ান) in WVHB, he quotes the *Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā*. In another passage on *navli* (নৌলি) he quotes the *Haṭha [Yoga] Pradīpikā* (Das 1957: 121, 123).¹⁴

Navli and *uḍḍiyāna* are the focus of Kuvalayananda's first *Yoga Mīmāṃsā* publication from October 1924. To perform *uḍḍiyāna*, *Yoga Mimamsa* states:

The exercise of *uḍḍiyāna* starts with a complete exhalation. The muscles of the abdomen are then fully relaxed and pushed well under the ribs (*Yoga Mīmāṃsā*, October 1924).

The abdominal control practices are present in many arenas. They serve as links between *haṭhayoga*, muscle control and the teaching of Das, Ghosh, Palit, Bose and Kuvalayananda.

1.4 Internal Health Through *Āsana*

By 1939, a distinction had grown between health and strength. The focus shifts toward internal health and disease. Ghosh asks, “Do you want strength? Do you want health? Your answer, ‘I want both.’” (Bose 1939: 4). This draws attention toward internal health and brings *āsana* into the limelight.

Ghosh explains that “a person may have cultivated great strength in his limbs or in certain muscles by the use of mechanical appliances, but he still may not have good health” (Bose 1939: 2). Even if a person has muscular strength, internal disease can occur. Ghosh writes:

¹⁴ Das does not specify the editions he is referencing of the *Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā* or the *Haṭha [Yoga] Pradīpikā*.

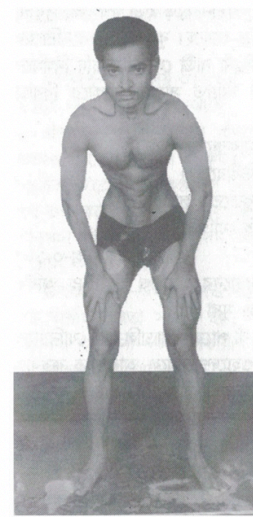


Figure 5: Practitioner displaying *navli* in IYV. “*navli*” (নৌলি) (Das 1956: 123).

What is more desirable in body culture is the harmonious development of power over the voluntary action of muscles and the involuntary processes of heart, lungs, stomach and other organs and important glands. This is what gives health, and is the scientific principle underlying the Yoga exercises (Bose 1939: 2-3).

What is the benefit of *āsana* over other forms of exercise? Bose writes that “proper practice of Yoga *Āsanas* or postures does not entail any loss of energy, hence longevity is increased” (Bose 1939: 7). Furthermore, *āsanas* are a “non-mechanical, scientific and natural means for the strengthening of all living or atrophying muscle fibres and tissues” (Bose 1939: 2). Medicalised language is commonplace in these sources, regardless of the scientific validity of the claims. *Āsanas* become a means to both internal and external health.

In Leg Lift (উত্থিত পদাসন, Skt. *utthita padāsana*), the practitioner lies on the back and lifts the legs in the air to 45 degrees. Bose says this position: “Strengthens the abdominal muscles and prevents Hernia, removes gas from the intestines. Helps to cure indigestion. It also strengthens the legs” (Bose 1939: 22). Das agrees:

This *āsana* helps to decrease fat around the abdomen. The stomach muscles grow stronger and prevent hernia (Das 1954: 126).

এই আসন পেটের চর্বি কমাতে সাহায্য করে। পেটের পেশীর শক্তি বৃদ্ধি হওয়ায় এই আসন অভ্যসকরিণীর কখনও হার্নিয়া হয় না। (দাশ ১৯৫৪: ১২৬)

Firm pose (বজ্রাসন, Skt. *vajrāsana*) is a seated posture. The practitioners sit on their heels with the knees fully flexed. This posture occurs in all of the Bengali sources and is also found in *haṭhayoga* texts. Palit instructs this pose as follows:

Place the two knees on the ground and sit in a kneeling position. Make the back and neck straight and gaze forward. Exhalations and inhalations are easy in this position. At first stay up to thirty seconds. With good practice, one can stay for as long as half an hour. Do this *āsana* three times each day. (Palit, *Jugantar*, 26th October 1952 BLA: Vol. 16; Issue 34, 23rd October, 1952).

হাঁটু দুটি মাটিতে রেখে হাঁটু গেড়ে বসুন। পিঠের শিরদাঁড়া, ঘাড় সোজা করে সামনে তাকান। নিঃশ্বাস প্রশ্বাস সহজ সরল থাকবে। এই অবস্থায় প্রথম প্রথম তিরিশ সেকেন্ড অবধি থাকুন, ভাল করে অভ্যেস হয়ে গেলে ক্রমশঃ আধঘন্টা পর্যন্ত বজ্রাসনে বজ্রাসনে থাকতে পারেন। নিয়মিত সকালে এই আসনটি ওবার করবেন। (পালিত “যুগান্তর” ২৬শে অক্টোবর, ১৯৫২)

This is a simple posture. However, Bose, Palit and Das agree that it has health benefits despite its simplicity. Bose writes that, “This *āsana* aids digestion, removes flatulence and helps to cure myalgia in the toes, calves, knees and thighs and also helps to cure sciatica” (Bose 1939: 14). Palit says it helps with relaxation:

The resting *āsana* (*śavāsana*) is the same as this *āsana* in the sense the body becomes completely relaxed as though one is lying on one’s back. The body is as loose and relaxed as possible. (Palit, *Jugantar*, 26th October 1952, BLA: Vol. 16; Issue 34, 23rd October, 1952).

প্রত্যেক বারই ‘শবাসনে’ শয়ে বিশ্রাম নেবেন। শবাসন অর্থৎ বিশ্রাম নেবার আসন। (পালিত “যুগান্তর” ২৬সে অক্টোবর, ১৯৫২)

Das says it helps with digestion:

Practise of this *āsana* prevents sciatica and arthritis of the feet. If you practice this *āsana* for 5–10 minutes after meals, it will become easy. Practising this *āsana* is beneficial for easing indigestion after meals (Das 1957: 62).

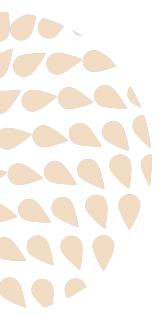
এই আসন অভ্যাসে সায়টিকা, পায়ের বাত ইত্যাদি হয় না, আহ্বারের পরে এই আসন ৫/১০ মিনিট অভ্যাস করলে ডুগ্ধদ্রব্য সহজে পরিপাক হয়। অর্জীর্ণ রোগীদের আহ্বারের পর এই আসন অভ্যাস করা ফলপ্রসূ। (দাশ ১৯৫৭: ৬২)

Das refers to the *Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā* (GS) when he writes about Firm Pose. Yet, the benefits of Firm Pose are different in the GS. One would expect similarity since the GS is relatively late when compared to other *haṭhayoga* texts, and probably originated from or near Bengal (Mallinson 2004: xiii). In the GS, Firm Pose (*vajrāsana*) “bestows success upon yogis” (Mallinson 2004: 18). Benefits to other *āsanas* in the GS include “break[ing] open the door to liberation” and “destroy[ing] all diseases” (Mallinson 2004: 17–18). Disease is mentioned, though not in any detail. The modern Bengali material gives far more detail. *Āsanās* cure diseases or prevent physical ailments. They strengthen muscles. They affect organs or glands. The difference displays the physicalization of *āsana* in the twentieth century. The goal of *āsana* in the early-mid twentieth century Bengal is health.

2. Vyāyāma in Bengal

Vyāyāma is an important element in our Bengali sources. Vyāyāma is a general term that means “exercise.” It often consists of physical positions set in motion. These positions





rarely have specific names. Typically they are numbered and grouped together under the title “vyāyāma.” Vyāyāma is also likened to other practices. For example, āsanas appear under the heading “Yoga-Vyāyāma” (যোগ-ব্যায়াম). These however, are not positions done in motion. Rather, they are held in stillness. Vyāyāma is not included in the English language manuals from Bengal, though it comes up consistently in the Bengali language manuals. I believe this, at least in part, springs from the role of exercise in Indian nationalism.

Physical training became popular in India during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1882, the Indian Education Commission recommended that “physical training be promoted in the interest of the youth by encouragement of native games, gymnastics and other exercises suited to each school” (Alter 2007: 1158). This coincided with the perception of a degenerate Indian individual and society at large (Singleton 2010: 95). To promote physical training and counter the idea of a weak society, physical training was put into practice in various ways. English schools included sports programs. Missionary groups organized competitions. Mass training drills were

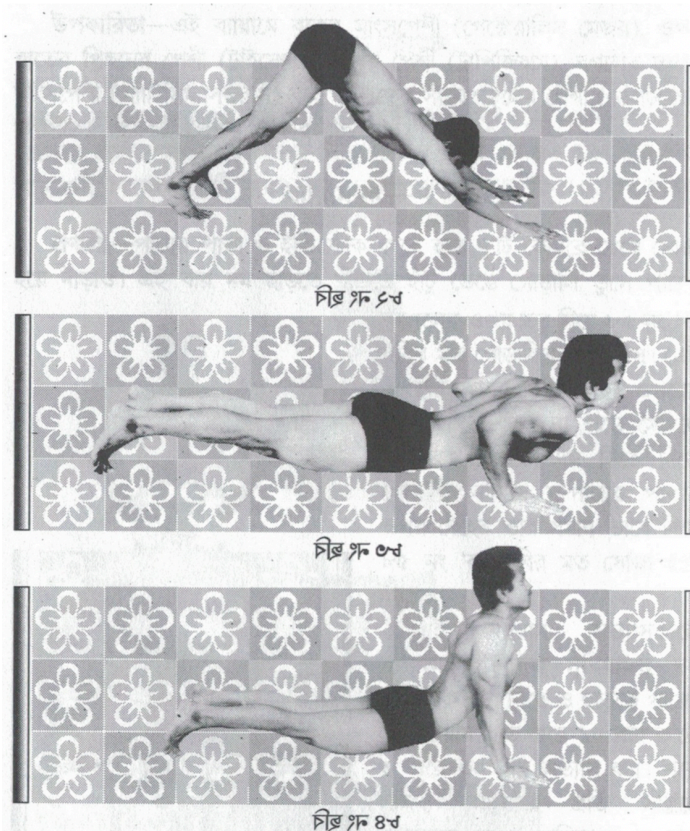


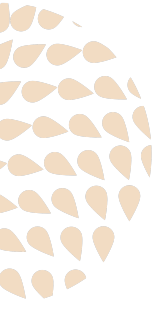
Figure 6: Vyāyāma practitioner going through the movements of danḍa.
In IYV it is labeled as Vyāyāma No. 6 (Das 1956: 151).

incorporated into nationalist organizations. *Rājas* and *mahārājas* promoted clubs for both indigenous and non-indigenous sport (Alter 2007: 1158). In Aundh (Pune) Bhavanarao Pant Prantinidhi popularized *sūrya namaskāra* for both individual and *national* health (Goldberg 2016: 200). Krishnamacharya developed gymnastic-based yoga under the Rāja of Mysore (Ibid.: 212). Both of these had an immense impact on modern yoga (see Armstrong 2023).

Beyond the promotion of *vyāyāma* by royalty, two additional approaches to integrating physical training impacted yoga in Bengal: secular nationalism and the prominence of gymnasiums.



Figure 7: Reba Das showing *vyāyāma* 1. This is included in the Free Hand *Vyāyāma* section of WVHB (Das 1954: 55).



Indian secular nationalism sought to reframe physical practices. Alter explains: “Kuvalayananda in particular sought to modernize indigenous sports and turn postural yoga into a modern form of traditional Indian physical culture” (Alter 2007: 1159). These practices needed to be indigenous to India, at least in name if not also in form. *Āsana* and *vyāyāma* were perfect. To modernize these practices, health benefits were incorporated and specific muscular anatomy was emphasized. They served as a cure for physical ailments.

Secular nationalism found a home in *akhārās*.¹⁵ These meeting grounds fostered community, accountability and political and social organizing. Both Ghosh’s College of Physical Education and Das’s Ironman Center started during this period. Secular nationalism appears in Ghosh’s dedication of MCBE. He dedicates the work to “Young Bengal,” a group which emerged in the 1830–40s ideologically opposed to orthodox Hinduism (Falk 2002: 141). Members of Young Bengal made their way into Brahma Samaj. Vivekananda and his “proto Modern Yoga” are greatly indebted to the Brahma Samaj (De Michelis 2004: 49). Das got his start from Pulin Behari Das who led the *Anusilan Samiti* (অনুশীলন সমিতি) or “bodybuilding society.” Pulin Behari Das emphasizes the need for a healthy body and strength of character. He felt physical training was linked to intellectual development (Rosselli 1980: 131).

The *Simla Vyāyāma Samiti* began in north Kolkata in 1926. This club existed in the same neighborhood as Ghosh’s College, Ironman Centre and Vivekananda’s ancestral home. It promoted three forms of *vyāyāma*.

The goal of the club was to develop healthy youth within a nationalist frame:

The main aim of establishing *Simla Vyāyāma Samiti* was to build healthy and morally courageous Bengali youths, so that they could at any time plunge for the freedom movement of the motherland and they could extend their help to the weak and miserable people.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Akhārā* (originally a Persian term) refers to a gymnasium. Gymnasias are found throughout India. They are places where wrestling, physical exercises and martial arts are practised by both professionals and non-professionals. Some young men in metropolitan cities train in *akhārās* simply to get fit. Also, fighting ascetics (*nāgās*) are organised into thirteen different *akhārās*. *Nāgā* members of the *akhārās* go to training arenas (*akhārās*), usually in the early morning, to train in the use of various weapons and in hand-to-hand combat.

¹⁶ See *Simla Byayam Samity* retrieved from: <http://simlabyayamsamity.com/history.html#history>.

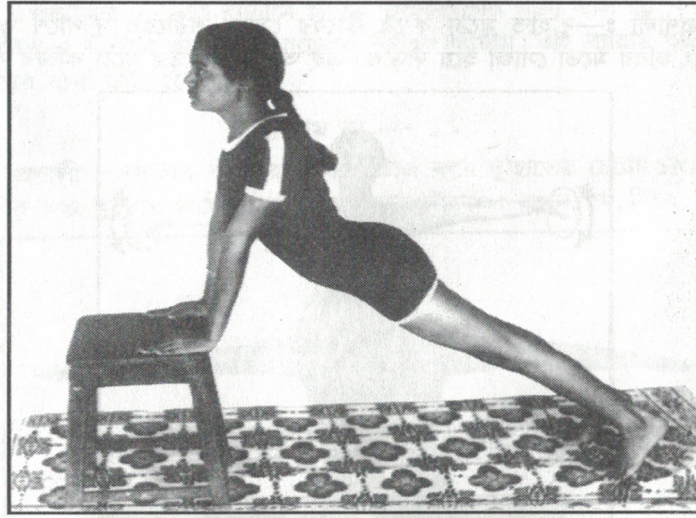


Figure 8: *Jugantar* 30th August 1953.
Vyāyāma practitioner in *daṇḍa* with a stool. In WVHB it is labeled as
Vyāyāma No. 13. (Das 1954: 66)

This club encouraged physical development through “training for wrestling, exercise, and training for fighting with sticks.”¹⁷ In Joseph Alter’s analysis of *Subaltern Bodies and Nationalist Physiques*, he describes two exercises commonly used for wrestling training. He calls these “jack-knifing push-ups,” and “a bouncing deep knee bend” (Alter 2000: 52). Both of these exercises are in Das’s books.

Vyāyāma features extensively in Bengali language material. Consider the titles of Das’s books: *Vyāyāma and Health*, *Women’s Vyāyāma for Health and Beauty*, *Yoga-Vyāyāma* and *Dumbbell-Barbell Vyāyāma*. Yet, it is entirely absent in English sources. Given the relationship of vyāyāma to nationalism, one could expect vyāyāma to be absent from the English language material. Vyāyāma is missing from Bose’s manual in 1939, Ghosh’s 1961 *Yoga Cure* and even Gouri Shankar Mukerji’s *Yoga und Unsere Medizin* from 1963. Yet Palit, a student of Ghosh and contemporary of Bose and Mukerji, includes vyāyāma in her columns and her book.

Both vyāyāma and āsana can be interpreted as indigenous forms of physical exercise. Scholars have probed the similarity of āsana, in form, to other Western practices. This same approach could be applied to vyāyāma. It would be of interest to explore why āsana makes its way into the English-language while vyāyāma does not. It is possible that the

¹⁷ See *Simla Byayam Samity* retrieved from: <http://simlabyayamsamity.com/history.html#history>.



peaceful undertone of *āsana* perpetuated it on a global scale. Perhaps this was enhanced by Gandhi's presentation of spiritual and moral force as superior to physical force (Howard 2011: 200). It is also possible that the funding sources propelled *āsana* but not *vyāyāma*. Further research is needed to address this. However, Bengalis were interacting with each other in their own language differently than they were in with English speakers. *Vyāyāma* is an example of this.

2.1 *Vyāyāma As Taught By Palit And Das*

Das draws on many terms to refer to different *vyāyāma* practices. Some of these are self explanatory. There is ডামবেল নিয়ে ব্যায়াম (*dumbbell niye vyāyāma*), which means “*vyāyāma* with dumbbells,” বারবেল নিয়ে ব্যায়াম (*barbell niye vyāyāma*) or “*vyāyāma* with barbell,” প্যারালেল বারে ব্যায়াম (*parallel bare vyāyāma*), meaning “parallel bar *vyāyāma*,” হেলান বারে ব্যায়াম (*helano bāre vyāyāma*) or “slanted bar *vyāyāma*,” রোসান রিংয়ে ব্যায়াম (*Russian ringe vyāyāma*), meaning “Russian ring *vyāyāma*,” and নীচু বারে ব্যায়াম (*nichu bare vyāyāma*), meaning “low bar *vyāyāma*.” These represent strengthening exercises using barbells or dumbbells, or gymnastics movements using apparatus like bars and rings.

Both Palit and Das use other terms to represent practices without equipment. These are what we would consider *yoga āsana* today. They are the practices of “free hand *vyāyāma*” (খালি হাতে ব্যায়াম or *khāli hāte vyāyāma*) and “yogic *vyāyāma*” or “*yoga-vyāyāma*” (যৌগিক ব্যায়াম). Under the *yog(ic)-vyāyāma* heading are specific *āsanas*.

In WVHB, there are thirty-six positions in the “yogic *vyāyāma*” section, all of which are named as *āsanas*. Some of them have a pre-modern origin. Das includes positions such as Lotus (পদ্মাসন, Skt. *padmāsana*), Stretching (পশ্চিমোত্তাসন, Skt. *paścimottānāsana*), and Corpse (শবাসন, Skt. *śavāsana*). These postures appear in the *Haṭha [Yoga] Pradīpikā*. In IYV, Das includes practices that do not fall under the heading of *vyāyāma*. (Though the book itself is broadly called *vyāyāma*.) These include *mudrā* (মুদ্রা), *ṣaṭkarmāni* (ষট্ কৰ্মাণি), *prāṇāyāma* (প্রাণায়াম). These too feature in *haṭhayoga* texts.

Das then introduces twenty-four free-hand *vyāyāma* (খালি হাতে ব্যায়াম) in WVHB. He teaches moving the arms up and down, push-ups, supine leg lifts, leg circles, sit-ups, and squatting. In IYV, there is also a section on free-hand *vyāyāma* which contains twelve movements. Palit includes nineteen positions in her book. She calls them “women’s free hand *vyāyāma*” (মেয়েদের খালি হাতে ব্যায়াম). Both Das and Palit explain this term. Das writes:

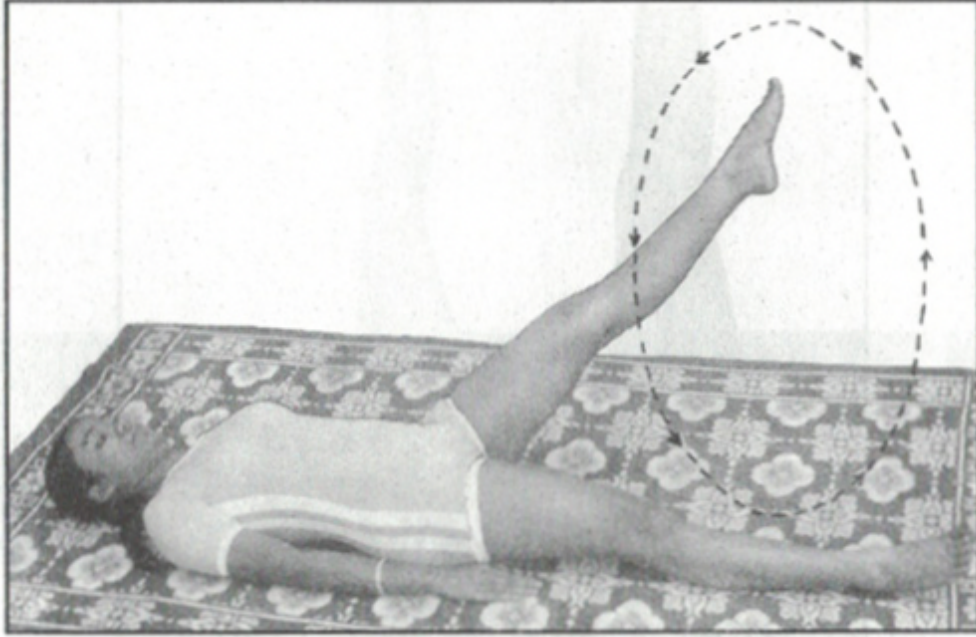


Figure 9: Practitioner showing Single Leg Circles in WVHB.
Labeled as *Bāyām* No. 16 (ব্যায়াম নং ১৬) (Das 1954: 69).

Another form of movement to present for women is *vyāyāma*. Young children love jumping and running so they too are in favor of this excellent *vyāyāma*. It also enhances blood circulation by developing the posture of the body and decreasing stiffness. Free-hand *vyāyāma* can be understood as various poses in movement (Das 1954: 54).

এই মসয় প্রকৃতি তাদের ব্যায়াম শিক্ষক । ছোট ছোট ছেলেমেয়েরা লাফালাফি ছোট্টাছুটি করতে ভালবাসে । তাদের পক্ষে ইহাই উত্তম ব্যায়াম । খালি হাতে ব্যায়াম বলতে কি বোঝায় এ সম্বন্ধে বলতে গেলে বলতে হয়—হাতে কিছু না নিয়ে শরীরকে বিভিন্ন ভঙ্গিমায় অঙ্গ সঞ্চলনের মাধ্যমে শরীরের জড়তা দূর করে শরীরে রক্ত সঞ্চলন বৃদ্ধি করাকেই খালি হাতে ব্যায়াম বলে । (দাশ ১৯৫৪: ৫৪)

Das emphasizes that the positions are carried out in motion. Palit agrees. She offers a similar definition for free-hand *vyāyāma*:

It is very beneficial for women to do free-hand *vyāyāma*. It is advisable to give free-hand *vyāyāma* according to the body structure of women. The difference between *āsana* and *vyāyāma* is that to do free-hand *vyāyāma*, the feet and limbs move, but *āsanas* are motionless. After an *āsana* you



should sit down or take *śavāsana*. After a good *śavāsana*, you proceed on. Both inhalation and exhalation should be done well. (Palit, 30th August 1953, *Jugantar* BLA: Vol: 16; Issue: 34.1 27th August 1953).

মেয়েদের জন্যে খালিহাতে ব্যায়ামও যথেষ্ট উপকারী। তাই বিভিন্ন শরীর বুঝে, আসন ও খালিহাতে ব্যায়াম দেওয়া কর্তব্য। খালিহাতে ব্যায়াম অর্থাৎ মুভমেন্ট দিয়ে ব্যায়াম করান। আসন ও খালিহাতে ব্যায়ামের বাহ্যিক পার্থক্য এই যে, খালিহাতে ব্যায়াম করবার সময় হাত, পা বা অন্যান্য অঙ্গপ্রত্যঙ্গ নড়াচড়া করে, কিন্তু আসনের সময় স্থির হয়ে বসে বা শুয়ে আসন করতে হয়। শ্বাস-প্রশ্বাসের কাজ দুটির বেলাতেই ভাল করে চলবে। (পালিত “যুগান্তর” ৩০ আগস্ট, ১৯৫৩)

Palit praises the health benefit of *yoga-vyāyāma*. In her column from 17th January 1954, she writes:

All the free-hand *vyāyāma* can be useful to women. Of these, I have published about a few. If these *yoga-vyāyāma* are excluded from publication, they will not be done. But they should immediately be practised.

I have spoken to you before about other *yoga-vyāyāma* and now I will discuss various others. Those people who have become a little overweight should do all of the *yoga-vyāyāma* every day.

After the *vyāyāma* are presented here, you will be able to practise them (Palit, 17th January 1954, *Jugantar* BLA: Vol: 17; Issue: 147, 14th January 1954).

খালি হাতে যে সকল ব্যায়াম করা যায়। মেয়েদের উপযোগী সে সকলগুলির মধ্যে আমি কয়েকটি আগেই প্রকাশ করেছি। এগুলি করলে যোগ-ব্যায়াম বাদ দেবেন তা নয়; তবে যোগ-ব্যায়ামের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে এগুলি অভ্যেস করবেন। আমি সকলকেই খালি হাতে ব্যায়াম অভ্যেস করতে বলিছ না।

তাই আমি এর আগে আপনাদের যোগ-ব্যায়াম সম্বন্ধে বলেছি, তারপর নানা রকম আনুসঙ্গিক ব্যায়ামগুলি সম্বন্ধে আলোচনা করছি। যাঁরা একটু মোটা হয়ে পড়েছেন তাঁরা অবশ্যই যোগ-ব্যায়ামের সঙ্গে এই সমস্ত আনুসঙ্গিক খালিহাতে ব্যায়ামগুলি অভ্যেস করবেন রোজ।

আজ যে ব্যায়ামগুলি কথা বলছি সেগুলি আপনারা অভ্যেস করে দেখতে পারেন। (পালিত “যুগান্তর” ১৭ জানুয়ারী, ১৯৫৪)



Figure 10: Palit in “Vyāyāma No. 1” (*Jugantar*, 17th January 1954)

Most of the *vyāyāma* lack specific names. One exception is *daṇḍa*, the jack-knife push-ups discussed earlier. Others possess generic names such as পায়ের ব্যায়াম (*pāyer vyāyāma*) translated as “leg *vyāyāma*.” Often they are simply numbered. To this end, photos serve to bring further clarity to written instructions. In one photo from 17th January 1954, Palit is seated with her legs out to the sides, leaning with her head toward her right knee and her left arm reaching toward her right foot. She writes:

First, sit with your legs in front, straight like a stick. Like in the picture, make a gap between your legs, bringing them out to the sides. Now, having taken the left hand over your head, bend to the right and immediately bring your head in that direction. Then having taken the right hand over to the left, that is, the right hand in the direction of your left leg. Take your arms in this way, as shown in the picture. In this manner, one at a time, lean to the right and then to the left ten times (Palit, 17th January 1954, *Jugantar* BLA: Vol: 17; Issue: 147, 14th January 1954).

প্রথমে সোজা হয়ে সামনে পা ছাড়িয়ে বসুন। এবার ছবি অনুযায়ী দুটি পা ফাঁক করে তফাতে রাখুন। এখন বাঁ হাতটিকে মাথার ওপর নিয়ে যান, সঙ্গে সঙ্গে মাথাটি ডান দিকে বেকিয়ে আনুন। তারপর ডান হাতটি বাঁ হাঁটুর ওপর নিয়ে যান অর্থাৎ ডান হাতের আঙ্গুলগুলি বাঁ হাঁটুর ওপর দিয়ে দিন। এবার মাথাটি ডান হাঁটুর দিকে নামিয়ে আনুন পাশাপাশিভাবে। বাঁ হাতের আঙ্গুলগুলি যেনো ডান হাঁটুর কাছে যায়। হাতের ভাবটি ছবি দেখলেই করতে পারবেন। এইভাবে একবার ডান দিকে মাথা হেলিয়ে আর একবার বাঁ দিকে মাথা হেলিয়ে ১০ বার করতে পারেন। (পালিত “যুগান্তর” ১৭ জানুয়ারা, ১৯৫৪)



Palit explains the health benefits for the previous *vyāyāma*:

The benefit of this *vyāyāma* is that it decreases fat along the waist. The kidney and bladder function well. This *vyāyāma* makes any stomach illnesses go away immediately (Palit, 17th January 1954 *Jugantar* BLA: Vol: 17; Issue: 147, 14th January 1954).

পেটের ভেতর ছোট বড় পেশীগুলিতে আংশিকভাবে চাপ পড়ে বলে সেগুলির ব্যায়ামও হয়ে যায়। কাজেই পেটের ভেতরের অসুস্থতা দূর করতে আসনের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে এই ব্যায়ামটের দরকার। (পালিত “যুগান্তর” ১৭ জানুয়ারি, ১৯৫৪)

Health benefits are a part of *āsana* instruction. They are also connected to *vyāyāma*. Developing health through “indigenous” exercise serves two goals: to build individual health and national health. Terminology is important for the latter especially. Terms like *vyāyāma*, *yoga* and *āsana* have geographical roots. This is summarized succinctly by Palit:

Yoga is the practice of national health. Yogis have prioritized *yoga-vyāyāma* as their primary and dominant form of practice, because by doing this they could survive in extremes of heat, cold, and other adverse situations.

This form of caring for the body was known as “*yoga-vyāyāma*.” Unfortunately, due to political turmoil in India, this trend has vanished. We owe it to the ancient system to bring it back. (Palit *Jugantar*, 12th October 1952, BLA: Vol 16; Issue 20, 9th October 1952).

যোগীরা এই জাতীয় দেহ-চর্চাকে ধর্মসাধনের প্রথম ও প্রধান ভিত্তি বলে গ্রহণ করেছিলেন, কারণ এই জাতীয় শরীর-চর্চার ফলে তাঁরা দেহকে অরণ্যে হোক, তুষার-পর্বতে হোক, উপবাসে হোক, স্বপ্নাহারে হোক, যে কোন প্রতিকূল অবস্থার মধ্যে নিরাময় ও স্ববশে রাখতে পারতেন। এই শরীর-চর্চাই যোগ-ব্যায়াম নামে পরিচিত ছিল। কিন্তু আমাদের দুর্ভাগ্যবশতঃ রাজনৈতিক উত্থান-পতনের আবেগে ভারতীয় বহু প্রাচীন ধারার মতন, এই শরীর-চর্চার ধারাও বিস্মৃষ্ট হয়ে যায়। (পালিত “যুগান্তর” ১২ই অক্টোবর ১৯৫২)

Palit refers to ascetic practices associated with *yoga*-like fasting and surviving extreme cold. If yogis were able to endure hardship before, they can endure political hardship now. *Yoga-vyāyāma* is the way.

Both Palit and Das write about nation-building. They both write about the importance of exercise for women and heavily campaign for women to take up physical practice. But it is important to reflect that Palit—a woman—is writing at all. Women were disparaged and deemed not fit to practice *yoga* prior to the twentieth century. This is

frequently attested to in *hathayoga* texts. Furthermore, they rarely received formal education. By the mid-twentieth century, Palit was teaching and writing publicly. This shift derives from the role of both women's reform and yoga in Indian nationalism.

3: Introducing Bengal's Women to Yoga

Prior to the twentieth century, texts on yoga were written from a male perspective (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 53). We do not have documentation of postural yoga as a practice for women to any significant extent. Yet, in the twentieth century, women emerge as authors, teachers and practitioners of yoga. By 2017, 82.2% of postural yoga practitioners in America are women.¹⁸ If we look at yoga in isolation, this transition does not make sense. Yet, if we consider the relationship between social movements and women's reform, yoga emerges as a female practice.

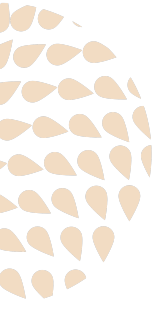
Since this paper is about Bengal, social reform and women in Bengal are the focus here. However, the development of physical training for women was not confined to this region. For example, in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain, women began participating in fitness classes and physical training. Like in Bengal, the methodology was shaped by "social and medical discourses" and "often constrained by distinctions of class and gender" (Macrae 2016: 19–20). The participation of women in physical training, be it yoga or otherwise, exists within a wider social discourse.

We know very little about the lives of women in India prior to the nineteenth century. Surviving records state that "most were denied men's opportunities to acquire knowledge, property and social status" (Forbes 1996: 19). Then, in the nineteenth century, British rulers came to question many Indian customs involving women. This criticism was a catalyst for reform. In Bengal, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshub Chandra Sen, and Swami Vivekananda all publicly addressed women's low social status and lack of opportunity in education (Forbes 1996: 20). These individuals, and organizations like Young Bengal, worked to improve the status of women in India.¹⁹

¹⁸ See *Yoga Journal* (2021) retrieved from: <https://www.yogajournal.com/blog/new-study-finds-20-million-yogis-u-s>.

¹⁹ This section focuses on what *men* say about *women* in yoga. Forbes (1996) describes this approach for her own work: "I begin this work with male reformers in nineteenth-century India. I have chosen to proceed in this way because patriarchal systems offer women few opportunities until men decide it is time for change" (1996: 6). Her work is not about yoga; however, the Bengal yoga sources support Forbes's approach.





The British directed criticism at social or ritual practices, not directly at yoga. However, *haṭhayoga* texts contain traces of these views. The British saw the seclusion of women (*purdah*) as a justifiable reason for evangelistic motives (Falk 2002). While it is not called *purdah* in *haṭhayoga*, the concept is present:

The Vedas, Shastras, and Puranas are like common courtesans; this Śāmbhavī mudrā is kept hidden like a lady of good family. (GS 3.54: 78)

Strive to keep them secret, as if they were a box of jewels. Like sex with a respectable woman, don't talk about them to anyone. (HYP 3.9: 54).²⁰

High-caste brahmin men marrying many young girls (*kulin*) was another area of criticism. Like *purdah*, the term *kulin* does not appear in *haṭhayoga*. However, the act of taking multiple sexual partners is. The Śīva Saṃhitā (SS) states:

The semen of the yogi who practices daily for six months according to his guru's instructions is never lost, even if he enjoys a hundred women (SS 4.103: 101).

If women practised yoga, it is not documented. In fact, women were listed as a hindrance to progress in yoga:

Women, lying about on beds, clothes, money, kissing on the mouth, chewing pan, drinking, kingship, heroism, wealth, gold, silver, copper, gems, fragrant aloe wood, cows, scholarship, Vedic treatise, dancing, singing, jewelry, flutes, lutes, drums, riding on elephants and tall horses, wives, children, and sensuality: these are said to be obstacles. (SS 5.3-5: 105).

Passages in the HYP, *Haṭharatnāvalī*, the 18th-century *Haṭhābhyāsapaddhati*, as well as the *Amaraughaprabodha* all say that women should be avoided as they are obstacles in yoga.²¹ From this standpoint, why would yoga shift so dramatically from a male-

²⁰ Also in HYP: "The Vedas, Shastras, and Puranas are like common courtesans. Only one, Shambhvimudra, is protected like a respectable woman" (HYP 4.35: 92).

²¹ "Even for those who are devoted should avoid in the beginning contact with fire, woman and taking a long walk, which is beneficial." (*Haṭharatnāvalī* 2.50: 60).

"Look at the widened-eyes sky, in hot season the grace of the moon, ladies, Vaiṣṇava idols and faces etc. until tears come in the eyes. See the faces of the ladies with the idea that addiction to such things should be abandoned." (*Haṭhābhyāsapaddhati* 92: 74).

"[The yogin] should avoid at first frequenting fire, women and roads." (*Amaraughaprabodha*: 24).

dominated practice to a female one? Why would yoga become a tool for change in women's social status?

Partha Chatterjee is an Indian political scientist and anthropologist. In his 1989 article “Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women” he outlines the separation between *material* and *spiritual*. He does not directly address yoga or women in yoga. Still, I shall summarize his ideas because they help to understand this change.

Chatterjee analyzes the dichotomy between colonialism and nationalism. He views the material world as *external* and ultimately subject to the colonizer's demands and innovations in science, technology, and rationalism. However, the spiritual domain—which is internal and therefore not affected by external innovations—remains untouched by colonization. In India, the spiritual domain was superior to that of the West. Chatterjee explains:

It followed that as long as India cared to retain the spiritual distinctiveness of its culture, it could make all the compromises and adjustments necessary to adapt to the requirements of a modern material world without losing its true identity (Chatterjee 1989: 624).

Indians could embrace yoga as “traditional” since it was both *spiritual* and *Eastern*. At the same time, yoga had to incorporate women to meet the demands of the twentieth century and respond to British criticism. The result was twofold. Indian reforms updated their treatment of women. At the same time, they embraced yoga. Women were championed as both practitioners and teachers of yoga.



Figure 11: Reba Das bending an iron rod in 1936. “Wife of author Shrimati Reba Das” (লেখকের স্ত্রী শ্রীমতী রেবা দাশ) (Das 1954: 5)



In 1936, Nilmoni Das writes about physical fitness in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. The photos are of his wife, Reba Das, bending an iron rod, flexing her biceps while dressed in a *sārī*. Das writes:

A nation's wealth is the sum total of its health, masculine and feminine. The learned physical culturists of the past and the present have done much and are still doing much for the physical uplift of the youths of Bengal, but there is hardly any movement for the physical improvement of our mothers, sisters, and daughters. Among the growing needs of the country, physical culture for girls and women has been found to be one. 'Mens Sana in Corpore Sano'— Sound mind in a sound body. Therefore culture of health on the part of girls is no discredit, rather it is a great asset (Das, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17th May, 1936; BLA, Vol. 68, Issue 121, 11th May 1936).

For Das, the physical culture movements did not do enough to uplift women and develop their health. A prosperous nation must embrace the well-being of both men and women.

Below, Bishnu Ghosh introduces Palit's *Path of the Body*. He writes about the importance of her work. Like Das, he illustrates the growing perspective that it is necessary for women to teach yoga:

Dearest Labanya, I am extremely happy to hear about the publication of your "women's *vyāyāma*" book. You have listened to my advice, and I know that women benefit from *vyāyāma*. For so long you have practised and your students can learn so much from you. I myself do not have the experience to teach women, because I am not a woman. You, of course, have that experience and can teach beyond what I am able to do. The renowned poet Rabindranath also gave you his blessings after having read your early writings.²² I am pleased that your countless writings in Bengali in this book, and also your columns in *Nari Jagat*, will reach any educated woman and even man. Know that my blessings are with you and I hope immediately you are successful (Palit 1955: introductory page).

স্বহের লাৰণা, তুমি "মেয়েদের ব্যায়াম"-এৰ বই প্ৰকাশ কৰা শুনে আমি অত্যন্তখুসী হৈছোঁ-কাৰণ এতদিনে তুমি আমাৰ কথা শুনেছোঁ । আমি ত জানি যে মেয়েদের

²² Palit was also a poet. Her poetry is included in the *Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*. Nolini Kanta Gupta was the premiere disciple of Śrī Aurobindo.

উপযোগী এমন কোনও ব্যায়াম নেই যা তুমি নিজে অভ্যাস করেনি এবং তোমার বহু ছাত্রীদের শিক্ষা দাওনি। তোমার নিজে করা ও শেখানো-দুটো অভিজ্ঞতাই আছে-যা আমারও নেই, কারণ আমি ত মেয়ে নই যে মেয়েদের ব্যায়াম মেয়েদের কেমন লাগে সে অভিজ্ঞতা নিজে অনুভব করি; শেখানোর অভিজ্ঞতা নিশ্চয় আছে যখন তোমাকে আমার পুঁজি নিঃশেষ করে শেখিয়েছি। তা ছাড়া তোমার কত ছোট বয়সের বাংলা লেখা পড়ে কবিগুরু রবীন্দ্রনাথও তোমাকে অশীর্বাদ করেছেন। অনেকের শিক্ষা থাকে-শেখানোর অভিজ্ঞতাও থাকে কিন্তু লেখার ভিতর দিয়ে অভিজ্ঞতা প্রকাশ করার ক্ষমতা থাকে না বলে তাঁদের লেখা বই সাধারণের উপকারে আসে না। ব্যায়াম বিষয়ে তোমার অগণিত লেখা পড়ে তৃপ্ত হননি বাংলায় এমন কোনও শিক্ষিতা নারী কেন, শিক্ষিত নরও আছেন বলে আমার মনে হয় না। তাই তোমার লেখা “শরীরম্ আদ্যম্” আমাদের দেশের এক বিশেষ অভাব পূর্ণ করে নারি জাতির যে প্রভূত বলাঘণ করবে সে বিষয়ে আমার কোনও সন্দেহ নাই। আমার আশীর্বাদ বাণী চেয়েছো-আমি তোমায় জানাচ্ছি যে, আমার আশীর্বাদের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে ভগবানের আশীর্বাদও তোমার প্রাপ্য হবে। (পালিত: ১৯৫৫)

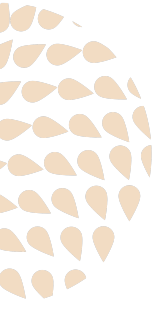
Instructions in *haṭhayoga* texts are not aimed at women. By 1936, Das is writing about the importance of women’s physical education. Twenty years later, Ghosh commends Palit as a more accomplished teacher for women than he *because* she is a woman. This is a significant change.

This was not only a phenomenon in Bengal. Yogendra, who exported innovations that he had introduced in modern yoga out of Santa Cruz (Mumbai), married Sita Devi. In 1934, she published *Easy Postures for Woman*. Yogendra wrote the introduction, much like Ghosh did for Palit. In it, he reinterpreted the historic role of women in yoga. Yogendra acknowledges that, in the early times of Aryan culture, women would have to be reborn each time in a successively higher caste in order to eventually be born for the fifth time as a male brahmin. This idea appears in the *Yoga Yājñavalkya* (YY), an early *haṭhayoga* text:

For the fourth division and women, who perform their duties and control their senses, listening to the Purāṇas (other sacred texts which explain philosophy mixed with stories and parables) is said to be *siddhāntaśravaṇa* by the wise (YY 2.8–10, 18).

Elsewhere, Yogendra writes that even if a woman were to be reborn as a brahmin male, salvation was not promised. Old age and disease could prevent liberation. Therefore, “*Haṭhayoga* took up this challenge and came to the rescue of those who desired to attain salvation during this very life” (Devi 1934: 10). Yogendra says it is a misunderstanding





to believe that women cannot do yoga. “Yoga can be undertaken successfully by one and all, and that at any rate there is no bar against a woman, or even a married woman or notwithstanding even a harlot” (Devi 1934: 13). Here Yogendra interacts with ideas in *haṭhayoga* and attempts to re-interpret them. He says, “that there have not been many women well acquainted with Yoga is no excuse for limitations, since, as in every other art and science, women have been victims to men’s greed for power in every age, country and community” (Devi 1934: 14).

Haṭhayoga texts are not intended for women. Yet yoga is popular with women today. How did this shift occur? If we constrain our inquiry to yoga texts, the answers are sparse. Answers begin to emerge when we examine the role of women in social reform movements of the twentieth century.

Conclusion

Today, yoga is a health practice popular around the world. It is particularly popular with women. At the beginning of the twentieth century, yoga was not about health nor was it practised by women. Yet the works of Ghosh, Das, Palit and Bose illuminate the very traits common in yoga today—yoga for health and as a practice for women. As yoga evolved in the twentieth century, our Bengali sources disseminated it for its impact on health well before the global community perceived it as such.

Āsana and *vyāyāma* sprang into public awareness in twentieth-century India, amidst the boom of gymnasiums and clubs. Ghosh and Das, both bodybuilders, led this trend in Bengal. They founded their respective institutions and published materials easily available within their community. Written in Bengali or English, their materials were not exclusive like Sanskrit-based yoga texts. Rather, they were intended to teach yoga to the general public. Today, yoga is an accessible practice. The Bengali sources helped thrust yoga into the mainstream.

By the mid-twentieth century, Ghosh, Das, Palit and Bose all disseminated *āsana* instruction to develop health and strength for the individual. Beyond physical strength, the sources recognize the importance of curing or preventing physical ailments and disease. To this end, they list the muscles required for each position. This is followed by specific physical benefits. Today, we do not think twice about yoga for health. A 2017 study listed both *wellness* and *health* as the top reasons Americans practise yoga. In many respects, the Bengali materials represent what yoga has become today.

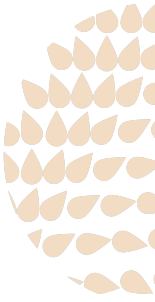
Since scholarship focuses on physical yoga in the twentieth century, it is important to go beyond anglophone sources. In India, aside from over 19,000 regional dialects and one hundred and twenty major languages, there are twenty-two official recognized languages.²³ (Although English is not one of them, it has become, *de facto*, an Indian language.) As examined here, the entire practice of *vyāyāma* is missing from the English-language sources in Bengal. Elements of nationalism appear in the Bengali material more than the English. Das and Palit's writing in Bengali provides a broader understanding of yoga than the English sources. Furthermore, it is only when we examine English and Bengali sources side by side that differences come to light.

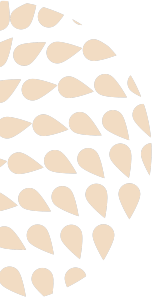
Das and Palit, writing in their native language, incorporated both *āsana* and *vyāyāma*. Their use of "indigenous" practices linked individual health with national health. This resulted in the Bengali innovation: "*Yoga-vyāyāma*." The large amount of material—Das's multiple volumes on practice, Palit's book, and her forty-one columns—illuminate the high demand for this material. Furthermore, Palit represents the shift toward yoga as a female practice. This was not an accident, nor did it happen by chance. It was carefully thought out. Women were brought into yoga by way of Indian reform movements. Das and Ghosh advocated for women in yoga, starkly in contrast with *haṭhayoga* materials. They proclaimed that the strength of a nation depends on the health of both men and women. As this idea established itself, women began to practise and teach. Today, women around the world are yoga teachers. Early teachers like Palit represent this change.

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²³ See *Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, Language Division*, 2011. Retrieved from: https://censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/C-16_25062018_NEW.pdf.





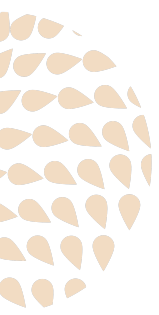
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CITATION

Pajunen, Ida. 2024. “Yoga and Vyāyāma in New Bengali Sources” In *Journal of Yoga Studies* (2024), Vol. 5: 3–38. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34000/JoYS.2024.V5.001>.





"MOTHER OF YOGA": ZHANG HUILAN, CHRIS BUTLER, AND THE POPULARIZATION OF YOGA IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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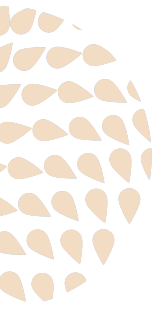
Abstract

The past and present development of modern yoga within the People's Republic of China (PRC) remains sorely understudied. To date, the vast majority of research written in English has dealt only with the practice's manifestations in the United States, Western Europe, and India. This paper responds by investigating the initial popularization of modern yoga in the PRC during the 1980s by Zhang Huilan 张蕙兰, contemporary China's so-called "mother of yoga," and her guru, Chris Butler. It examines Zhang and Butler's books from the period alongside their audio and visual material in light of the political, economic, and cultural context in which they emerged. It offers an explanation for why Zhang and Butler's yoga was successful despite the stiff competition it faced from local psychophysical- and biospiritual-cultivation practices, namely *qigong* 气功. It explores why their brand was tolerated (possibly even supported) by authorities at a time when the Chinese state was actively promoting science in conjunction with indigenous forms of medicine and healing. Finally, it provides a reason for why Zhang and Butler were able to overcome the tumults of the 1990s and the crackdown on self-cultivation practices spurred by the Falun Gong 法轮功 incidents of 1999.

KEYWORDS

Yoga, China, Zhang Huilan, Chris Butler, *qigong*, ISKCON, Hare Krishnas, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, religion.





Despite the People's Republic of China (PRC) being the most populated country in the world and replete with yogis, the past and present development of modern yoga within its borders is sorely understudied. To date, the vast majority of research written in English has dealt only with the practice's manifestations in the United States, Western Europe, and India.¹ *The Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies* has sought to break from this trend by offering chapters on yoga in Southeast Asia, Korea, Japan, and Latin America.² Yet, as editors Karen O'Brien-Kop and Suzanne Newcombe lament in their introduction to the text, a China-focused study is missing.³ Only a single work—Benôit Vermander, Liz Hingley, and Liang Zhang's ethnography, *Shanghai Sacred*—touches on the subject at all, and only then in a cursory manner as it explores the multireligious landscape of the PRC's financial capital.⁴ Beyond this, yoga in China remains ignored.

I venture a small step towards rectifying this neglect by investigating the initial popularization of modern yoga in the PRC during the 1980s by Zhang Huilan 张蕙兰 (b. 1955), contemporary China's so-called “mother of yoga” (*dangdai Zhongguo de yujia zhi mu* 当代中国的瑜伽之母), and her guru, Chris Butler (b. 1948).⁵ I examine Zhang and Butler's books from the period alongside their audio and visual material in light of the political, economic, and cultural context in which they emerged. I offer an explanation for why Zhang and Butler's yoga was successful despite the stiff competition it faced from local psychophysical- and biospiritual-cultivation practices, namely *qigong* 气功.⁶

¹ I follow Elizabeth De Michelis in understanding “modern yoga” as referring to “the graft of a Western branch onto the Indian tree of yoga,” which gradually took shape as India encountered Western imperialism and modernity. See De Michelis (2004: 2). Yet, I do find that a fluvial metaphor à la Tweed (2008) is preferable to De Michelis's sylvan one. For studies on yoga in the United States, see, for example, Dazy (2005), Syman (2010), and Deslippe (2018). For work on yoga in Western Europe, see De Michelis (1995), Augenstein (2013), and Newcombe (2019). For research on yoga in India, see Alter (1997) and (2004). For a monograph that works across some of these boundaries, see Strauss (2005).

² Also see McCartney (2020).

³ O'Brien-Kop and Newcombe (2021: 8).

⁴ Vermander, Hingley, and Zhang (2018: 165–71).

⁵ This sobriquet is widely used to refer to Zhang in mainland China. I have encountered it being used by scholars, state-media personnel, and practitioners alike.

⁶ *Qigong* literally translates to something like “breathwork.” The term appears a few times in historical sources but should for all intents and purposes be considered a modern construction formulated by Chinese Communist Party cadre Liu Guizhen 刘贵真. Through Liu and his comrades, the term came “to encompass all traditional techniques for disciplining the mind, the breath, and the body.” See Goossaert and Palmer (2011: 120). Later, *qigong* would also include under its umbrella things like “trance, divination,

At the same time, I explore why their brand was tolerated (possibly even supported) by authorities at a time when the Chinese state was actively promoting science in conjunction with *indigenous* forms of medicine and healing. Finally, I provide a reason for why Zhang and Butler were able to overcome the tumults of the 1990s and the crackdown on self-cultivation practices spurred by the Falun Gong 法轮功 incidents of 1999.

China, Butler, and Zhang

In December 1978, just a little over two years after the death of Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893–1976) and the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904–1997), now at the helm of the People’s Republic of China, initiated major economic reforms, which would forever change the face of the country. Over the following years, moves were made away from collectivization, central planning, and state ownership. Privatization occurred on a large scale, including in the health sector, and the country began opening up to foreign investment.

Religion and various practices formerly deemed superstitious were granted room to breathe.⁷ Yet, science, the key to Deng’s Four Modernizations (Si ge xiandaihua 四个现代化), remained hegemonic.⁸ This power dynamic imbued existing efforts to “scientize” traditional healing practices with new vigour.⁹ The search for a *Chinese* science, which might enable the PRC to leapfrog the West, also intensified. Throughout the 1980s and 90s, *qigong* was believed to offer an answer. Some spoke of “a super-science,” others of potential military applications.¹⁰ More realistic individuals simply saw in *qigong* a cheap way to improve the country’s health, a necessary task if China was to ever be recognized

charismatic healing, and talismanic techniques, as well as...paranormal phenomena, and UFOs” Palmer (2007: 18).

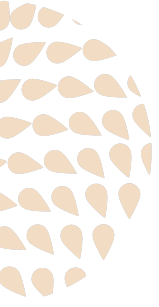
⁷ Goossaert and Palmer (2011: 316–17).

⁸ Deng hoped to modernize agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology. However, of these, the fourth was the most important. Deng called it “the key to the four modernizations” for “without modern science and technology, it is impossible to build modern agriculture, modern industry or modern national defence.” Deng (1984: 102).

⁹ Indeed, as Palmer observes, the immediate post-Mao era saw “scientism became the new creed for the development of the country.” Palmer (2007: 49).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 120 and 73–74.





as a developed and modern nation.¹¹ At the peak of the 1980s *qigong* boom (*qigong re* 气功热), millions of citizens were practicing the art at home and in parks, often as disciples of one of thousands of masters seeking to make a name for themselves.¹² It was under precisely these conditions that Zhang and Butler first entered mainland China.

Butler was born in New Orleans and later moved to Molokai, Hawaii with his parents.¹³ Referred to by Chinese as Bo Zhongyan 柏忠言 and by his American disciples as Jagad Guru Siddhaswarupananda Paramahansa, Butler claims to have grown up in a Marxist household (although his mother insists it was Quaker).¹⁴ Expelled from Kailua High, he finished secondary school at Kalani.¹⁵ Thereafter, he began taking classes at the University of Hawai'i and, at around age twenty, claims to have attained what he calls the "Impersonal Brahman Aspect of the Absolute Truth," a state variously rendered into Chinese by Zhang as "the Ocean of White Light" (Bai guang haiyang 白光海洋), "Brahmanic Light" (Fan guang 梵光), and "the Impersonal Aspect of the Original Cause" (Yuanshi dongyin de fei rengen tedian 原始动因的非人格特点).¹⁶ Sometime after this life-altering event, Butler dropped out of school, opened the Haiku Meditation Center, and began taking disciples to whom he taught *aṣṭāṅgayoga* and methods for awakening Kuṇḍalinī.¹⁷ He first met members of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in 1969 at Diamond Head Crater's Sunshine Music Festival. They shared with him the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra*, which Butler then took and began promoting independently. The leader of ISKCON, A. C. Bhaktivedānta Svāmī Prabhupāda (1876–1977), responded swiftly to this new competition by declaring that Butler was an illegitimate spiritual teacher—an accusation which prompted the latter to join the movement himself in 1970.¹⁸ While with ISKCON, Butler claims to have been drawn to

¹¹ Strauss proposes that, "while illness is always a marked category, 'health' is not." She argues, "health is not only a central value of modernity, but also a marker for modernity, in the sense that development of nations is measured in part by a series of 'health indicators' such as morbidity and mortality rates." Strauss (2005: 6).

¹² Palmer calculates that, "at its height in the late 1980s, the *qigong* movement may have attracted over one hundred million practitioners in some form or another." Palmer (2007: 6).

¹³ Wright (1977, sec. A).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Zhang and Bo (1986: 545).

¹⁷ Jones and Ryan (2007: 411). I have been unable to determine from whom Butler learned these practices.

¹⁸ Wright 1977, sec. A. For Butler's own account of this process, see Siddhara-svarūpa Dāsa (1971).

the personal aspect of the divine.¹⁹ However, approximately four years after “offer[ing] himself and all his possessions at the feet of his [new] *guru*,” Butler became disillusioned with the Vaiṣṇava organization and criticized it for being like “a welfare state where they centralize food and sleeping and have control over [everyone].”²⁰ Although he had already abandoned ISKCON years earlier, it was not until after its founder’s death in 1977 that Butler began acting as an initiating (*dīkṣā*) *guru*.²¹ That same year, he founded the Science of Identity Foundation—a tax-exempt, religious organization based in Hawaii—and, in 1994, assisted with the establishment of the World Vaiṣṇava Association.²² To this day, he still considers Prabhupāda his *guru* and ultimately traces his lineage back through figures like Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Mahāprabhu (1486–1533 CE) to Kṛṣṇa himself.²³

As for Zhang, not much is known about her other than the bits and pieces she herself provides. Also called Wai Lana and Vaiṣṇava Dās (Ch.: Wayishinawa Daxi 瓦伊史那瓦·达西), she was born and raised in Hong Kong.²⁴ Apparently, as a youth, she was materialistic and cared nothing for others.²⁵ She would smoke, skip school, and even dabbled with opiates. However, at the age of sixteen, she had a life-changing experience while hearing music at a party—music she eventually identified as Butler’s.²⁶ Later, Zhang saw her future *guru* speak at an event in Hong Kong and, sometime after that, while on retreat in Manila at Butler’s Science of Life Institute (Shengming benzhi kexueyuan 生命本质科学院), officially became his disciple.²⁷ Returning to Hong Kong, Zhang kept in contact with her teacher, who advised her via letter to start proselytizing

¹⁹ Science of Identity Foundation (2020).

²⁰ Wright (1977, sec. A).

²¹ *Ibid.* and Science of Identity Foundation (2020).

²² The Science of Identity Foundation was originally called the Hari Nama Society (Jones and Ryan 2007: 412).

²³ Zhang and Bo (1986: 628).

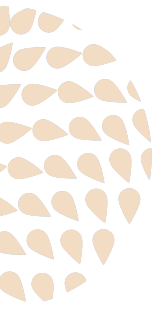
²⁴ Zhang and Bo (1986: 7).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 579.

²⁶ Huilan Yujia (2017). It is unclear which work of Butler’s so captivated Zhang. The earliest of his recordings I have been able to locate is the album *A Very Gentle Force: This World/A Different World*, which became available only in 1975.

²⁷ *Ibid.* Also see Bo and Zhang (1983: 7).





in her homeland by translating and distributing his essays alongside her own.²⁸ In response, she launched a magazine called *Life Force, China* (*Shengmingli, Zhongguo* 生命力, 中国). Due to lack of sales, though, the publication flopped.²⁹

In 1980, Zhang helped Butler acquire an invitation from the All-China Youth League (Zhonghua quanguo qingnian lianhehui 中华全国青年联合会) to tour various Chinese cities where he gave lectures on the social problems of the Western world and performed rock songs to a similar tune.³⁰ Dysentery cut his trip short, however. After only three or four months, Butler was forced to leave the country.³¹ In 1982, he returned with his newly-formed Hawaiian rock band, Morning Sun (Zhaoyang 朝阳). That year, the group released its first album through the China Record Corporation (Zhongguo changpian zonggongsi 中国唱片总公司). In 1983, it produced a second and, in 1985, a third and a fourth. With music as his medium, Butler travelled across the country, denouncing hedonism and trumpeting the names of God.³²

During his 1980 tour, a publisher approached him with the proposition to turn his lectures into a book.³³ This offer prompted Zhang and Butler to produce *Social Ills of the West: Drugs, Suicide, and Divorce* (*Xifang shehui bing: xidu, zisha, he lihun* 西方社会病——吸毒、自杀和离婚)—a collection of essays and interviews, some of which had previously appeared in *Life Force, China*. First printed in 1983, the text laments the social issues plaguing the developed world and declares hedonism as their root cause.³⁴ In 1985, Zhang also published a related work, *Talks on Western Society* (*Xifang shehui mantan* 西方社会漫谈), which chiefly consists of interviews with members of Morning Sun and champions much the same as *Social Ills of the West* but directs its message at China's youth to whom the book is dedicated.

²⁸ Ibid., 7–8.

²⁹ Ibid., 8.

³⁰ Cities visited include Shanghai, Beijing, Wuxi, Suzhou, and Nanjing. Huilan Yujia (2020a). The two had previously entered the mainland together in 1979. Zhang and Bo (1986: 362).

³¹ Huilan Yujia (2020a).

³² Morning Sun's albums contain tracks such as "The Pursuer of Material Desire's Sick and Worried Heart" (*Wuyu zhuiqiuzhe youxinzhongzhong* 物欲追求者忧心忡忡) and "Gopāla Govinda Rāma" (Gepala Gewenda Wama 戈帕拉·戈文达·哇玛).

³³ Huilan Yujia (2020a).

³⁴ 35,000 copies were printed in this first run and an additional 10,000 in 1987.

While Butler busied himself with music, Zhang taught yoga throughout the mainland in parks and at universities.³⁵ In this respect, her proselytization method was identical to that of many *qigong* masters. Yet Zhang's lessons were no doubt tamer than those of some of her counterparts.³⁶ Zhao Jinxiang's 赵金香 Soaring Crane Technique (Hexiangzhuang 鹤翔庄), for instance, was especially popular in the early 80s, and his method culminated in people acting "spontaneously" in public, "hugging trees, rolling on the ground, crying, burping, or making wild kung fu-style movements."³⁷ Often, practitioners would even speak in glossolalia (*yuzhou yu* 宇宙语).³⁸ Not surprising, the government quickly came to disapprove of such unruly displays. Zhang and Butler did too, a fact that could have only improved their standing with the Communist Party.³⁹

Eventually, the number of Zhang's students became too great to handle in parks, so she decided, instead, to disseminate her teachings via television.⁴⁰ In 1985, her show, *Yujia: ziwo shenxin duanlian fangfa* 瑜伽——自我身心锻炼方法 (*Yoga: Exercise Methods for One's Body and Mind [YEM]*), began airing on China Central Television (CCTV) in thirty-minute segments. Filmed in Honolulu, the program features yoga instruction as well as health and morality talks. The postural practice Zhang models consists mostly of static poses and occasionally makes use of props (e.g., chairs, cushions, ropes, etc.), facts which strongly suggest the influence of B. K. S. Iyengar (1918–2014). Running for fifteen years during a period when government subsidies for television were increasingly reduced and advertisement revenue became CCTV's bread and butter, the show was a success

³⁵ Huilan Yujia (2020a). Zhang began teaching to interested individuals in the mainland as early as 1977. Unfortunately, I have been unable to determine the content of her instruction during these initial years.

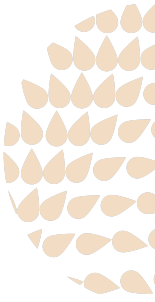
³⁶ In the mid-1970s, after having allegedly cured herself of cancer, Guo Lin 郭林 (1909–1984) became perhaps the first person to begin offering *qigong* instruction in parks. By the early 1980s, "the use of public spaces for mass *qigong* practice" was commonplace across the country. Guo also lectured on her method at Beijing Normal University (Goossaert and Palmer 2011: 287). See also Palmer (2007: 46–48).

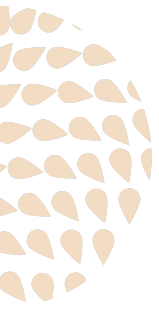
³⁷ Goossaert and Palmer (2011: 288).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Zhang and Butler acknowledge that yoga can give rise to things like spontaneous jumping, dancing, singing, drooling, coughing, or laughing. However, they also declare that, while "there are sometimes charlatans in public places imitating these symptoms so as to deceive the naïve and unknowing public into believing they are yoga masters...a yoga master possessing true qualifications will normally strive to control these symptoms, not allowing them to show, especially in public" (有时候, 有些骗子在公众场所模仿这些征象, 来欺骗天真无知的公众, 是他们以为自己是瑜伽师...真有真正资格的瑜伽师通常都尽力控制住这些征象, 不让它们露出来, 特别是在公众场合) (Zhang and Bo 1986: 9).

⁴⁰ Huilan Yujia (2017).





and, during its tenure, no doubt reached an ever-growing number of people.⁴¹ In 1985, CCTV only had one station. In 1986, it had two, and in 1989, it had three.⁴² Viewers were hardly awash with options, even where additional, local broadcasts existed. The number of televisions in China also increased dramatically from one per one hundred people in 1978 to one for every four people in 1996.⁴³ In cities, ninety-five percent of families already had a television by 1986.⁴⁴

Zhang's efforts were supplemented by two publications—the first works on modern yoga written in Chinese for Chinese: *Yujia: ziwo shenxin duanlian fangfa dianshi jiemu congshu* 瑜伽——自我身心锻炼方法电视节目丛书 (*Yoga: Exercise Methods for One's Body and Mind TV Episode Companion*) and *Yujia: qigong yu mingxiang* 瑜伽——气功与冥想 (*Yoga: Qigong and Meditation [YQM]*).⁴⁵ The former was released in three volumes from 1985 to 1988. For the most part, it simply parrots content from the television show and fails to provide a comprehensive overview of yoga. By contrast, YQM offers an extremely thorough, 624-page introduction to yogic thought and practice. Co-authored by Zhang and Butler, the book's discussion of postures (*zishi* 姿式, Skt.: *āsana*), its photographic illustrations of them, and its treatment index are reminiscent of Iyengar's *Light on Yoga*, published exactly twenty years earlier in 1966. However, in addition to offering instruction on *āsana*, breathing techniques (*tiaoxifa* 调息法, Skt.: *prāṇāyāma*), locks (*shoushufa* 收束法, Skt.: *bandha*), and seals (*qihefa* 契合法, Skt.: *mudrā*), YQM delves deeply into the philosophy and practices of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. It also advances the four prohibitions demanded of ISKCON practitioners by Prabhupāda: no illicit sex, no intoxicants, no gambling, and no meat. To help with the latter, it even provides ten vegetarian recipes. Overall, the work might be seen as a somewhat unusual hybrid of what Elizabeth De Michelis refers to as modern psychosomatic and denominational forms of yoga.⁴⁶

YQM's first printing of 39,000 copies sold out at RMB 3.35 a piece. In 1988, an additional 20,000 books were produced. They too flew off the shelves. Since then, hundreds of thousands of copies have been sold and various editions made. Zhang, the face of her

⁴¹ Hong, Lü, and Zou (2009: 44).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴³ Ying and Berry (2009: 3).

⁴⁴ Lull (1991: 23).

⁴⁵ Liu, Liu, and Cai (2017: 56).

⁴⁶ De Michelis (2004: 187–88).

and Butler's brand, was probably never as popular as some of the PRC's best-known *qigong* masters. Unlike Yan Xin 严新 (b. 1950), she might have had trouble filling up stadiums of twenty thousand people.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, her accomplishments were remarkable. In the closing decades of the twentieth century, she was, without a doubt, China's most famous purveyor of yoga. In the following sections, I provide a few of the reasons for this success.

Familiar and Familial: "Eastern" Healing From the West

The Chinese People all believe bodily health is extremely precious. [They] also think inner peace and happiness and noble, spiritual qualities are worth more than treasure. It is for precisely this reason I am led to believe that the people of my ancestral homeland will find value in the ancient science of yoga.⁴⁸

These opening lines of YQM are indicative of the way in which Zhang and Butler present their yoga. The practice should be undertaken because it has the power to treat illness, maintain health, and improve one's moral quality.

As with *qigong*, most people probably began flirting with yoga due to health concerns. During the 1980s, free medical care in the countryside was vanishing, and companies providing good insurance in urban centres were becoming rare.⁴⁹ The onus was increasingly on individuals to look after themselves. At the same time, China's economic reforms were bringing with them a host of new health issues commonly associated with the modern world (i.e., diseases of affluence).⁵⁰

Under these circumstances, Zhang and Butler claimed to offer something for everyone—"men, women, the old, the young, manual workers, intellectuals, athletes, artists."⁵¹ Even the poor could benefit given yoga's cost-effectiveness. Specific poses and meditative practices were recommended based on occupation. Farmers, for example,

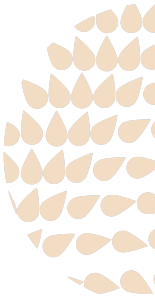
⁴⁷ Goossaert and Palmer (2011: 288).

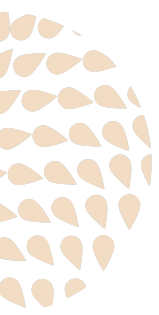
⁴⁸ "中国人民都认为身体健康非常宝贵，也认为内心和平幸福与高尚精神品质胜于珍宝。正是这个原因使我相信祖国人民会认识历史悠久的瑜伽科学的价值。" Zhang and Bo (1986: 1).

⁴⁹ Milcent (2018: 38–40). The numerous migrant workers flooding cities and taking up menial jobs had particular difficulty financing their healthcare needs. See *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁰ Cook and Dummer (2004: 335–338).

⁵¹ "男女老幼，体力劳动者或脑力劳动者，运动员或艺术家" (Zhang and Bo 1986: 4).





could gain by performing plow pose (*li shi* 犁式, Skt.: *halāsana*), camel pose (*luotuo shi* 骆驼式, Skt.: *uṣṭrāsana*), and extended triangle (*sanjiao shenzhan shi* 三角伸展式, Skt.: *utthita trikoṇāsana*) while those in high-intensity positions (*jinzhang de gongzuo* 紧张的工作) could benefit from things like neck exercises and *mantra* meditation (*yujia yuyin mingxiang* 瑜伽语音冥想).⁵²

Yoga could also help with particular ailments. Doing sun salutations (*xiang taiyang zhijing shi* 向太阳致敬式, Skt.: *sūrya namaskāra*) could assist with a cough and cold; yogic sleep (*yujia xiuxishu* 瑜伽休息术, Skt.: *yoganidrā*) and *mantra* meditation were good for cancer patients; headstands (*tou daoli shi* 头倒立式, Skt.: *sālamba śīrṣāsana*) and *prāṇāyāmic* techniques could benefit those with epilepsy; and yogic fasting (*yujia duanshifa* 瑜伽断食法) could improve infections. Psychological issues were similarly treated. Boat pose (*chuan shi* 船式, Skt.: *naukāsana*) was able to alleviate stress, and “holy light” breathing (*shengguang tiaoxi* 圣光调息, Skt.: *kapālabhāti prāṇāyāma*) could dispel anger.

While Zhang and Butler do warn that immediate results are unlikely and advise against viewing yoga as a panacea, they never fail, on television or in their publications, to highlight yoga’s wide-ranging health benefits. They also link the wellbeing of individuals to that of society, stressing the desirable impact yoga can have on a nation’s economy and health care system as well as its ability to raise a country’s moral standing.

Anthropologist Gareth Fisher observes that, in post-Mao China, many individuals were experiencing “moral breakdowns,” the result of “radical ruptures to their identities and social roles” brought on by the abrupt shift from Maoism to a market-based economy.⁵³ No doubt, many such people would have found Zhang and Butler’s essays and lectures denouncing hedonism and praising socialist values reassuring as they watched Chinese society become more materialistic and corrupt. An explicit connection is even made in YQM between socialists who labour for the collective good and those who selflessly perform karma yoga (*shijian yujia* 实践瑜伽).⁵⁴ Yet, this moral dimension would not

⁵² Ibid., 14–19. On television, the suffix “gong 功” is used far more often than “shi 式.”

⁵³ Fisher (2014: 3). Fisher begins his fieldwork in 2001, but the “moral breakdowns” he observes were occurring prior to this date.

⁵⁴ Zhang and Bo (1986: 585).

have set Zhang and Butler apart from their *qigong*-peddling peers, many of whom were presenting their practices in a similar light.⁵⁵

It was also not the only resemblance between yoga and *qigong*. Chinese healing and cultivation practices share a number of similarities with yoga. Many of the subjects discussed in *YQM*—poses, breathing techniques, hygiene, meditation, *mudrās*, and mantra recitation—have precedents in China long before the 1980s. The *Zhuangzi* 庄子, written and compiled during the Warring States period (476–221 BCE), mentions at least two “guiding and pulling” (*daoyin* 导引) techniques, which, like many yoga *āsanas*, imitate animals: “bear-hangings” (*xiongjing* 熊经) and “bird-stretchings” (*niaoshen* 鸟申).⁵⁶ Hua Tuo’s 华佗 Five Animals’ Frolic (*Wuqin xi* 五禽戏), first noted in the third-century text *Sanguo zhi* 三国志 (*Records of the Three Kingdoms*), also brings to mind certain yoga postures.⁵⁷ Similarly, the *Xing qi* 行气 (*Cultivating Breath*), a rhyming, forty-five-character inscription dating back to the late fourth century BCE evidences just one of many early breathing practices akin to *prāṇāyāma*.⁵⁸ The “sleep exercises” (*shuigong* 睡功) associated with Chen Tuan 陈抟 (d. 989), too, could be compared to *yoganidrā* (yogic sleep).⁵⁹

Historically, the Indian subcontinent has had a tremendous influence on China. The impact of South and Central Asian Buddhists, who began their “conquest” of the Sinic civilization during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), was especially potent, including in the area of medicine.⁶⁰ A particular Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) text, the *Shesheng zuanlu* 摄生纂录 (*Comprehensive Record for Protecting Life*) even speaks of something

⁵⁵ Goossaert and Palmer (2011: 289).

⁵⁶ Watson (1968: 168). There is also the instance of Hong Meng 鸿蒙 “slapping his thighs and hopping around like a sparrow” (*fubi queyue* 拊髀雀跃). *Ibid.*, 121. Thomas Michael suggests that the sparrow-hopping is an example of *daoyin* and that Hong Meng’s thigh-slapping is “a kind of *qi*-massage that serves to assist the flow of *qi* throughout the body” (Michael 2015: 147). Although Michael certainly seems convinced, Hong Meng’s actions might just be those of a madman. The *Zhuangzi* contains many characters who appear at once insightful and insane—saying and doing the nonsensical and often acting with total disregard for social norms. When asked what he is doing, Hong Meng responds, “I am amusing myself,” not “I am cultivating myself” (Watson 1968: 121).

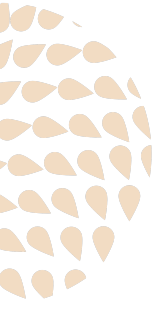
⁵⁷ The first texts to describe the Five Animals’ Frolic only appear in the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE). For a history of the sequence’s development, see Kohn (2008: 163–69).

⁵⁸ For a brief discussion of this inscription, see Harper (1998: 125–26).

⁵⁹ For information on *shuigong*, see Kohn (2008: 184–89).

⁶⁰ See, for example, Fan Ka-Wai’s discussion of certain Indian medicines, massages, and surgeries being recognized or even adopted in China during the Sui (581–618 CE) and Tang (618–907 CE) dynasties





called “Brahmanic gymnastics” (*poluomen daoyin fa* 婆罗门导引法).⁶¹ Yet, despite this influence, many of the practices introduced to China in the 1980s by Zhang and Butler were, in fact, new, only having been devised in India during the late colonial period.⁶² As Joseph S. Alter demonstrates, “a significant percentage of what counts for yoga today” is absent from the *hathayoga* literature.⁶³ Postural practice in particular underwent immense transformation. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, various novel poses and sequences emerged as “hybridized product[s]” via the dialogical interactions which occurred between bodybuilding and harmonial gymnastics from the West, on the one hand, and Hindu revitalization and reformation movements, on the other.⁶⁴ It must be noted, however, that, broadly speaking, yoga was changed through its encounter with modernity and imperialist powers in much the same way as Chinese practices were, and this has, if anything, deepened their resemblance even as it has produced new forms within their respective traditions.⁶⁵

Ontologically, of course, rationalized forms of yoga are not the same as those of *qigong* or any other Chinese system for that matter. Although a particular posture or movement may look identical whether performed by a yogi or a *qigong* master, the way in which it is meant to be utilized, experienced, and understood is unlikely to be the same. That said, it is entirely possible for an individual to conflate two or more traditions. And confusing yoga with *qigong* in 1980s China certainly happened. In fact, at times, it was encouraged.

While Zhang and Butler do draw attention to yoga’s universal nature, calling it, for instance, “the whole world’s and all of humanity’s treasure,” they also emphasize yoga’s “Easternness” and likeness to Chinese cultivation practices.⁶⁶ The subtitle of YQM

(Fan 2013: 77, 89, and 96). The transmission of Indian medicine was less successful at the theoretical level (Unschuld 2010 [1985]: 141 and 150).

⁶¹ Despeux (1989: 231).

⁶² New for the vast majority of Chinese, that is. Indeed, forms of modern yoga were taught to small numbers of people prior to Zhang’s mission. Indra Devi (1899–2002), a student of Krishnamacharya (1888–1989 CE), for instance, taught her postural practice in Shanghai during the 1940s. See Goldberg (2015: 133–36).

⁶³ Alter (2004: 23).

⁶⁴ Singleton (2010: 81).

⁶⁵ Some of these parallel processes are explored in van der Veer (2014: 168–92).

⁶⁶ “全世界——全人类的财富。” Zhang and Bo 1986, 2. An almost identical statement is made in Huilan Yujia (2020b: episode 1).

actually suggests that yoga is a type of *qigong*.⁶⁷ Elsewhere in the book, Zhang and Butler call *qigong* “Chinese yoga” (*Zhongguo yujia* 中国瑜伽), further conflating the two.⁶⁸ In using Chinese medical terms like *jingluo* 经络 (meridian) to denote the channels (*nāḍī*) of the yogic body and words like *qi* 气 (breath) to refer to *prāṇa* (breath), they do much the same.⁶⁹ Through translation, yoga acquires a distinct, local flavour.

Zhang and Butler call “the connection [between yoga and *qigong*] important, ancient, and long lasting” and suggest that the “two systems...have many methods of practice that are, in essence, not very different.”⁷⁰ They argue that “there already exists many Chinese-style yoga methods for improving and controlling *prāṇa*” and that yoga and *qigong* are alike in viewing problems with the body’s *qi* as a major source of illness.⁷¹ Yoga and Chinese traditions are also “almost identical” in the way they conceive of the body’s subtle channels.⁷² Given these similarities, one can do yoga and Chinese exercises in tandem. Zhang and Butler even admit to “practising a little *taijiquan*” themselves.⁷³ In fact, they call on their audience to “take Chinese *qigong* and Indian yoga and smelt them together in a single furnace.”⁷⁴ Individuals “who already practise a form of Chinese yoga...[should] not mistakenly think that, if they practise [Indian yoga], they must quit

⁶⁷ Zhang’s pre-YQM essays published in the “*Qigong* in Foreign Countries” (*Qigong zai guowai* 气功在国外) section of *Qigong Magazine* (*Qigong zazhi* 气功杂志) imply much the same. See, for instance, Zhang (1984). In episodes of *YEM*, the term *yujiaogong* 瑜伽功 (yoga gong) is also used frequently. Many Chinese called yoga “foreign *qigong*” (*waiguo qigong* 外国气功) or “Indian *qigong*” (*Yindu qigong* 印度气功), but Zhang and Butler avoid these terms.

⁶⁸ Zhang and Bo (1986: 7).

⁶⁹ It is perhaps of interest to the reader that Zhang and Butler almost always choose to translate “corpse pose” (Skt.: *śavāsana*) as “method for resting supine” (*yangwo fangsong gong* 仰卧放松功). This choice was no doubt made in consideration of Chinese taboos surrounding death and dying. One is certainly reminded of the proscription against lying like a corpse (*qin bu shi* 寝不尸) found in the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 论语).

⁷⁰ “两者的关系是重要而极为古老悠久的。” Zhang and Bo 1986, 2. “两种瑜伽体系[即中国和印度的]有许多练习方法其实并没有什么本质上的不同。” *Ibid.*, 7.

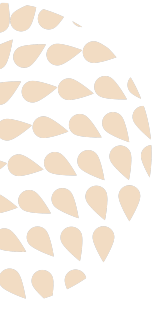
⁷¹ “已经有好几种提升和控制生命之气的中国式瑜伽功法存在了。” *Ibid.*, 8. The claim that yoga and *qigong* possess similar medical understandings is made in Huilan Yujia (2020b: episode 1). In other instances, the term “Eastern medicine” is used to envelop the two systems. *Ibid.*, episode 13.

⁷² “几乎完全等同。” Zhang and Bo (1986: 391).

⁷³ “练了一点太极拳。” *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁴ “把中国气功和印度瑜伽共治一炉。” *Ibid.*





their existing practice.”⁷⁵ “On the contrary, they can use their discretion to take beneficial techniques [from yoga] and incorporate them into their routine.”⁷⁶ In doing so, “there is no contradiction [and] there will be no harm.”⁷⁷ Since, in China, being exclusive in one’s practice is literally a foreign concept which vexes only those adherents of Abrahamic faiths, the notion of mixing yoga with *qigong* would, for most Chinese, hardly have been controversial.⁷⁸

These observations are very different from what academics like Véronique Altglas have encountered while investigating yoga’s spread to Western nations. In Europe and the Americas, yoga has been exoticized, clandestinely made palatable, and adopted through a kind of neoliberal bricolage.⁷⁹ Zhang and Butler, though, highlight similarities rather than differences, and their audience’s selective embrace of yoga alongside other practices was nothing new or exciting, neither modern nor rebellious; it was decidedly typical, the way things had always been done.

But why *not* present yoga as exotic? Would doing so not have made it more attractive? One reason for focusing on the similarities between *qigong* and yoga might have been to make the latter more accessible. Another reason, though, is political. In the 1980s, there was a spike in nationalist fervor. In the aftershock of Maoism’s great disappointment, nationalism acted as a lifebuoy. And at the time, integral to the reimagination of the PRC was *qigong*. Actively promoted by leading scientists and high-ranking government officials, including members of the twelfth and thirteenth Politburo Standing Committees (1982–1987 and 1987–1992), *qigong* was considered “a Chinese cultural treasure,” even “the source of Chinese civilization.”⁸⁰ Many believed it would “trigger a

⁷⁵ “已经练习了某种形式中国瑜伽...不要以为为了开始练本书中某种功法就得放弃他们现在正练着的某种体系。” Ibid., 8.

⁷⁶ “相反，他们还可以采用感到对自己有益处的那些功法，并编配到自己的锻炼内容中去。” Ibid.

⁷⁷ “没有什么矛盾的，不会有什么害处的。” Ibid., 7.

⁷⁸ Religious professionals aside, Chinese have long been noncommittal, moving freely among temples and between gods and bodhisattvas in search of the power (*ling* 灵) necessary to grant them their wants and needs. See Hansen 1990. Intellectual forms of eclecticism also have a long history. By the fourth century CE, China already had its very own “Alan Watts” in the form of Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343). See Sivin (1978: 326).

⁷⁹ Altglas (2014).

⁸⁰ Palmer (2007: 82–84, 57, and 109).

new scientific revolution” and would “allow China to recover its place as a leader among world nations.”⁸¹ “To attack *qigong* was to attack all of Chinese society.”⁸²

It is perhaps no wonder that Zhang and Butler dedicated YQM to “the people of the great and magnificent Chinese nation.”⁸³ In any case, placing yoga in opposition to *qigong* or demanding exclusivity were obviously not options. Doing so could very well have turned Butler into an enemy and made Zhang a traitor to her own people.

It should also not escape our attention that being Indian or “Eastern” improved yoga’s political standing in the country. From its conception, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has seen itself as leading “the East” (or developing South) against “the West” (or industrialized North) and, since coming to power in 1949, has ceaselessly employed this bifurcation for purposes of stoking nationalism, defining “Chineseness,” and disciplining its subjects.⁸⁴ Fortunately for yoga, being “Eastern” also meant being on the right side of this divide.

That said, Zhang and Butler’s brand, even while underscoring its connection to China, is not entirely devoid of Western content—and in it are these elements, rather than anything Indian, which might have appeared exotic to their Chinese audience. The Western influence on yoga itself would have been undetectable to most. Yet Zhang’s makeup, brightly coloured clothes, and flower leis—truly the antithesis of Mao-era fashion—no doubt would have turned heads. She appeared, in many ways, the very embodiment of China’s opening up and reform. Her television show, too, filmed out of doors in Hawaii, provided her audience glimpses of beautiful American landscapes. Cutscenes during monologues also offered snippets of Western homes, restaurants, and offices. Implied, somewhat paradoxically, in Zhang and Butler’s work is the notion that to be like the modern West one ought to practice yoga.

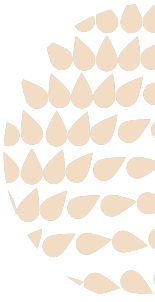
In addition to Zhang herself—her charisma; her soft, confident tone; her physical beauty; and less-than-holy beginnings—it is perhaps her link to the West that would have set her apart from the many *qigong* masters of her day. It certainly would have done a lot more to make her conspicuous than a few novel *mantras* and *mudrās*. Yet, as

⁸¹ Ibid., 105.

⁸² Ibid., 131.

⁸³ “这个伟大，壮丽国家的全体中国人民” (Zhang and Bo 1986: xiii).

⁸⁴ Chen (1995: 5 and 39).



we will see in the following section, Zhang and Butler, despite all of this, employed an overtly anti-Western rhetoric.

Hedonism and “Science”

The idea that the developed world is plagued by hedonism is not limited to *Social Ills of the West* and *Talks on Western Society*. It is present in all of Zhang and Butler’s work and immediately reminds one of Swami Vivekananda’s (1863–1902) habit of materializing “the West” and spiritualizing “the East.” Never once bringing up China’s own infamous hedonist, Yang Zhu 杨朱 (4th c. BCE), Zhang and Butler complain that too many Westerners mistakenly identify with the body. Even worse, they believe freedom is a state of surrendering to the senses. “Such people are no more than dogs” endlessly chasing gratification.⁸⁵ In taking aim at the West, however, Zhang and Butler are quick to note that one should not cease consuming and contributing to China’s economic growth. In no way do they force their audience to choose between Bernard Mandeville’s “spacious hive” and “hollow tree.”⁸⁶ “Economic development,” they declare, “is a must.”⁸⁷

Zhang’s morality talks on *YEM* draw attention to things like junk-food diets and sexual promiscuity. She points to the diseases and economic issues these practices can bring, and, in one episode, even suggests that HIV might spread wildly and destroy the Western world.⁸⁸ Perhaps, most appalling to Chinese ears, though, so tuned to the discourses of filial piety (*xiaoshun* 孝顺), would have been the assertion that hedonism causes individuals “to no longer have any interest in being sons and daughters who lovingly care for their parents and grandparents.”⁸⁹

Such rhetoric helps explain why the state was so tolerant of Zhang and Butler’s yoga-spreading mission. Butler in particular—a white American wilfully denouncing his homeland—was a propagandist’s dream. Until 1989, there was a faction within the CCP which, to some extent, still romanticized the West. However, it was by far the weaker camp. The fact that starry-eyed depictions of the developed world, such as *River Elegy*

⁸⁵ “这样的人只不过是一条狗罢了” (Zhang and Bo 1986: 581). Also see Huilan Yujia (2020b: episode 24).

⁸⁶ Mandeville (1806 [1714]: 1 and 11).

⁸⁷ “经济发展显然是有必要的。” Bo and Zhang (1983: 597).

⁸⁸ Huilan Yujia (2020b: episode 24). For talk of junk food, see *Ibid.*, episodes 9 and 27.

⁸⁹ “做儿女的对关心爱护父母或者长辈也不再感兴趣了。” *Ibid.*, episode 39.

(*Heshang* 河殇), reached the masses at all in the 1980s was “almost accidental.”⁹⁰ Without a doubt, the majority of China’s leadership would have supported Zhang and Butler’s efforts to defame the West. The fact that YEM indirectly received state subsidies and aired for fifteen years on CCTV, the most strictly censored network in the country and a well-known mouthpiece of the Communist Party, certainly implies as much.⁹¹

Although it definitely wished to cast the West in a negative light, the Dengist regime did recognize that the developed world had something of value—science, which China desperately needed if it wished to achieve its Four Modernizations. Chen Xiaomei calls Deng “a master in annexing the Occident.”⁹² He snatched up “Western science and technology for his economic reform while wholly rejecting Western political and legal systems.”⁹³ Notably, *Social Ills of the West* opens with a song lyric echoing precisely this sentiment:

take the best
leave the bad
choose only that which you need
like a honeybee extracting nectar⁹⁴

Succulent hegemon as it was, no doubt many readers would have been quick to construe “nectar” as science. Its status also makes it easy to see why Zhang and Butler make use of scientific facts, terms, and figures to bolster yoga’s legitimacy. Their written materials are peppered with references to leading biomedical journals and

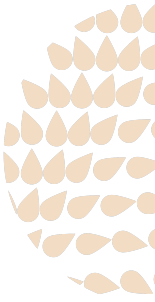
⁹⁰ Chen (1995: 43). *River Elegy* is a six-part documentary series that vilifies traditional Chinese culture and glorifies the West. It first aired on CCTV in 1988 and played a role in bringing about the following year’s protests. See Gunn (1991: 21–22).

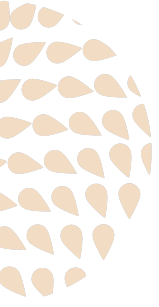
⁹¹ Lull (1991: 26). Hong et al. argue that CCTV serving in this capacity has remained unaltered since its conception. See Hong, Lü, and Zou (2009: 47 and 52–53). I have encountered one case of Zhang critiquing Chinese society. However, the issue raised was that of corruption, a topic relatively safe to discuss during the 1980s so long as one’s finger did not point too high. Even in this instance, though, Zhang locates the root of the problem in the infectious hedonism which her and Butler so commonly associate with the West. See Huilan Yujia (2020b: episode 39).

⁹² Chen (1995: 43).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ “取其精华，去其糟粕。只选取您所需要的，就象蜜蜂采花蜜” (Bo and Zhang 1983: 9). *Talks on Western Society* concludes with the same lyric. See Zhang (1985: 214). The lyric itself appears to come from a song Butler performed during his 1980 tour of the PRC called “Take the Best, Leave the Bad” (*Qu qi jinghua, qu qi zaopo* 取其精华，去其糟粕) (Huilan Yujia 2020a).





scientific institutions. They even cite famous figures like Albert Einstein (1879–1955) as “gasping in amazement” when confronted with the wisdom of ancient yogic treatises.⁹⁵ Yet, they also speak of yoga as a science in its own right.⁹⁶ Such an assertion certainly brings to mind efforts within *qigong* circles to elevate the Chinese system to the level of “super-science.”⁹⁷ However, Zhang and Butler’s tactics should not be thought of as mimetic of *qigong*. For decades, Indians and Westerners had sought to secularize and scientize yoga in much the same way as Chinese had sought to secularize and scientize their own health and healing traditions. Already in the nineteenth century, Vivekananda was employing the language of science to justify yoga, and, in the early 1900s, individuals like Swami Kuvalayananda (1883–1966) were “systematically ‘confus[ing]’ *prāṇa* and oxygen, nerves and *nāḍīs*, organs and *cakras*.”⁹⁸ More importantly, Prabhupāda had proclaimed his tradition a science worthy of replacing its Western counterpart.⁹⁹ Inheriting this discourse and “confusion” served the two yogis well. It made them politically correct in the PRC, lent their practice an air of validity, and allowed them to integrate seamlessly into the *qigong* scene.

But as “scientists,” were they not also Vaiṣṇavaitees? What of the religious dimensions of their yoga?

Subduing the Religious

Zhang and Butler are Vaiṣṇavaitees. They are religious, and so is their yoga.¹⁰⁰ Such statements will seem obvious to anyone who has had even a cursory glance at Butler’s English-language publications from the period.¹⁰¹ Yet, in what appears to be nothing less than an attempt to covertly spread Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in the People’s Republic of China, Zhang and Butler have greatly subdued in their Chinese works many elements which might be readily associated with religion. This is especially the case with *YEM* but

⁹⁵ “惊异赞叹” (Zhang and Bo 1986: 1).

⁹⁶ Yoga is referred to as a science in both the very first episode of *YEM* and on the opening page of *YQM*.

⁹⁷ Palmer (2007: 120).

⁹⁸ De Michelis (2004: 156); Alter (2004: 105–6).

⁹⁹ For a discussion of the various ways Prabhupāda and other ISKCON leaders employ the term “science,” see Zeller (2010: 69–113).

¹⁰⁰ Religion is, of course, a contested category. Zhang and Butler’s Vaiṣṇavism, though, easily meets the criteria of most definitions.

¹⁰¹ See, for instance, Butler (1982); Butler (1987 [1983]).

is true of their written materials as well. Scriptures such as the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and the *Bhagavadgītā* are praised, even quoted. But Kṛṣṇa's miraculous exploits in the former and his transfiguration in the latter are notably absent. Often, too, the names of gods and goddesses are presented esoterically. Let us take *mantra* meditation as an example since it is the practice *par excellence* of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavites and praised by Zhang and Butler as “the most complete, popular, and tried and true yoga meditation technique.”¹⁰² YQM recommends and discusses the following six mantras:

1. *Omu* 噢姆
2. *Omu Harui Omu* 噢姆-哈瑞-噢姆
3. Haliboer Nitai-Ge'er 哈里波尔-尼太-戈尔
4. Madanna Mohanna 玛丹那-莫汉那
5. Madanna-Mohanna Muwali Haruiboer 玛丹那-莫汉那-木哇利-哈瑞波尔
6. Gepala Gewenda Wama Madanna-Mohanna 戈帕拉-戈文达-哇玛-玛丹那-莫汉那¹⁰³

The second *mantra* consistently appears on Zhang's television show. It begins and ends with the first *mantra*, “*Omu*,” a somewhat awkward rendering of the Sanskrit “*Om*.” This, however, is not the way in which *Om* is usually transliterated into Chinese. In the vast majority of Buddhist texts, for instance, the character *an* 唵 is used. It might be the case that Zhang and Butler were simply trying to better capture the Sanskrit sound, although it is equally possible that they were attempting to create distance from Buddhism. After all, tying themselves to a recognized faith would have greatly complicated their mission, even sabotaged it. To be a science was infinitely better than being a religion.¹⁰⁴ In addition, there appears to be sectarian reasons for their choice. Early on in YQM, Zhang and Butler explicitly state that yoga is not Buddhism. Any similarities, they claim, are the result of “Buddhists absorbing multiple forms of yogic practice and incorporating them into their own systems.”¹⁰⁵ As a result, “the majority

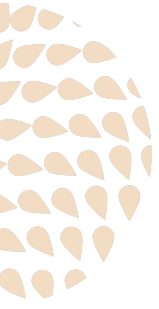
¹⁰² For Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavites, chanting the names of Kṛṣṇa is believed to be the only effective method for achieving liberation during the *kaliyuga* (the present and worst age in a cycle of four). “瑜伽冥想术中最完全、最流行、最久经时间考验的一种” (Zhang and Bo 1986: 6). Elsewhere, Zhang and Butler refer to it as the “most advanced and easiest yoga mediation method” (最高级和简易的瑜伽冥想方法). *Ibid.*, 526. Zhang even goes so far as to suggest it should be learned prior to taking up any other yoga practice (*gongfa* 功法) (Zhang 1985–1988: 3, 6).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 523–28. Notably lacking is the *mahāmantra* so inextricably linked to the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement and, more generally, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Perhaps, even in the PRC, it was simply too recognizable.

¹⁰⁴ Ute Engelhardt notes that, prior to the 1990s, “it was considered wrong to point out the Daoist or Buddhist precursors of certain exercises” within the *qigong* milieu (Engelhardt 2000: 84).

¹⁰⁵ “佛教徒们把许多种瑜伽修炼方法吸收、柔和到自己的体系中去” (Zhang and Bo 1986: 9).





of Buddhist systems make use of yogic cultivation methods, but the majority of the world's yogis do not practice Buddhism.”¹⁰⁶ Elsewhere, they attack the Buddhist ideal of *nirvāṇa* (*jimielun* 寂灭论) and the doctrine of *no-self* (*wuwo* 无我, Skt.: *anātman*).¹⁰⁷ In still other places, they belittle the practice of “returning to emptiness” (*gui yu xuwu* 归于虚无), criticizing its proponents for not recognizing that “emptiness is, in fact, not empty at all...but full of spiritual substance, spiritual form, spiritual love, and spiritual motion.”¹⁰⁸ Ultimate realization comes only when one experiences the state described by Caitanya as “oneness and difference existing simultaneously” (*yizhixing yu chabiexing tongshi bingcun* 一致性与差别性同时并存, Skt.: *acintyabhedābheda*).¹⁰⁹

The second *mantra* listed above also contains the word “Harui” (Skt.: Hare), which is commonly believed to denote either the god Viṣṇu or else Kṛṣṇa’s consort Rādhā.¹¹⁰ Yet, Zhang and Butler do not make this connection. In fact, they provide no explanation for the term whatsoever. The same word appears in the third *mantra* but as “Hali.” Here, the authors suggest the word’s “hidden meaning” (*hanyi* 含义) is simply “magnificence” (*zhuangmei* 壮美) or “attractiveness” (*xiyin* 吸引).¹¹¹ “*Nitai*” (Skt.: *nitya*) and “*ge’er*” (Skt.: *gaura*) are technically correct being glossed as “eternal” (*yongheng* 永恒) and “golden in colour” (*jinse de* 金色的).¹¹² Only in a footnote, do they point to the fact that “*Nitai-Ge’er*” is conventionally understood as pointing to Śrī Nityānānda Prabhu (b. 1474) and Caitanya.¹¹³ Even here, though, Zhang and Butler fail to mention that Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavaitees believe these two figures to be incarnations of Balarāma and Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa respectively.

The fourth *mantra*, “Madanna Mohanna” (Skt.: Madanamohana), is a name for Kṛṣṇa, which means something like “confounder of Kāma,” Kāma being the god of sexual love.

¹⁰⁶ “大多数佛教的体系都利用瑜伽修炼方法，但是，世界上大多数瑜伽士都不修佛。” Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 547–48; Bo and Zhang (1983: 386–87).

¹⁰⁸ Zhang and Bo (1986: 545). “‘虚无’，其实一点也不‘虚无’的...却是充满精神实质、精神形体、精神的爱和精神活动的” Ibid., 546.

¹⁰⁹ My translation seeks to reflect the Chinese rather than the Sanskrit, which would be better rendered as something like “inconceivable difference and non-difference.”

¹¹⁰ This variability results from Hare being both the vocative form of Hari and Harā. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavaitees tend to favour the latter interpretation.

¹¹¹ Zhang and Bo (1986: 526).

¹¹² Ibid. A similar explanation can be found in Zhang (1985: 66).

¹¹³ Zhang and Bo (1986: 526).

Once again, Zhang and Butler are less than forthcoming. Similarly, in the fifth *mantra*, “Muwali” (Skt.: Murāri), a name for Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa meaning “slayer of Mura” is left unexplained. Instead, the entire *mantra* is simply said to be “spiritual love, truth, goodness, and beauty, as well as the aural representation of these four qualities which the human heart finds attractive.”¹¹⁴

The final *mantra*, like the second through fifth, also includes names or epithets of deities. “Gepala” (Skt.: Gopāla) and “Gewenda” (Skt.: Govinda) both mean something like “cowherd” and refer to Kṛṣṇa. And “Wama”—normally written Luomo 罗摩—denotes Rāma. Once again, none of this is communicated to the reader.

It is worth noting that such reticence is absent from Butler’s English-language publications, which explicitly make the connection between God and the aforementioned terms.¹¹⁵ This being the case, Zhang and Butler’s decision to subdue the religious while missionizing in China appears to have been made in consideration of local politics. It is perhaps not surprising then that, as masked as the meanings are in YQM, when *mantras* appear on television—a far more politically sensitive medium—they are even less decipherable. Although each and every episode begins and ends with musical renditions of either the second or third *mantra*, the words are never explained. The same is true when Zhang teaches *mantra* meditation. Doubly disguised by her pronunciation and their transliteration into Chinese, during such lessons, even someone with a background in Sanskrit might be left guessing at what the sounds signify. Zhang and Butler’s willingness to be less than transparent in the PRC can be explained by the fact that the two yogis understood these *mantras* to have inherent power. “God’s Name has power whether you think it has power or not,” claims Butler.¹¹⁶ “It’s not just a mirror that’s reflecting the belief of the chanter...All you need to do is chant it and the effect will be there.”¹¹⁷ At the same time, YEM viewers’ willingness not to know the *mantras*’ meanings likely has something to do with the fact that reciting the unintelligible as if a magic spell has long been commonplace across East Asia.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ “精神之爱、真、善、美以及这四者吸引人心的性质的语音代表。” Ibid., 528. See also Zhang (1985: 66).

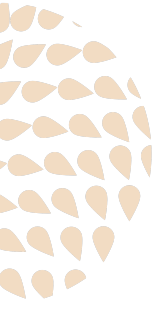
¹¹⁵ See, for instance, Butler (1982: 24–25).

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 21.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ See, for example, Paul Copp’s work on *dhāraṇīs* in the context of medieval Chinese Buddhism (Copp 2014: 4).





Notwithstanding Zhang and Butler's efforts to downplay the religious and position their yoga as a science, it is probably still best to think of their brand as belonging to what Yang Fenggang refers to as the "grey market" of religion in China. According to Yang, the PRC's religious landscape can be divided into red, grey, and black markets. The former includes the legal activities of registered bodies and believers belonging to one of the country's five official religions: Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam. This "open market is stained 'red,'...colored with the official Communist ideology" and, significantly, does not include Hinduism.¹¹⁹ The black market refers to all groups and activities explicitly banned in the country and the grey market to "all religious and spiritual organizations, practitioners, and activities with ambiguous legal status."¹²⁰ Yang places in this latter category "various forms of informal or implicit religion and spirituality," including schools of *qigong* and yoga, which "may insist that their practices are culturally or scientifically based."¹²¹ In the next and final section, I offer an explanation for why Zhang and Butler's yoga was able to stay grey even as the *qigong* sector turned black.

Staying Grey

Throughout the 1990s, *qigong*'s relationship with the Chinese state was strained at the best of times. In many respects, the government had lost control of the movement. *Qigong* was becoming unabashedly religious, and its leaders were increasingly seen as dangerous. On April 25, 1999, after over ten thousand Falun Gong practitioners lined up in protest at China's political center in Beijing, Zhongnanhai 中南海, the state's subsequent move to paint *qigong* black probably felt overdue.¹²²

YEM stopped airing in 2000, no doubt as part of the ensuing crackdown. Yet, Zhang and Butler managed to retain a presence in the country. After rebranding as Huilan Yoga (Huilan Yujia 蕙兰瑜伽), Zhang released a series of DVD collections between the years 2006 and 2007 as well as a coffee-table book, *The Gift of Yoga* (*Yujia de zengyu* 瑜伽的赠予).¹²³ In 2010, Zhang and Butler produced three music compilations, and, in 2012,

¹¹⁹ Yang (2006: 97).

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 97–98.

¹²² For a discussion of this protest, see Penny (2012: 1–3).

¹²³ The DVD collections are Huilan Yoga Simple and Easy Series (Huilan yujia jianyi xilie 蕙兰瑜伽简易系列), Huilan Yoga Intermediate Series (Huilan yujia zhongji xilie 蕙兰瑜伽中级系列), and Huilan Yoga

published *Huilan Yoga* (*Huilan Yujia* 蕙兰瑜伽) in three volumes.¹²⁴ That same year, they also released *Meditation with Melodies for Physical and Spiritual Health* (*Mingxiang youyun xingshen jian* 冥想悠韵形神健), an audiovisual resource for meditative practice. Religious elements remain subdued in this new material—at times, to a greater extent than before.¹²⁵ Moreover, “*qigong*” and related terms like “*gongfa* 功法” (method) hardly ever appear.¹²⁶ Measures such as these have allowed Zhang and Butler’s yoga to remain grey.

And flourish. The suppression of *qigong* created a vacuum in China that, in recent years, yoga has been quick to fill, leading to a second, vastly larger wave of popularization than occurred in the 80s and 90s. Zhang and Butler’s ability to disassociate themselves from *qigong* in this later period has been to their advantage. Indeed, today, the “mother of yoga” is a celebrated icon and source of national pride.¹²⁷ Her content is widely available across the country, especially online where practitioners can hear from Zhang directly via WeChat (Weixin 微信) or Weibo 微博 and can make use of platforms like Youku 优酷, iQiyi (Aiqiyi 爱奇艺), and CCTV to stream her music and videos.

Conclusion

Zhang and Butler’s yoga was a success in the PRC during the 1980s and 90s precisely because it offered a unique path to health and morality while remaining politically savvy. As medical care became less affordable and the country shifted away from Maoism, it provided a cost-effective treatment and supplied a counterpoint to society’s increasing materialism and corruption.

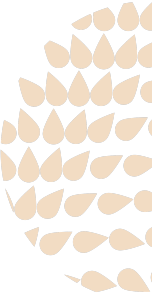
International TV Series (*Huilan yujia guoji dianshi xilie* 蕙兰瑜伽国际电视系列). A sequel to *Huilan Yoga Simple and Easy Series* was also released in 2014.

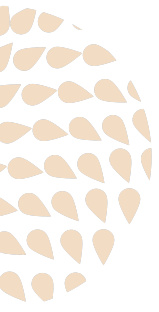
¹²⁴ The music compilations are *Sound Meditation Classics Collection* (*Yuyin mingxiang jingdian heji* 语音冥想经典合集), *Huilan Yoga Handpicked Music Collection One* (*Huilan yujia yinyue jingxuan diancang [yi]* 蕙兰瑜伽音乐精选典藏 [一]) and *Huilan Yoga Handpicked Music Collection Two* (*Huilan yujia yinyue jingxuan diancang [er]* 蕙兰瑜伽音乐精选典藏 [二]).

¹²⁵ In *Huilan Yoga*, for instance, all references to Zhang and Butler’s spiritual lineage are scrubbed, their Sanskrit names are missing, and the *Bhagavadgītā*, so often quoted in *YQM*, is never once mentioned.

¹²⁶ The suffix “*gong* 功” is consistently replaced with safer alternatives like “*shu* 术” (technique) and “*shi* 式” (pose) as well.

¹²⁷ Zhang was especially a source of national pride in 2016 when she became the second Chinese national in history to win India’s prestigious Padma Award. See *Times of India* (2016) and *Zhongguo tiyu bao* 中国体育报 (2016).





Politically, Zhang and Butler were accepted because they subdued the religious dimensions of their practice while holding themselves as champions of science and critics of the West. They also emphasized yoga's "Eastern" roots and made efforts to present it as similar to and compatible with *qigong* and Chinese medicine. Yet, when the government's crackdown on psychophysical- and biospiritual-cultivation practices ensued at the turn of the century, their ability to separate their brand from *qigong* and keep veiled its religious nature did much to ensure its survival. As a result, while many forms of *qigong* have, today, long since vanished from the PRC, Zhang and Butler's posture-heavy Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism continues to stretch and sing.

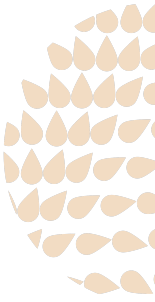
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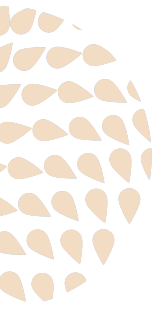
I am grateful to James Benn, Philip Lagace, Matthew Clark, and the anonymous reviewers for their feedback on earlier versions of this article; to Eileen Deng, Dorothy Wang, and Kiki Li for their assistance in procuring a number of primary sources; and to Mark Rowe for recommending several important books. This paper was made possible through funding from McMaster University and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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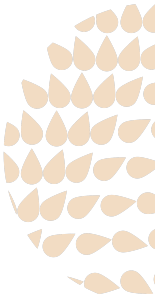
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CITATION

Lagace, M. L. A., 2024. ““Mother of Yoga”: Zhang Huilan, Chris Butler, and the Popularization of Yoga in the People’s Republic of China.” In *Journal of Yoga Studies* (2024), Vol. 5: 39–67. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34000/JoYS.2024.V5.002>.





FADING INTO DEATH THROUGH PĀTAÑJALAYOGA: ON THE APPARENT DEAD-LIKE STATE OF THE YOGA PRACTITIONER ABSORBED INTO CONTENTLESS SAMĀDHI

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Abstract

This article was inspired by a reading of Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa's commentary, *Pātañjalayogasūtravṛtti* (PYV), on *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* 1.18. In explaining contentless absorption (*asamprajñātasamādhi*), Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa depicts the yoga practitioner as being “like a cadaver” (*mṛtavat*). The article investigates the use of metaphors of death in the Pātañjalayoga commentarial literature and aims to make sense of them in the context of *asamprajñātasamādhi*. This literature indicates that the yoga practitioner becomes deeply absorbed in contentless *samādhi* through the practice of cessation (*nirodha*), namely the progressive shutting down of psycho-physical drives, up to the point of their total annihilation. Thus, one might say that the practitioner attains a quasi-death-like condition. Once the practitioner has reached this advanced phase of absorption, metaphors of death are used to depict his condition. This raises the question of how these metaphors relate to the practice of yoga. I argue that these expressions were intended to convey the stillness of the yoga practitioner's mind and body, once he or she has reached *asamprajñātasamādhi*, which makes the yoga adept fit either for liberation-in-life (*jīvanmukti*) or at the time of death (*videhamukti*).

KEYWORDS

Pātañjalayoga, death, death-like state, yogic death, *mṛta*, *mṛtakavat*, *mṛtavat*, *nirodha*, *samādhi*, *samprajñātasamādhi*, *asamprajñātasamādhi*.



Preliminary Remarks

Nowadays, at least among modern, global urbanites, yoga is mainly associated with ideas and practices that enhance mindfulness and healthy bodies and lifestyles. However, early traditions of South Asian yoga were connected with an ascetic lifestyle and world-view that is very different from modern concerns. The historical goal of yoga was not particularly to have a mindful and healthy life, but rather to attain ultimate liberation (*mokṣa*) from the ongoing cycle of *saṃsāra*. Therefore, in several yoga texts (Gerety 2021; Jonker 2021; Sanderson 2004; Vasudeva 2004) one can find instructions on practices enabling an advanced yoga practitioner to voluntarily abandon his life and to never return. Seen from this perspective, in some early yoga traditions yoga was not primarily about the art of living but especially about the art of abandoning the mind and body, if not the art of dying.

Although there have been many detailed commentaries published on the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*,¹ many commentators do not provide specific textual references to the associations between death and *samādhi* found in this corpus and its commentaries. Grinshpon (2002), for example, associates Pātañjalayoga with a context of emptiness and the cessation of psycho-physical activities. While usefully exploring this and other important aspects of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*,² Grinshpon's work, in his *Silence Unheard: Deathly Otherness in Pātañjala-Yoga*, focuses mainly on the PYŚ and he fails to detail textual occurrences of terms in the commentarial literature such as *mṛta* and *mṛtakavat*, which refer specifically to death. These terms are explored in this article. From the

¹ Regarding terminological references in this article, YS/YB/PYŚ refers to specific textual portions of the so-called *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*: YS=*Yogasūtras*; YB=*Yogabhāṣya*; PYŚ=*Pātañjalayogaśāstra*. Therefore, when mentioning a *sūtra*, it will be referred to as YS; when the *bhāṣya*, as YB; and when both *sūtras* and *bhāṣya*, as PYŚ. According to Maas (2020a: 5) Patañjali's work can be dated to around 400 CE. In line with Maas (2013: 58; 2006: xv, xx) and Bronkhorst (1991: 212; 1985: 194, 203), in this article the text of PYŚ is taken as a single and unified whole work edited by a single person, probably named Patañjali, who arranged the *sūtras* (some of which could be older, while others are his own compositions) and provided them with an explanation (Maas 2013: 64). As for other assessments of PYŚ authorship, see Maas (2013: 64–5). Moreover, in this article, the terms Pātañjalayoga, *Pātañjalayogadarśana*, *yogadarśana*, *yogaśāstra* of Patañjali, or simply *yogaśāstra*, all refer to the yoga of Patañjali as a theoretical and prescriptive system of philosophy. The denominations are not to be confused with *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, the title of the root text comprising both the *sūtras* and the *bhāṣya*.

² Grinshpon (2002: 6) summarises his understanding of the *Yogasūtra* in terms of three main motifs: a) “Yoga is essential otherness,” which implies “[T]he creation of a yogic universe based on difficult and prolonged observances and practices culminating in actual sensory renunciation”; b) “The otherness of Yoga is expressed in terms of paranormal experiences (*siddhi*)”; and c) “The scholarly tradition underestimates the significance of yogic otherness. Even the classical scholars (Vyāsa, Vācaspati-miśra, Vijñānabhikṣu, King

analysis of the expression *mṛtakavat* occurring in Vijñānabhikṣu's *Yogavārttika*, and *mṛtavat* in Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa's *Pātañjalayogasūtravṛtti*, I aim to further contribute to the understanding of the imagery of death connected to yoga, making references not only to the cultural background of the *Pātañjalayogadarśana*, but also to Abhidharma Buddhism, the Pāśupatas, and *Haṭhayoga* generally.³

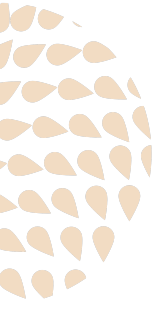
In this article, I suggest that there is an implicit awareness among Pātañjalayoga adherents that a death-like state constitutes the advanced practice of this tradition of yoga, which entails the stillness (*niścalatva*) of *asamprajñātasamādhi*, wherein, in the afterlife of yogic absorption, the Self (*puruṣa*) is freed from the empirical self (*prakṛti/citta*).⁴ In *asamprajñātasamādhi*, once psycho-physical functions are put to rest, the yoga practitioner's mind and body have no more tasks to accomplish. His body resembles that of a cadaver (*mṛtavat/mṛtakavat*). Finally, the Self can abide in its own nature (YS I. 3: *tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe 'vasthānam*). This essentially entails a different, yogic conception of life and death. The aim is to free the true Self (*puruṣa*) from being wrongly entangled in its empirical and illusory counterpart (*prakṛti*), namely the phenomenal self. Thus,

Bhoja) exemplify this gap between the commentator and yogic silence." For reviews of Grinshpon (2002), see Carpenter (2003: 218–20) and Williamson (2004: 226–27).

³ This article deals mainly with the Sanskrit literature on the *yogadarśana* of Patañjali. However, it should be noted that metaphors of death occur abundantly in both early and later texts on *haṭhayoga*: see, for example, HP IV.107, and the use of *mṛtavat* in the *Amanaska* (11th–12th cent. CE), *Yogabīja* (14th cent. CE), and *Nādabindūpaniṣad* (first half of the 18th cent. CE); *śavavat* (like a dead body) in the *Dattātreyaयोगशास्त्र* (12th–13th cent. CE), *Gheraṇḍasamhitā* (18th cent. CE), and *Yogacintāmaṇi* (16th cent. CE) (text chronology is based on Birch 2018: 6–10). The use of other metaphors could be included, such as: *mṛtyu* (death), *maraṇa* (the act of dying), *mṛyate* (he dies), *kāṣṭhavat* (like a log of wood), and *stambhavat* (like a pillar). I am grateful to Jason Birch for pointing out references in these *haṭhayoga* sources. On the relation between yoga and death in the early Śaiva tradition of the Pāśupatas, see Jonker (2021).

⁴ The polarity of *puruṣa/prakṛti*, a fundamental principle of Sāṅkya philosophy, in which Pātañjalayoga is entwined, represents an ontological dualism, which structures the world. For a philosophical and descriptive account of Pātañjalayoga dualism, see Larson and Bhattacharya (2008: 72–73; 85–91) and Larson (2013: 183–221). Larson defines this particular form of dualism as "eccentric dualism." On the dualism in yoga, see also Jakubczak (2008) and Schweizer (1993). Although different forms of dualism characterise the history of South Asian philosophy, these studies focus on how the PYŚ accepts a specific, non-Cartesian kind of dualism, according to which not only physical but also mental phenomena are regarded as having a material constitution. The term *citta* (mind) as well as the nominal compound *cittavṛtti* (mental states/events/functions), include a wide variety of events ranging from mental to material ones. In this sense, both mind and brain fall under the same category, providing an alternative to Cartesian dualism, which represents a well-known paradigm within the history of European philosophy. Physical and intellectual phenomena are described and inscribed in the paradigm of *prakṛti*, while *puruṣa* (the Self) is essentially distinct, having nothing in the way of content that is a feature of the world or of one's bodily or mental constitution.





the yogic path is a way to prepare oneself for the final release from the body. Considering this context, I argue that through the metaphor of death (*mṛtavat/mṛtakavat*), the Pātañjalayoga commentators, Vijñānabhikṣu and Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa, are ultimately concerned with evoking a scenario of the psycho-physical stillness of *asamprajñātasamādhi*. On a different level of textual interpretation, these metaphors convey a reference to the “yogic death,” which refers to an advanced yogi deciding to abandon his own life by deliberately inducing death by means of yoga techniques at the end of his life.

In the following section of this article, two passages are examined: one is from an influential commentary on the PYŚ, namely Vijñānabhikṣu’s *Yogavārttika* (YV), and the other is from Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa’s *Pātañjalayogasūtravṛtti* (PYV). Vijñānabhikṣu dates from between around 1450 and 1550 CE, while Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa lived between around 1670 to 1750 CE. Commenting on YBh/YS I.18, both Vijñānabhikṣu and Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa describe the yoga practitioner as being deeply absorbed in *asamprajñātasamādhi* and “remaining like a cadaver.” The expressions used are *mṛtavat* in the PYV, and *mṛtakavat* in the YV. These passages comment on the textual portion of YBh/YS I.18 where *asamprajñātasamādhi* is defined. To my current knowledge, the specific terms *mṛtavat/mṛtakavat* do not occur in the PYŚ nor within its other commentaries besides the YV and the PYV. In order to make sense of these expressions, there will be consideration of other texts connected with the practice of yoga where the exact or similar expressions occur.

Discussing the effects and outcomes of the advanced phase of yogic practice is not at all easy. Rather, it is a highly complex matter due to the verbal idiosyncrasy involved in describing the ineffable experiences ensuing from the achievement of extraordinary mental states.⁵ The advanced phase of yogic practices, namely the contentless meditative absorption or *asamprajñātasamādhi*, is achieved by progressively regulating mental and bodily functions, involving a series of psycho-physical inhibitions. In the Pātañjalayoga textual corpus, the description of this process conveys the sense of the absence and cessation of mental and physical states. Such experiences, being of a

⁵ See Matilal (2002: 3–37) for a comprehensive treatment of mysticism and ineffability in South Asian culture, philosophy, and religion. On the theme of mysticism and its relation to language and logic, see also Russell (1970), in relation to ancient Greece thinkers and modern European philosophers, and Staal (1975; 1979) for Asian and South Asian cultures. Staal explains how so-called mystical experiences go beyond language, and that to recount them in ordinary language faces difficulties in adequately describing them. He presents a parallel with the artificial languages of physics, music, ritual, linguistics and logic. All these disciplines are in need of expressive vehicles capable of communicating their relative objects of study or scientific facts and relationships, which go beyond ordinary language. In all these cases, ordinary language

mystical sort, are achieved through a set of beliefs and practices which lead the practitioner beyond his body and mind, through absorption into the *puruṣa*; they are hard to communicate and to prove empirically. In this regard, the actual performance of the above-mentioned cessative activity, termed as *nirodha*, is fundamental to yoga practice, particularly in the context of the PYŚ. The practice of *nirodha* consists of the progressive achievement of increasingly refined and subtle states of consciousness, where the mind and body of practitioners are reduced to their minimal functions. Once these are completely absent, the practitioner, being deeply absorbed into *asamprajñātasamādhi*, appears, to someone observing him, as if he were dead; he resembles a cadaver.

The PYŚ explains that it is important to detach oneself from worldly affairs in order to achieve contentless absorption. YS II.15 states: *pariṇāmatāpasamskāraduḥkhair guṇavṛttivirodhāc ca duḥkham eva sarvaṃ vivekinaḥ*.⁶ Patañjali claims that for the yogin whose mind discriminates, everything is sorrow, due to the conflict of the *guṇas*, and the sorrow caused by the mental impressions, austerities and the transformations of the *prakṛti*. This “dark” scenario is also connected to the cessative practice (*nirodha*) of the progressive absorption of any mind-state, and the relative conceptualisation in terms of *vivekakhyaṭi*, namely, the “knowledge of the difference,” which refers to the ontological difference between the Self and *prakṛti* in meditative concentration.⁷

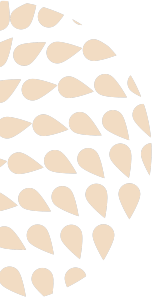
Vijñānabhikṣu uses an evocative image, namely *unmūlaka* (YV\PYŚ 1.18, cfr YV 1932: 56, 29), to describe the annihilation of mental impressions (*samskāra*). *Unmūlaka* denotes the “pulling up by the roots” of mental impressions, which comprise the apparent objectiveness of *prakṛti*. The act of renouncing the apparent world of *prakṛti* provokes internal resistance. This is because the means for uprooting *prakṛti* are contained within *prakṛti* itself: among the impressions of *prakṛti*, which need to be uprooted and eradicated, there is also, paradoxically, the sense of there being a “person” who is doing the uprooting and eradicating, the impressions of which also need to be eradicated.

can create only shorthand descriptions and approximations. Even though those engaged in mystic experiences may depict experiences in ordinary language, they refer to non-ordinary states of mind that are beyond language. According to Staal (1979: 20; 1996: 279–93, 433–41), mystical experiences precede the origin of language in the course of biological evolution, similarly to both music and ritual.

⁶ Cf. YS II.15 (YS 1919: 74, 4–5): “Because of the sorrows due to the [continuous] transformation of matter, as well as anguish and latent impressions [in the mind], and [also] because of the conflicting movements of the *guṇas*, everything is just sorrow for one who discriminates.”

⁷ Cf. YBh/YS II.26 (YBh 1919: 97, 1): *sattvapuruṣānyatāpratyayo vivekakhyaṭiḥ*.





Prakṛti can be broadly understood as referring to existence in the world. The practitioner immersed within *prakṛti* needs to completely detach himself from *prakṛti* by inhibiting his psycho-physical states, to let him abide in the *puruṣa*. In the PYŚ this process is also described as *pratīprasava*,⁸ a process in which the yoga practitioner, voiding the mind of its contents and functions, allows all phenomena to become reabsorbed (*pratīprasava*) in *prakṛti*. Only in this way does the aspirant yogin reach the ultimate destination of “isolated perception” (*dṛṣeḥ kaivalyam*), as stated in YS II.25.⁹

PYŚ II.3 defines one of the *kleśas* (sorrows/afflictions) affecting the yoga practitioner.¹⁰ It concerns the idea of “clinging to life” (*abhiniveśa*), or the desire to be alive.¹¹ *Abhiniveśa* also manifests as “anxiety at death” (*maraṇatrāsa*), and the “pain connected with death” (*maraṇaduḥkha*), which is caused by the experiences of death in past lives.¹² Considering that the yogin deeply absorbed in *asamprajñātasamādhi* has put to rest all of his mental and physical functions, he has also mastered the fear and anxiety connected with death.

⁸ The concept *pratīprasava* refers to the flowing back of the externalized and physical *guṇas* into unmanifest *prakṛti*, cf. YS IV.34 (YS 1919: 207, 2–3): *puruṣārthasūnyānāṃ guṇānāṃ pratīprasavaḥ kaivalyaṃ svarūpapratīṣṭhā vā citiśaktir iti*: “The process of returning to the original state [of *prakṛti*] and its constituents (*guṇas*), once void [of acting] for the Self’s purpose, is referred to as the contentless of seeing (*kaivalyam*), or else as the abiding of the consciousness in its own essence.” The standard English translation for the neuter term *kaivalya* is “isolation.” Here, I understand it as *taddṛṣeḥ kaivalyam* on the basis of YS II.25). Henceforth, the rationale behind *kaivalyam*’s semantic shift from “isolation” to “contentlessness of that seeing” detached from the *guṇas*, is that the Self is isolated, and rests in itself because it sees no object. On *pratīprasava*, see also YBh/YS II.2, 10, 27; III.50.

⁹ Cf. YS II.25 (YS 1919: 96, 5–6): *tadabhāvāt saṃyogābhāvo hānaṃ taddṛṣeḥ kaivalyam*: “Because of the absence of [wrongly directed knowledge], the correlation [between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*] is [also] absent. [This is] the removal [of what is] the contentlessness of that seeing of the seer (*puruṣa*).”

¹⁰ The *kleśas* are five in number (ignorance, ego/one’s self, excitement/passion, aversion, will to live), listed in YS II.3: *avidyāsmītārāgadveṣābhiniveśāḥ kleśāḥ*; see also YBh/YS I.8), and singularly defined in PYŚ II.5–9.

¹¹ Cf. PYŚ II.9 (YS 1919: 65, 6): *svarasavāhī viduṣo ’pi tathā rūḍho ’bhiniveśaḥ*: “The will to live is sustained by a natural instinct and is strong even in the wise.” Cf. also YBh/YS II.9 (YBh 1919: 65, 7): *sarvasya prāṇina iyam ātmāśīr nityā bhavati mā na bhūvaṃ bhūyāsam iti*: “Every living being has the desire for eternal life, stated as: ‘May I not cease to live! May I live.’”

¹² Cf. YBh/YS II.9 (YBh 1919: 65, 8): *sa cāyam abhiniveśaḥ kleśaḥ svarasavāhī kṛmer api jātamātrasya pratyakṣānumānāgamair asaṃbhāvito maraṇatrāsa ucchedadṛṣṭyātmakaḥ pūrvajanmānubhūtaṃ maraṇaduḥkham anumāpayati*: “Moreover, the affliction termed *abhiniveśa* is a natural instinct. It is even in a new-born worm. The anxiety about death, which is essentially regarded as extinction [of life], is not experienced through perception, inference or verbal testimony. It enables one to infer that the pain of death has been experienced in a previous life.”

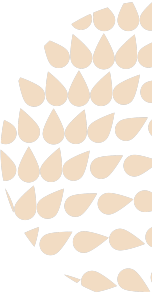
The concepts of *jīvanmukti* and *videhamukti* provide insight into the destiny of the advanced yoga practitioner, who has attained the final goal of *samādhi*. Although the PYŚ does not contain either of these two terms, later commentators nevertheless make use of them. Patañjali says virtually nothing about the condition of the yogin after the experience of *samādhi*, though the terms *jīvanmukti* and *videhamukti* convey ideas later conceived within the context of South Asian asceticism to describe what the condition could be. *Jīvanmukti* refers to the practitioner who obtains liberation while still alive, notwithstanding the residue of *karma* yet to be burnt, which binds the subject to the world; *videhamukti* refers to the practitioner who, close to the time of death, finally and voluntarily abandons the body by means of the practice of yoga.

Vijñānabhikṣu, Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa and their Reading of Death in PYŚ I.18

In his *Yogavārttika* (YV) on PYŚ I.18 (*virāmapratyayābhyāsapūrvāḥ saṃskāraśeṣo 'nyaḥ*), Vijñānabhikṣu employs a peculiar expression: *mṛtakavat*. This is used to describe the condition of the practitioner's mind (*citta*), which, when dissolved in *asamprajñātasamādhi*, only consists of left-over mental impressions (*saṃskāraśeṣa*),¹³ due to the steady practice of *nirodha*, *paravairāgya* “superior form of detachment,” and *virāmapratyaya* “cessation-experience.” Vijñānabhikṣu uses this metaphor to describe the condition in which the mind and the body of a yoga practitioner become merged. He says that this state of *asamprajñātasamādhi*, which in the YS is called the “other” (*anya*), can be equated with death, that it is death-like (YV/PYŚ I.18: *mṛtakavat*). Here, the practitioner's mind seems as if it were dead because there are no more tasks to accomplish, and no more psycho-physical functions (*cittavṛttis*) giving shape to it.¹⁴ Using the term *mṛtakavat*, Vijñānabhikṣu comments in the YV on PYŚ I.18:

¹³ As noted by Maas (2020b: 977, fn. 57), Patañjali conceives the term *saṃskāra* (mental impression) as a quasi-synonym with *vāsanā*, and vice versa, even if this translation neither conveys the etymology of the term, nor the distinctly Buddhist Yogācāra connotations. This is indicated in YBh/YS II.13 (*ye saṃskārāḥ smṛtīhetavaḥ tā vāsanās tās cānādikālīnāḥ*) and similar passages. It is interesting to note that the PYŚ mentions two varieties of *saṃskāras*, as stated in YS III.9: a) *vyutthānasamskāra*, namely the mental impressions of the emergent-state of consciousness; and b) *nirodhasamskāra*, the mental impressions of the restricted state of consciousness. Moreover, YS I.50 makes reference to a further *saṃskāra* whose function consists of restricting the *nirodhasamskāra* itself. That the *saṃskāras* are related to past activities can be read in YS III. 18. Here they are the causes—in the form of subliminal traces (*vāsanās*)—of memory and afflictions, and also the causes of the fruition (*vipāka*) of right or wrong actions (*dvaye khalv amī saṃskārāḥ smṛtikleśahetavo vāsanārūpā vipākahetavo dharmādharmarūpāḥ*).

¹⁴ Cf. YV/PYŚ I.18 (YV 1935: 55, 34): *cittaṃ...vṛttisārūpyakāryakaraṇād mṛtakavad bhavati iti*.



*kr̥tavairāgyābhyāsaṃ cittam nirāmbanaṃ nirviṣayam abhāvaprāptim iva
vṛttirūpakāryākaraṇād mṛtakavad bhavati ity, eṣo 'vasthāviśeṣa ityāder ayam
arthaḥ nirbīja iti. saṃskāradvārā janmabījaṃ jñānakarma tacchūnyāvasthety
arthaḥ. saṃskārākhyasaṃsārabījonmūlaka iti vārthaḥ.*¹⁵

The mind resulting from the practice of [higher] detachment loses its meditative support, content, [and] appears as if non-existent, just as if cadaverous, because of the absence of action [giving rise] to effects in the form of mental activity. [In the passage of the *Yogabhāṣya*] beginning with *iti*, it is said that this is a peculiar condition. This is called the seedless *samādhi* (*nirbīja*). By means of the mental impressions (*samskāras*), knowledge and action, the seed of life, [arise]. The meaning of [seedless *samādhi*] is a state void of those. Alternatively, it can also mean the uprooting of the seed of *saṃsāra* known as subliminal drives.

The expression *mṛtakavat* used here is somewhat curious. It appears to imply both bodily stillness and austerity. In the entire textual corpus of the *Yogaśāstra* of Patañjali there are no occurrences of qualifications implying the semiotic space of death used to refer to *asamprajātasamādhi*. Within such a semiotic space, what sort of information and imaginary is realised? I argue that the image of death in the YV and PYV conveys the stillness of *asamprajñātasamādhi* where the psycho-physical inhibition achieved through *nirodha* is implied. This stillness is expressed by Vijñānabhikṣu's formula *vṛttirūpakāryākaraṇād*, which refers to the absence of that which causes effects, such as psycho-physical activities (*cittavṛtti*). Neither the PYŚ, nor other commentaries on it, besides the YV, describe the practitioner absorbed in deep *samādhi* as if cadaverous or dead. There is only one other instance in the *Yogaśāstra* that imitates Vijñānabhikṣu's use of the term, which is chronologically posterior to him. This use of the term is represented in a late commentary on the PYŚ entitled *Pātañjalayogasūtravṛtti* (PYV) by Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa. He was a prolific author, active between the middle of the 17th and the 18th centuries CE, well known for his remarkable works on *vyākaraṇa*.

To Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa are attributed two commentaries on the PYŚ, namely the PYV and an abridged form of it (*Laghuvṛtti*). Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa followed the example of his yogic predecessor Vijñānabhikṣu, who wrote the YV and a condensed form of it, entitled *Yogasārasaṃgraha*.¹⁶ Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa, about two centuries after the time of Vijñānabhikṣu,

¹⁵ Cf. YV/PYŚ I.18 (YV 1935: 56, 27–29).

¹⁶ See Jha (1894) and the reviewed edition by Kumar (1995).

closely follows the wording and the ideas contained in the YV.¹⁷ The PYV is an example of where the author reuses the wording of another text, in this case from the YV.¹⁸

PYŚ I.18	Vijñānabhikṣu YV/PYŚ I.18	Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa PYV/PYŚ I.18
<p><u>Yogasūtra</u></p> <p><i>virāmapratyayābhyāsa-pūrvah saṃskāraśeṣo 'nyah</i></p>	<p>- <i>kṛtavairāgyābhyāsa-cittaṃ nirālambanaṃ nirviṣayam abhāvaprāptim iva vṛttirūpakāryākaraṇād mrtakavad bhavati ity.</i></p>	<p>- <i>evaṃ hi kṛtavairāgyābhyāsa-cittaṃ nirviṣayaṃ vṛttirūpakāryākaraṇād abhāvaprāptam iva mrtavad bhavati.</i></p>
<p><u>Yogabhāṣya</u></p> <p><i>tadabhyāsapūrvakaṃ hi cittaṃ nirālambanam abhāvaprāptam iva bhavati ity eṣa nirbījah samādhir asamprajñātaḥ.</i></p>	<p>- <i>nirbīja iti saṃskāradvārā janmabījaṃ jñānakarma tacchūnyāvastha ity arthaḥ.</i></p> <p>- <i>saṃskārākhyasamsāra-bījonmūlaka iti vārthaḥ.</i></p>	<p>- <i>ata eṣo 'samprajñāto janmabījakarmaśūnyāvastha ity ucyate.</i></p>

Turning now to Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa's PYV commentary on PYŚ I.18, the resemblance with Vijñānabhikṣu's wording is striking. Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa, however, uses the form *mṛtavat* instead of Vijñānabhikṣu's *mṛtakavat* to depict the advanced yoga practitioner in *asamprajñātasamādhī*:

¹⁷ Currently, there are no specific or systematic studies comparing the works of both these authors, who comment on *Pātañjalayoga*. In my PhD thesis, I collected and reported on comparisons between the wording of both texts, but the study was limited to the first *pāda* of the PYŚ. Moreover, studies analysing Vijñānabhikṣu's relevant contribution to *Pātañjalayoga* and his theistic reading of it are lacking. In his YV, Vijñānabhikṣu established a new interpretation of the PYŚ in terms of *bhedābhedavāda*, *bimbapratibimbavāda*, or *anyonyapratibimba*. The new *bhedābhedā* reading of the PYŚ is hardly comprehensible if the most important works of Vijñānabhikṣu (*Vijñānāmṛtabhāṣya*, *Sāṅkhyapracāsanabhāṣya*, and YV) are not taken as a whole. Nicholson (2010: 41–65; 108–118), Rukmani (2007: 13–17), and White (2014: 44–48, 52) have shed some preliminary, but not systematic, light on this Vedāntic trend in the *Pātañjalayogadarśana*.

¹⁸ The “reuse” and “adaptive reuse” of philosophical material is a widespread practice in South Asian literature. See Freschi and Maas (2017).

*evam hi kṛtavairāgyābhyāsaṃ cittam nirviṣayaṃ vṛttirūpakāryākaraṇād
abhāvaprāptam iva mṛtavad bhavati. ata eṣo'samprajñāto janmabījakarma-
śūnyāvastha ity ucyate.*¹⁹

Consequently, the mind resulting from the practice of [higher] detachment becomes void of content, it seems non-existent, as if it was in a *dead-like state* because of the absence of action [giving rise] to effects in the form of psycho-physical activities. Therefore, this is said to be the contentless [*samādhi*], which is a condition void of activity causing birth in the world.

In a comparative analysis, very few changes in word order and lexicon can be detected between Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa's PYV and Vijñānabhikṣu's YV, though Nāgeśa is generally more concise than Vijñānabhikṣu.²⁰

The comparative chart sketched above outlines how there are no relevant differences in the main readings of PYŚ I.18 by Vijñānabhikṣu and Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa. The chart illustrates how formal similarities or differences, and textual material coming from the YV, have been reused by Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa. Expressions in bold indicate similarity in form. The expressions *mṛtakavat/mṛtavat* are underlined to mark their relevant place within this analysis. Although a few, slight differences, which do not affect the overall construal of PYŚ I.18, come to light when comparing both YV and PYV, the hermeneutic effort of both authors nevertheless coincides with the explanation of the concept of *asamprajñātasamādhi*. Already in the commentarial portion of PYŚ I.18, *asamprajñātasamādhi* is explained through a metaphor referring to *citta*, namely *abhāvaprāptam iva*, pointing to a mind-state void of any object/support in absorption (*nirvastuka/nirālambana*), in which mental activities are absent. While explaining the expression *abhāvaprāptam iva*, Vijñānabhikṣu states that it amounts to a distinct condition (*avasthāviśeṣa*). This qualifying statement does not occur in Nāgeśa's text. This expression refers to the term *tadabhyāsa*. It is a reference to the practice of a superior form of detachment (*paravairāgya*), which is the cause that leads the practitioner to

¹⁹ Cf. PYV/PYŚ I.18 (PYV 1917: 235, 11–12).

²⁰ Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa's style of composition is specifically praised in the ambit of his works on *vyākaraṇa*, and the way he makes explicit and solves the intricacies of the grammarians Pāṇini and Patañjali. Nāgeśa's principal literary activity concerns *vyākaraṇa* and, in particular, explanations of Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*. As stated by Thieme (1971: 47), Nāgeśa can be considered as the great reformer of Pāṇini interpretation, liberating the explanation of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* from a great many artificial, interpretative tricks and, at the same time, opening up a more thorough and precise understanding of Patañjali.

abandon even the support/object on which meditative absorption was previously rooted in, namely *samprajñātasamādhi*. The term *nirālamba* refers to the mind (*citta*) resting in *asamprajñātasamādhi*, which is characterized as being void of any object, or support for meditative absorption. Grouping together the various qualifiers referring to *asamprajñātasamādhi* witnessed in the PYŚ, YV and PYV, the use of negations is striking, as for instance in the use of the terms *nirvastuka*, *nirālambana*, *nirviṣaya* and *abhāvaprāptam*. The same type of semantics qualifying *asamprajñātasamādhi* applies to another term occurring in PYŚ I.18, namely *virāmapratyaya*.²¹

The series of negations qualifying *asamprajñātasamādhi* continues with the expression *nirbija*, that is “seedless absorption.” This term primarily refers to the concentration that contains no seed, which is a form of *samādhi* devoid of any generative seed of *kleśa* and the resulting *karma*.²² The condition qualified as “without seed” is what makes *asamprajñātasamādhi* a distinct state, as indicated by Vijñānabhikṣu, because the only *saṃskāras* left have no potential to create in the yoga practitioner any desire for action or knowledge capable of creating karmic bonds in the world, or *saṃsāra*. Knowledge and

²¹ As pointed out by Maas (2009: 275), the author reads the compound *virāmapratyaya*, as a descriptive (*karmadhāraya*) compound, underlying a relation of apposition between the two terms, cf. YVi/PYŚ I.18 (1999: 225, 11): *viramaṇaṃ virāmaḥ / virāmaś ca asau pratyayaś ca virāmapratyayaḥ*. In this sense, the compound does not denote an experience having inhibition as its content, as it would have been in the case of a *bahūvr̥hi* compound, but rather an experience being described as inhibition or cessation. Therefore, the compound should also not be translated as the “experience of inhibition” as in the case of a *atpuruṣa* compound, rather, as “inhibition-experience.” The same formula of analysis of the compound *virāmapratyaya* as a *karmadhāraya*, is also followed by Bhoja in his *Rājamārtaṇḍa* (RM), cf. RM/PYŚ I.18 (RM 1919: 6, 28): *virāmaś ca asau pratyayaś ca iti virāmapratyayaḥ*. Furthermore, Bhoja continues, the practice of cessation is an interrupted modality of exclusion, or negation of any sort of mental content. Interestingly, Bhoja also claims that this cessative practice expresses the form “not this, not this,” quoting a famous *mahāvākya* from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, cf. RM/PYŚ I.18 (RM 1919: 7, 1–2): *tatra yā kācidvṛttir ullasati tasyā neti netīti nairantaryeṇa paryudāsanaṃ virāmapratyayābhyāsaḥ*. The expression *neti neti* also occurs in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* II.3, 6; III.9, 26; IV.2, 4, IV.23 (see Olivelle 1998: 66): *athāta ādeśo neti neti*. Interestingly, Bhoja here refers to the *paryudāsapratīṣedha* type of negation, namely the implicative negation. According to Indian grammarians, the negative particle (*nañ*) can have two meanings, *prasajyapratīṣedha* and *paryudāsapratīṣedha*. The latter is generally found when the negative particle is compounded with a noun (*abrāhmaṇaṃ ānaya*), whereas the former is generally found when it is used independently with a verbal form (e.g., *anṛtaṃ na vaktavyam*). *Prasajyapratīṣedha* is described as a case where the negative sense predominates (“in any case, one should not say an untruth”), whereas in *paryudāsapratīṣedha* the negation is not absolute, but rather qualifies something else; see Abhyankar (1986: 212–13 [sub voce *na*, 6], 213 [sub voce *nañ*]).

²² Cf. PYŚ I.51 (Maas 2006: 158–62). *Nirbija* is the state in which all traces of the seed of future *kleśa* have been eradicated. On the usage and meaning of *nirbija* within the PYŚ, see also O’Brien-Kop (2020: 6; 2017: 142–4).



action amount to the seeds that sprout into life (*janmabija*) and continuous rebirth. Even in this case, both the YV and the PYV semantically agree. The only difference consists in a stylistic preference. In Vijñānabhikṣu's wording occur two compound expressions, *janmabijaṃ* and *jñānakarma*, which do not feature the PYV. Again, and still a matter of contrasting literary tastes, YV's choice of the term *tacchūnyāvastha* directs attention towards the occurrence in the PYV of a single compound expression, namely *janmabijakarmaśūnyāvastha*.

While not amounting to a semantic shift, a notable difference between the YV and the PYV emerges at the end of the YV commentarial section on PYŚ I.18. Here, Vijñānabhikṣu's text presents an alternative interpretation of the term *nirbija*, marked by *iti vārtha*, which does not occur in the PYV. The YV states that the fact of being seedless can alternatively signify, or be expressed as, "the uprooting of the seed of *saṃsāra* known as subliminal drives" (*saṃskārākhyasaṃsārabijonmūlaka*). Once mental impressions have been purified and put to rest by means of the steady practice of *paravairāgya*, they do not have any further function. For the advanced yoga practitioner, psychic drives which still do not yet exist or are not yet manifest do not constitute any potential impediment. Although the practitioner might appear as though dead, he is now finally released and free to move towards a different mind level up to the final stage of *kaivalya*.

According to the Monier-Williams and Apte dictionaries,²³ the term *mṛtaka* as an adjective can signify: "a dead man, a corpse," or as a neuter substantive: "death, decease, impurity contracted through the death of a relation." As for the case of *mṛta*, as a past participle, and as an adjective, it has the following entries: "dead, deceased, death-like, torpid, rigid, departed, vanished (as consciousness), vain, useless, calcined, reduced (said of metals)." *Mṛta* has the following meanings as a neuter substantive: "death, grave (*caitya*), begging, food or alms obtained by begging." Both terms might be used, to some extent, as synonyms. However, the term *mṛta* seems to possess a more ample variety of contextual meanings compared to *mṛtaka*, as witnessed by the following entries: "*caitya*, namely a grave; torpid, rigid; departed and vanished as consciousness, vain, useless; calcined, reduced."

The meaning of *mṛta* as *caitya* (grave) is interesting, especially when the meaning of *mṛta* is connected to the idea of *samādhi*. As discussed by McLaughlin (2021: 8), both

²³ As on the following websites: <http://sanskritdictionary.com/?q=mRtaka&lang=sans&iencoding=hk&action=Search> and <http://sanskritdictionary.com/?q=mRta&lang=sans&iencoding=hk&action=Search>.

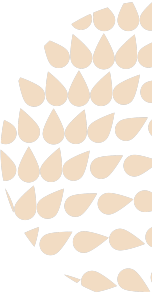
burial and cremation have a long history in South Asia, which can be traced back to Bronze Age practices from Central Asia (see Koryakova and Epimakhov 2007).

McLaughlin remarks (2021: 8) that in South Asia, when death comes to exceptional individuals— such as sages, monks, ascetics, saints or accomplished yoga practitioners—their bodies are generally buried rather than cremated; the burial site is indicated by a special marker.²⁴ Such a burial site is called a *samādhi*. The marking of such a burial site is not considered simply as a memorial. Rather, it marks a localised instantiation of sacred power radiating forth from the mortal body left behind by the realised individual (McLaughlin 2021: 16). Brahmanical textual sources, such as the *Taittirīyāranyaka* (8th–6th cent. BCE), *Baudhāyanapitṛmedhasūtra* (6th–3rd cent. BCE), *Yatidharmasamuccaya* (11th cent. CE), *Atridharmasūtras* (5th–10th cent. CE), *Śaunakadharmasūtras* (5th–10th cent. CE), and some Pāśupata's manuals, narrate the practice of taking care of realised sages' bodies (McLaughlin 2021: 13–14). This is a radical concept, considering the impurity generally associated with death in Brahmanical and Hindu traditions. Striking is the fact that behind these practices there are no purification rites performed in relation to the death and burial of an ascetic. It is believed that there is no transfer of impurity to those touching the corpse.

As for cremation ground practices, Pāśupata textual sources (see Jonker 2021: 75–76), such as the *Pāśupatasūtras* (4th–5th cent. CE), along with its commentaries, the *Pañcārthabhāṣya* (4th–5th cent. CE) and *Ratnaṭikā* (10th cent. CE), tell that in the last two stages (*avasthā*) of life a Pāśupata ascetic is supposed to live on offerings and strive towards death in a cremation ground to attain the highest goal, namely union with Rudra (*rudrasāyujya*).²⁵ To this aim, the mind has to be stilled by fully fixating it on god. To do so: “The [Pāśupata] aspirant dies, and even must die, in order to become united with Rudra, for it says: *right* at the moment of his death will the lord give him the highest goal. Death does not overcome the aspirant, nor is he unprepared for

²⁴ On burial markers, see McLaughlin (2021: 15–18). It should be noted that the *samādhi* shrine has resonances with the Buddhist *stūpa*, the Sufi *dargāh* (tomb/shrine), and the Hindu temple (*mandir*).

²⁵ Jonker (2021: 76) quotes here from *Pāśupatasūtras* vv. 32–40: “Kaunḍinya comments that the aspirant is not supposed to leave the cremation ground to acquire food because staying alive is not the highest attainment for a Pāśupata. He infers this from *Pāśupatasūtra* 5.33: ‘obtaining union with Rudra’ (*labhate rudrasāyujyam*). The union with Rudra is the highest goal to be achieved. By keeping Rudra in his mind continuously (*Pāśupatasūtra* 5.34), the last bit of *karma* is consumed, thereby allowing the aspirant to escape the endless cycle of transmigration (Hara 1999: 431). From the commentary it becomes clear that the aspirant is not there to continue to live for a very long time.” The commentary referred to by Jonker is from the *Ratnaṭikā* (Jonker 2021: 77).





death” (Jonker 2021: 78). Jonker (2021: 79) adds that, “It is plausible to understand the death of the Pāśupata ascetic as a form of a self-induced yogic death.” He concludes that, “This death can be considered yogic because of the yogic practices of meditation, stilling of the mind, breath-restraint and concentration on Rudra. It is also yogic because right at the moment of death, the Pāśupata attains yoga, namely union with Rudra and thereby *mokṣa*.”

In the Buddhist context, there are also references to a dead-like state. Generally speaking, Pali *sūtras* are more informative regarding the practices of meditation, compared to other coeval texts, notably the Upaniṣads. The eight-fold path described in Pali texts contains two practices specifically related to meditation, namely right mindfulness and right concentration. Meditation practices are also categorised, particularly in the Theravāda tradition, as *jhānas* (Sanskrit: *dhyāna*) (attainments/contemplations), which are distinguished as being either *rūpajhānas* (with form) states or *arūpajhānas* (without form) states (Potter 1996: 52–53). There are four *rūpajhānas*: (1) detachment from the external world and a consciousness of joy and ease; (2) concentration, with suppression of reasoning and investigation; (3) the passing away of joy, with the sense of ease remaining; (4) the passing away of ease also, bringing about the state of pure self-possession and equanimity.

Beyond those states are added four higher states, called formless (*arūpa*) meditations (*arūpajhāna*), which are also known as *samāpattis* (attainments). To these, a ninth state is annexed, namely “cessation of perception and feeling” (*saññavedayitanirodha*), or the “attainment of cessation” (*nirodhasamāpatti*), which constitutes an integral process in the realization of liberation. Here, however, the aim of meditative teaching is clearly depicted: a monk in his advanced state of meditation practice is anything but dead. It is implied, exactly as in the case of *Pātañjalayoga*, that the mind of the practitioner dwells in a condition where all its functions and activities are put to rest. The description (below) of this meditational state, points to the suspension of all mental events, even the most rudimentary mental activity, and the realization of *nirvāṇa*:

The monk who has attained *saññavedayitanirodha*, his bodily activities, verbal activities, and mental activities have been stopped, have subsided, but his vitality is not destroyed, his (body) heat is not allayed, and his senses purified. This, sir, is the difference between a dead thing, passed away, and that man (*Majjhima Nikāya* I. 296: see Potter 1996: 52–53).

In a discussion of Buddhist practices of meditation, Griffiths (1993: 38–41) refers to the *Samyuttanikāya* (v. 307) and the *Dighanikāya* (II.71). The context is the description of a

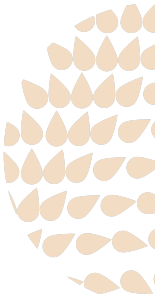
double series of meditational states called *dhyānas*, which is characterised by an increasing degree of enstasis (“standing within”), aimed at the withdrawal of the practitioner’s psycho-physical function from the external world, and at the reduction of the content of consciousness. As noted above, these are divided into a series of four *rūpa* (“with form”) states, and a series of five *arūpa* (“formless”) states, which consist of a series of four plus a fifth state. The author points to a state of meditative absorption referred to by other Buddhist texts as *nirodhasamāpatti* (“attainment of cessation”) (Griffiths 1993: 40). *Nirodhasamāpatti* denotes the progressive cessation of all mental events, and, among the various absorbed mental states, it is considered the more elevated one. It is also named “cessation of sensation and conceptualisation” and *acittaka* “mindless” (Griffiths 1993: 41). Griffiths continues:

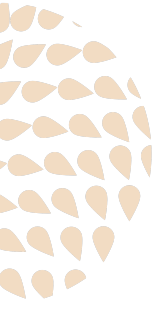
A practitioner who attains this state is perhaps most like a catatonic or a patient in deep coma: the only things that distinguish such a person from a dead person are the continuance of the autonomic functions of the nervous system, such things as minimal heartbeat, body heat, and (perhaps) respiration. Response to external stimuli is impossible, as is initiation of action. Attaining cessation in this way is the culmination, perhaps the *reduction ad absurdum* of enstatic meditational technique.²⁶

Still within the Buddhist milieu, there also exists the concept of *bhavaṅga*, which can be taken as referring to a condition of psycho-physical cessation, and thus similar to a death-like state. *Bhavaṅga* refers to the state in which the mind is said to rest, when no active consciousness process is occurring. In other words, it can be described as one’s state of mind when nothing appears to be going on, or when the mind rests in itself, such as when one is in a state of deep dreamless sleep,²⁷ and also momentarily between

²⁶ Cousins (1973: 127) explains the term *jhāna* as a practice involving the systematic induction of a specific type of “trance” state under controlled conditions, necessarily requiring a previous clarity of consciousness and a well-balanced, happy frame of mind. For Cousins, *jhāna* refers, in its higher phase—namely the fourth formless *samāpatti*—to a specific physiological phenomenon, neither in the sense of a dull stupor nor as catalepsy, in terms of suspension of consciousness. Cousins (1973: 125) claims that *jhāna* denotes a lucid trance, and although it possesses similarities with a trance state, the mind does not perceive through the five senses and the person is incapable of speech. During this higher phase of *jhāna*, all bodily activities have ceased, though the movement of breath is mentioned, and heartbeat is implied.

²⁷ In this regard, one might also include a parallel with the Vedānta discourse on deep, dreamless sleep. The Vedāntic theory of *ātman* is construed on the basis of the experience of dreamless sleep, which, being radically and qualitatively different from waking and dreaming states, is considered by the Vedāntins as a state of a temporarily purified individual *ātman*, a state of pure, substantial consciousness. They take the experience of dreamless sleep as a model experience of the *ātman*’s final liberation from the body and its internal as well as external faculties. See Fort (1985), Prasad (2000), and Sharma (2004).





each active consciousness process. In a reading of Buddhist texts such as the *Visuddhimagga* and *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, Gethin (1994: 13–14) claims that *bhavaṅga* is: a) “understood in the texts as in most respects sharing the same properties as other types of consciousness (*citta*); *bhavaṅga* is not something different from consciousness, rather it is consciousness operating in a particular mode (*ākāra*) or consciousness performing a particular function (*kicca*)”; b) “a mental province that defines the essential character and capabilities of a given being, and that this mental province is seen as exerting some kind of influence on conscious mental states.” *Bhavaṅga* is essentially consciousness in its passive mode, and is as sophisticated and complex a kind of consciousness as any other.

Still Dead and Sleeping Bodies: *Pātañjalayogasūtra-Bhāṣyavivaraṇa* on PYŚ II.46 and IV.4

Besides the expression *mṛtavat/mṛtakavat*, used to refer to the body of the yoga practitioner who has fallen into a dead-like state, other terms are also used in *Pātañjalayoga* to refer to this state, namely *supta* (sleeping) and *śava* (corpse). In this section, two instances from the *Pātañjalayogasūtrabhāṣyavivaraṇa*²⁸ (YVi) will be analysed. As seen, in the context of the practice of *samādhi*, the metaphors of death can have the simple purpose of conveying the idea of the extraordinary immobility or stillness that occurs in advanced states of meditative absorption. In this regard, it might be asked how practitioners attain a deep state of contentless absorption. Concerning the practice of *āsana*, YS II.46 states that a posture (*āsana*) should be firm (*sthira*) and pleasant (*sukha*).²⁹ The description and conception of *āsana* imply the idea of stillness. In *Pātañjalayoga*, the idea of stillness is conveyed through terms such as *sthiratva*,

²⁸ Rukmani (1998) argues that it is highly improbable that (Ādi) Śaṅkarācārya wrote this text. Moreover, she places the TV chronologically prior to the YVi. However, see also the review by Harimoto (2004), who criticises the points Rukmani thinks are decisive evidence for placing the YVi after Vācaspatimiśra’s TV (10th cent. CE). Rukmani claims that terms in the YVi such as *anye/anyeṣām*, *nimitta*, *pūraka*, *recaka*, and the variant readings of YS II.7–8, refer to their use by Vācaspatimiśra. Harimoto claims that neither the *Vivaraṇa-kāra* nor Vācaspatimiśra knew the commentary on the YBh by the other, and that the YVi’s authorship seems to be still open to investigation. On the YVi’s authorship problem, see also Harimoto (1999: 36–136).

²⁹ Cf. YS II.46 (YS 1919: 110, 15): *sthirasukham āsanam*.

sthita,³⁰ *niścāla*,³¹ and *niškampa*.³² How *sūtras* II.46 and II.47 can be read has been discussed by Maas (2018).³³ It is in the context of an exposition of yoga postures that the YVi employs the expression *mṛtasuptavat*,³⁴ namely “remaining like a dead or sleeping body.” This compound glosses the term *padmāsana* occurring in YBh/YS II.46. *Mṛtasuptavat* is meant to describe the outward resemblance of the yoga practitioner performing the lotus posture. Although the practitioner’s depiction might appear similar—as the terms *mṛtasuptavat*, *mṛṭavat* and *mṛtakavat* all indicate bodies like those of a cadaver—the difference is that in the former case the practitioner is simply practising *padmāsana*, while in the latter the yogin is deeply absorbed in *asamprajñātasamādhi*.

In PYŚ IV.4, the topic of the discussion focuses on how the yogin, whose successful practice has led him to the development of extraordinary powers (*siddhi*), may be able

³⁰ Cf. YVi/PYŚ II.46 (YVi 1952: 225, 15–16): *yasmin āsane sthitasya manogātrāṇām upajāyate sthīratvam, duḥkham ca yena na bhavati tad abhyasyet*: “[The practitioner] should practise a posture in which the condition of stability (*sthīratva*) in both mind and body is produced and by which no harm arises.”

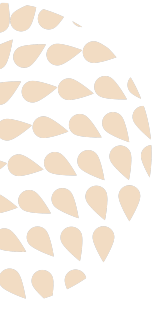
³¹ Cf. TV/PYŚ II.46 (TV 1919: 110, 26): *sthīraṃ niścālaṃ*. Also cf. YV/PYŚ II.46 (1935: 266, 29): *sthīraṃ niścālaṃ*.

³² Cf. RM/PYŚ (RM 1919: 28, 25): *tad yadā sthīraṃ niškampaṃ*.

³³ Maas proposes (2018: 57–60, Appendix I) reading II.46 and 47 as a single sentence: *sthīrasukham āsanam prayatnaśāithilyānantasamāpattibhyām*. “None of the above cited translators took into account that YS 2.46 actually is just the initial part of a sentence that extends—over a parenthesis in the *bhāṣya*-part of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*—into the following YS 2.47. This is quite surprising because the fact that the two *sūtra*-s 2.46 and 2.47 form a single sentence is clearly expressed at the beginning of the *bhāṣya*-part of PYŚ 2.47, in which Patañjali remarks that the verbal form ‘arises’ (*bhavati*) has to be supplied in this sentence.” As for the meaning of the expression *sthīrasukham*, Maas concludes: “However, it cannot be decided with certainty whether it is a determinative adjective compound in which the first member specifies the second one adverbially, as Vācaspati suggested, or whether the relationship of the two members of the compound is appositional, as it was understood by Śāṅkara in his *Pātañjalayogaśāstravivaraṇa* (i.e., in the most informative commentary of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*), and in Bhojarāja’s and Vijñānabhikṣu’s commentaries. Nevertheless, in view of the general superiority of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstravivaraṇa* over the *Tattvavaiśārādī*, I would tend to accept the second-mentioned analysis of *sthīrasukha* at least provisionally. In this case, the two *sūtras* 2.46 and 2.47 can be translated in the following way: “A steady and comfortable posture (YS 2.46) [arises] from a slackening of effort or from merging meditatively into infinity (YS 2.47).”

³⁴ Cf. Maas’ edition of this passage, Maas (2018: 91, 10–12): *tatra padmāsanaṃ nāma – savyaṃ pādān upasaṃhṛtya dakṣiṇopari nidadhīta, tathāiva dakṣiṇam savyasyopariṣṭāt. kaṭyurogrīvam ca viṣṭabhya mṛtasuptavan nāsikāgranihitadrṣṭih...* “In this context, the Lotus Posture (*padmāsana*) is like this: drawing the left foot in towards oneself, one should then place it over the right. Likewise, the right one on top of the left. Stiffening the hips, trunk, and neck, with the gaze fixed on the tip of the nose, like a dead or sleeping person...”





to create other bodies endowed with single, individuated personalities.³⁵ The yoga practitioner is capable of creating and projecting new mentally reproduced creatures endowed with consciousness, resembling those of living human beings. In the YVi commentary on PYŚ IV.4, there is another reference to death: YVi/PYŚ IV.4 (1952: 320, 23): *cittendriyābhāve ca mṛtadeśīyaḥ kāyo nirarthakaḥ syāt*. The author of the YVi states that a body deprived of a mind and its sensory-motor functions would be like a corpse not fit to accomplish any task, and practically useless (*nirarthaka*). Here, the author of YVi seems to be claiming that even though the yogin may be as if dead, through the power of a *siddhi* he can be conscious in other minds, which are manifested from "I-ness" (*asmitā*).

Asamprajñātasamādhi, Dharmameghasamādhi, Abhāva: Fading Into a State Like Death

As seen through textual references in the YV and the PYV on PYŚ I.18, the advanced yoga practitioner progresses in the attainment of *samādhi*, first through *samprajñātasamādhi*, and then *asamprajñātasamādhi*. In the PYŚ, both types of meditative absorption are described. *Samprajñātasamādhi* is cognitive concentration, which still has some objects, while *asamprajñātasamādhi* is non-cognitive and objectless. Mental and physical functions are different according to the kind of *samādhi* attained.³⁶ In *samprajñātasamādhi*, mental activity (*cittavṛtti*) becomes progressively less operative, but nevertheless persists in four aspects: *vitarka* (cogitation), *vicāra* (reflection), *ānanda* (bliss), and *asmitā* (I-ness) (PYŚ I.17).³⁷ However, in *asamprajñātasamādhi*, the mind's functions are fully arrested, and there is neither any object nor content of concentration. Both the expressions *mṛtakavat* and *mṛtavat* point to a death-like

³⁵ Cf. YS IV.4 (YS 1919: 178, 12): *nirmāṇacittāny asmitāmātrāt*; and relative commentarial section YBh/YS IV.4 (YBh 1919: 178, 13–14): *asmitāmātram cittakāraṇam upādāya nirmāṇacittāni karoti, tataḥ sacittāni bhavanti*: "Making use of nothing more than [the ego-sense form of meditation] as a cause for the mind, [the yoga practitioner] is able to create [other] minds [out of his extraordinary powers]. Therefore, [the newly created beings] are endowed with [single] minds."

³⁶ See Larson and Bhattacharya (2008: 27).

³⁷ *Samprajñātasamādhi* has four progressive levels of the mind's adherence to any sort of content or object (from sensorial to cognitive) characterising its activities. These different levels are referred to with the technical term *samāpatti*, literally "coming together/entering into relation with." Cf. YBh/YS I.41 (Maas 2006: 68, 17–19); see also PYŚ I.42–45. *Samāpatti* can be read as a reference to their individual denomination that is listed in PYŚ I.17 as: *vitarka*, *vicāra*, *ānanda* and *asmitā*. These levels stand for different layers of relation to the *guṇas* and the operations of *prakṛti*, which are controlled by the yoga practitioner applying *vairāgya* (detachment). The result is *viśayavitr̥ṣṇya* (having no thirst for objects). Cf. YS I.15: *dṛṣṭānuśravikaviśayavitr̥ṣṇasya vaśikārasamjñā vairāgyam*.

condition where mind and bodily functions are inactive. It is in contentless *samādhi*, namely *asamprajñātasamādhi*, that the death-like state is experienced.

The progressive arrest of psycho-physical functions witnessed during the levels of *samprajñātasamādhi* indicates the yoga practitioner's level of involvement with *prakṛti*; the *guṇas* become progressively less effective. In *asamprajñātasamādhi*, mental functions only consist of one's own mental impressions (*saṃskāraśeṣa*), as described in YS I.18. These mental impressions, according to Patañjali, can be represented as the remainder of mental impressions inherited from previous lives, which shape present life, triggering and prompting experiences that bind the subject to *saṃsāra*. When YS I.18 refers to *saṃskāraśeṣa*, it points to the state resulting from the *abhyāsa* (continuous practice) of *vairāgya* (dispassion) and *paravairāgya* (extreme dispassion), which are technical terms describing the overall attitude to the praxis of *nirodha*, or the cessation of mental and physical functions.³⁸ This inhibition of mental impressions required to attain *nirodha* is directed towards any *cittavṛtti* (mental event), and in particular towards any *pratyaya* (idea/concept). A *cittavṛtti* or a *pratyaya* can be caused by any sort of experience or stimulus, and results from mental content or sensori-motor input occurring in a subject. *Nirodha*, denoting both the cessative function and relative mind and body state (*niruddha*), thus marks the praxis, the aim of which is the attainment of *kaivalya* (alone-ness) through separation from phenomenal existence.

The term *nirodha*, as with many Sanskrit terms, designates both the *process* of cessation and the *state* of cessation of psycho-physical events. It is a masculine noun deriving from the verbal root *rudh-*, plus the adjunct of the preverb *ni-*. The *Dhātupāṭha* presents two basic meanings of the root *rudh-*: a) 4A. (with *anu-*) *kāme*:³⁹ “desiring/obeying,” and: b) 7U. *āvaraṇe*: “covering/opposing.”⁴⁰ It is quite apparent that the PYŚ retains the meaning b), although the idea of desire, wish or intention is also relevant, especially if the voluntary type of psycho-physical cessative practice performed by yoga practitioners is taken into account. Considering its fundamental place within the *Pātañjalayoga* system of philosophy and practice, it should be noted that the term *nirodha* is generally understood as meaning “cessation,” “restriction,” or “inhibition.” However, *nirodha* presents different levels of application. Broadly speaking, *nirodha* is

³⁸ YS I.2: *yogaś cittavṛttinirodhaḥ*. *Nirodha* can also stand for one of the stages of mind (*cittabhūmayas*) conceived in the PYŚ. This stage is referred to as *niruddha* “obstructed, shut down.” See YBh/YS I.1: *kṣiptaṃ mūḍhaṃ vikṣiptaṃ ekāgraṃ niruddhaṃ iti cittabhūmayāḥ*.

³⁹ Cf. *Dhātupāṭha* (1969: 33).

⁴⁰ Cf. *Dhātupāṭha* (1969: 40).





characterized as an ongoing process to be applied to all mental events, in which the mind's content and its objects are increasingly restricted.⁴¹ It takes place once the yoga practitioner begins to withdraw the sense-organs from the external world.⁴² Here, the yoga aspirant has to perform *pratyāhāra*, namely the withdrawal from the practitioner's body of sensorial stimuli.⁴³ On the other hand, as a state of mind rather than a process, *nirrodha* occurs in the state of mind (*cittabhūmaya*) denoted as *niruddha* (restricted/shut down).⁴⁴ Along with the practice of *pratyāhāra*, the restriction of the mental occurrences is brought about by means of both *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*.⁴⁵

The extent of the yogin's steadiness of practice and detachment determines his endurance in the advanced meditational state of *asamprajñātasamādhi*, which does not necessarily continue indefinitely; it can persist as well as fade. The scenario described in PYŚ I.18 refers to the liminal condition that takes place when the yoga practitioner attains the stage beyond *samprajñātasamādhi*, which is also referred to as

⁴¹ It should be noted that the distinction presented here between levels of *nirrodha* is hypothetical; it is a tentative interpretation of the texts. This distinction does not occur in the literature of *yogadarśana*.

⁴² YBh/YS II.54 (YBh 1919: 115, 10; 116, 1–2) contains an interesting and naturalistic simile: *yathā madhukararājam makṣikā utpatantam anūtpatanti nivīśamānam anunivīśante tathendriyāṇi cittanirrodhe niruddhāni ity eṣa pratyāhārah*. “Just as when the queen bee flies up, the bees fly up after her [and] when she settles down, they settle down after her; so, also when the mind is restricted, the organs are restricted. This is the withdrawal of the sense-organs.” Vācaspatimiśra reads the compound *svaviśayāsamprayoge* as a locative of motive (*nimittasaptamī*), cf. TV/PYŚ II.54 (TV 1919: 115, 23–24): *svaviśayāsamprayogasya sādharmaṇasya dharmasya cittānukāranimittatvaṃ saptamyā darśayati sveti*. According to Vācaspatimiśra, the mind imitates the sense-organs because both the mind (*citta*) and the sense-organs share the common characteristic of being detached from their objects.

⁴³ That *pratyāhāra* may mark the first practical step of *nirrodha* is a matter of textual interpretation. *Pratyāhāra* is listed in YS II.29 as the fifth of the eight *aṅgas* and is explained by way of analogy in YS II.54 and in the commentary. It is defined as the sense-organs' imitation of the mind's form, when they have no contact with their own object, cf. YS II.29 (YS 1919: 101, 7–8): *yamaniyamāsanaprāṇāyāmapratyāhāradhāraṇādhyānasamādhayo 'ṣṭāv aṅgāni*; and YS II.54 (YS 1919: 115, 5–6): *svaviśayāsamprayoge cittasvarūpānukāra ivendriyāṇaṃ pratyāhārah*. Moreover, *pratyāhāra* can be intended as the first phase of the overall process of *nirrodha* because, still following YBh/YS II.54, it begins with the mind's restriction (*citta-nirrodhe*). Vācaspatimiśra reads the compound *svaviśayāsamprayoge* as a locative of motive (*nimittasaptamī*), cf. TV/PYŚ II.54 (TV 1919: 115, 23–24): *svaviśayāsamprayogasya sādharmaṇasya dharmasya cittānukāranimittatvaṃ saptamyā darśayati sveti*. Vācaspatimiśra (TV/PYŚ II.54) reads the compound *svaviśayāsamprayoge* as a locative of motive (*nimittasaptamī*); see preceding fn. above.

⁴⁴ Cf. YBh/YS I.1: *kṣiptam mūḍham vikṣiptam ekāgraṃ niruddham iti cittabhūmayah*: “The states of mental activity are: fixed, dull, distracted, one-pointed, and ceased.”

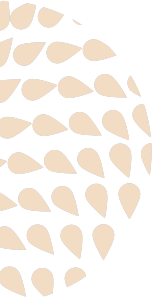
⁴⁵ Cf. YS I.12: *abhyāsavairāgyābhyāṃ tannirodhaḥ*. Here the demonstrative pronoun *tad* can be referred to the *cittavṛttis* previously discussed (cf. YS I.2).

asmitāsamāpatti. In this state, the yogin abandons his own identity, as well as the practice of object-based absorption (*sālabhana/sabjja*), and only *saṃskāras* (*nirbija*) that do not bear fruit persist. The state of *nirbijasamādhi* occurs when the practitioner restrains even those *saṃskāras* borne out of *ṛtaṃbharaprajñā*.⁴⁶ The term *nirbija* can be here read as an adjective referring to *asamprajñāta*.⁴⁷ In turn, *asamprajñāta* can be taken as a synonym for the interesting, poetic phrase *dharmameghasamādhi*.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Cf. YS I.51: *tasyāpi nirodhe sarvanirodhān nirbijāḥ samādhiḥ*: “The seedless *samādhi* takes place when, due to the cessation of any mind-activity, this [*saṃskāra* born out of *prajñā/ṛtaṃbharā/nirvicāra*] is also restricted.” The main idea behind this *sūtra* concerns *ṛtaṃbharaprajñā* (YS I.48: *ṛtaṃbharā tatra prajñā*), which inhibits the production of *vyutthānasaṃskāras* (cf. YS I.50: *tajjaḥ saṃskāro ’nyasaṃskārapratibandhī*), though this does not yet properly amount to the *nirbija* state. It must be applied to the *saṃskāra* of *nirodha*, even with regard to those *saṃskāras* born from *ṛtaṃbharaprajñā*, as they can, in turn, generate a further attachment to *prajñā* itself. *Asamprajñāta* is achieved through the steady and thorough practice of *nirodha*. Here, however, an attitude of *paravairāgya* (cf. YS I.16: *tat paraṃ puruṣakhyāter guṇavairiṣṇyam*) is necessary in order to abandon the practice of *nirodha* itself and progress toward *kaivalya*, as suggested by YS III.50 (YS 1919: 138, 6–7): *tadvairāgyād api doṣabijakṣaye kaivalyam*.

⁴⁷ Cf. YBh/YS I.18: *eṣa nirbijāḥ samādhir asamprajñātaḥ*: “This *samādhi*, which is seedless, has no content to recognize.” YBh/YS I.2: *tadavasthaṃ saṃskāropagaṃ bhavati // sa nirbijāḥ samādhiḥ // na tatra kiṃcit samprajñāyata ity asamprajñātaḥ*: “This condition admits [only] *saṃskāras*. This is the seedless *samādhi*. The word *asamprajñāta* means that nothing whatsoever is cognised.” See also, YS III.8 (YS 1919: 122, 1): *tad api bahiraṅgaṃ nirbijasya*: “Even these [three, namely *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*] are considered as external supports to seedless meditation.” YBh/YS III.8 (YBh 1919: 122, 2–3): *tad apy antaraṅgaṃ sādhanatrayaṃ nirbijasya yogasya bahiraṅgaṃ bhavati, kasmāt, tadabhāve bhāvād iti*: “Even these, namely the three internal means of attainment, are indirect aids to seedless yoga. Why? Since this [seedless *samādhi*] occurs even when these do not take place.”

⁴⁸ Whether or not *dharmameghasamādhi* is synonymous with *asamprajñāta* is a matter of textual interpretation. Furthermore, the topic is complicated by whether or not *dharmamegha* might be also regarded as the highest peak of *samādhi*, as mentioned in YBh/YS I.2, as *prasaṅkhyāna*, which is the culmination of *vivekakhyaṭi*. *Dharmamegha*, *prasaṅkhyāna*, *nirbija* and *asamprajñāta* are semantically related terms, all describing consciousness as being void of any object. At the same time, each of these terms has a specific function and characterisation. Whereas *dharmamegha* seems more related to *prasaṅkhyāna*, considering that both the terms *nirbija* and *asamprajñāta* denote a state of meditative absorption, they may refer, by means of negative prefixes *nir-* and *a-*, to a psychic state lacking any object. The PYŚ discusses the theme of *dharmamegha* in reference to YS I.2 and YS IV.29: YBh/YS I.2 (see Maas 2006: 8–17): *tad eva rajoleśamalāpetam svarūpapratistham sattvapuruṣānyatākhyātimātram dharmameghadhyānopagaṃ bhavati // tat paraṃ prasaṅkhyānam ity ācakṣate dhyāyinaḥ... tadavasthaṃ saṃskāropagaṃ bhavati // sa nirbijāḥ samādhiḥ // na tatra kiṃcit samprajñāyata ity asamprajñātaḥ*: “This one [*sattva*] abides in itself, released from the last small particles of *rajas*, it is composed of discriminative knowledge (*vivekakhyaṭi*), [and] advances into the concentration known as *dharmamegha*, as recognized by those practising meditation... In this state, [in which no mental functions or even discriminative knowledge is left], mental impressions come forwards. This is the seedless *samādhi*. Here the consciousness has no object, [that is why it is called] non-cogitative *samādhi*.” O’Brien-Kop (2017: 133) discusses how the *kleśas* (mental afflictions) are eradicated through the practice of a particular form of meditation, or *dhyāna*, known as *prasaṅkhyāna*, which, in turn, is defined as



The condition of the non-fruitfulness of *saṃskāras* defines *dharmameghasamādhi* and thus connects it to *asamprajñātasamādhi* and *nirbījasamādhi*, which can be traced to PYŚ IV.29.⁴⁹ Here it is claimed that *dharmameghasamādhi* indicates a state where the seeds of *saṃskāras* are removed and not active anymore. This event leads the practitioner towards the non-arising of further *pratyayas*, which means the full eradication of psycho-physical stimuli.⁵⁰ The expression *dharmamegha* occurs in YBh/YS I.2, where the term is introduced to denote the highest form of meditation, or contemplation (*paraṃ prasaṅkhyānaṃ*). *Dharmameghasamādhi* is thought to take place when the *sattva* of mind (*cittasattva*) predominates over the other two *guṇas*. When the *tamas* and *rajas guṇas* are removed, then the yoga practitioner can approach the state of trance known as *dharmamegha* (YBh/YS 1.2). That *dharmamegha* is the highest form of meditation is reiterated also in the TV and the YV on YS I.2, while in the YVi/PYŚ I.2 (1999: 163, 1) it is referred to as *samādhi* (*dharmamegho nāma samādhi*). Two other references to

meditation on the cloud of *dharma* (*dharmameghadhyāna*). Referring to PYŚ IV.29, 30, 31, O'Brien-Kop (2017: 133–134, fn. 40) argues that *dharmamegha*, although considered as equal to *prasaṅkhyāna* by the author of the YVi (1952: 11) discussing PYŚ I.2, is nevertheless divided into two forms that are distinguished, namely *dharmameghadhyāna* and *dharmameghasamādhi*. In the form of *dhyāna*, it serves to eradicate the *kleśas* (cf. PYŚ II.2, 11) and its effect is *vivekakhyaṭi*, which is an epistemic and ontological distinction between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. On the other hand, the form of *dharmameghasamādhi* will arise only once the practice of *dharmameghadhyāna* stands “in every respect” (*sarvathā*, cf. PYŚ IV.29) in a completely fulfilled state. In the words of O'Brien-Kop (2017: 134, fn. 40): “In keeping with soteriological texts of the period, including Buddhist texts, Patañjali treats the terms *dhyāna* and *samādhi* as distinct technical signifiers in his text, so there is no reason to suppose that he collapses the two terms into one when it comes to *dharmamegha*. The progression of *dharmamegha* from a state of *dhyāna* to one of *samādhi* represents the typical sequence from absorption to concentration, such as we see in both Pātañjala and Buddhist schemes of meditation.”

⁴⁹ Cf. also YBh/YS IV.29 (YBh 1919: 202, 7–10): *yadāyaṃ brāhmaṇaḥ prasaṅkhyāne 'py akusīdas tato 'pi na kiñ cit prārthayate. tatrāpi viraktasya sarvathā vivekakhyaṭir eva bhavati saṃskārabijakṣayān nāsyā pratyayāntarāny utpadyante tadāsyā dharmamegho nāma samādhir bhavati*: “When this Brāhmaṇa [practitioner] has no interest in the highest meditation (*prasaṅkhyāna*), when he does not desire anything from that [*prasaṅkhyāna*], then, indifferent, he has ever-present discriminative knowledge. In this manner, once the seeds of mental impressions are annihilated, no other psycho-physical drives are generated, [then this person] abides in what is known as *dharmameghasamādhi*.”

⁵⁰ For the present study, the exposition of *dharmamegha* is limited to only the most important references. The compound *dharmamegha* poses several problems related to its interpretation and deserves a separate analysis; see Collins (2009), Klostermaier (1986), O'Brien Kop (2020), and the analyses by Feuerstein (1987), Rukmani (1997: 619–623), and Wujastyk (2018: 35–38). What must be here underscored is how the idea of *dharmamegha* stands as evidence of a strong relationship with Buddhist thought, as highlighted by Wujastyk (2018: 35–41) referring to the *Milindapañha* (Wujastyk 2018: 36–37), *Daśabhūmikasūtra* (Wujastyk 2018: 36), and Asaṅga's (c. 350–430 CE) *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* (Wujastyk 2018: 38). For the use of *dharmamegha* as a *bhūmi* in Vasubandhu's *Bhāṣya* on *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* and other Buddhist texts, see Squarcini (2015: 158, 189).

dharmameghasamādhi are at (1) YS IV.29 (cf. YS 1919: 202, 5–6: *prasaṅkhyāne 'py akusīdasya sarvathā vivekakhyāter dharmameghaḥ samādhiḥ*): “[The yoga practitioner] taking no interest in contemplation, possesses discriminative knowledge in every respect, [and] obtains *dharmameghasamādhi*,” and at (2) YBh/YS IV.30 (cf. YBh 1919: 202–203, 12–13: *kleśakarmanivṛttau jīvaṇ eva vidvān vimukto bhavati*), where it is maintained that having utterly annihilated the afflictions and the deposit of *karma*, the yoga practitioner becomes liberated, whilst still being alive (*jīvanmukti*).

YBh/YS IV.29 and IV.32 also describe the effects of *dharmamegha*. In YBh/YS IV.29, *dharmamegha* is described as that state in which the *pratyayas* no longer arise, due to the perishing of the seeds of *saṃskāras*.⁵¹ YBh/YS IV.32 describes how *dharmamegha* corresponds to a state where the *guṇas* cease their activities, achieve the limit of their sequence, and no longer subsist.⁵² Perusing the commentarial literature, similar ideas are present in the YVi, the TV and the YV explaining PYŚ IV.29. In this passage, the YVi IV.29 states that, “It is named *dharmamegha* since it rains the highest form of *dharma* known as *kaivalya*.”⁵³ Again, regarding *dharmamegha*, Vācaspati’s TV/PYŚ IV.29 states that it is the state following the inhibition of all *pratyayas*, and marks the emergence of *vivekakhyāti* and the detachment from and the cessation of *prasaṅkhyāna*.⁵⁴ Similar ideas also recur in TV/PYŚ IV.32 (1919: 204), YV/PYŚ IV.29 (YV 1935: 445–446), and YV/PYŚ IV 30 (YV 1935: 449).

Considering these textual sources, the ongoing practice of detachment in its two forms (*vairāgya/paravairāgya*) is essential to the achievement of *dharmameghasamādhi*. In this regard, YS IV.29 introduces a term related to *vairāgya*, namely *akusīda*, meaning, “taking

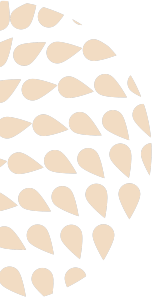
⁵¹ Cf. YVi/PYŚ IV.29 (YVi 1952: 363, 20–21): *kleśasaṃskārabhijakṣayān nāsya pratyayāntarāṇy utpadyante tadāsya dharmamegho nāma samādhir bhavati*.

⁵² Cf. YBh/YS IV.32 (YBh 1919: 204, 5–7): *tasya dharmameghasyodayāt kṛtārthānāṃ guṇānāṃ pariṇāmakramah parisamāpyate na hi kṛtabhogāpavargāḥ parisamāptakramāḥ kṣaṇam apy avasthātum utsahante*.

⁵³ Cf. YVi/PYŚ IV.29 (YVi 1952: 363, 22–23): *kaivalyāhkyam paraṃ dharmam varṣati iti dharmameghaḥ iti saṃjñā*.

⁵⁴ Cf. TV/PYŚ IV.29 (TV 1919: 202, 23–26): *yadā vyutthānapratyayā bhaveyus tadā nāyaṃ brāhmaṇaḥ sarvathā vivekakhyātir yatas tasya na pratyayāntarāṇi bhavanti tataḥ sarvathā vivekakhyātir iti / tadāsya dharmameghaḥ samādhir bhavati / etad uktaṃ bhavati prasaṅkhyāne viraktas tannirodham icchan dharmamegham samādhim upāsita*. “Whenever presented-ideas of emergence may arise, then this Brāhmaṇa has not attained to discriminative discernment at all times. After he has no other presented-ideas, he has at all times attained to discriminative discernment. Then the concentration called the Rain-cloud of [knowable] things becomes his. What he means to say is this: when he becomes disaffected towards Elevation and longs for its restriction, he should devote himself to the concentration [called] the Rain-cloud of [knowable] things” (trans. Woods 1914: 341).





no interest” or “without gain.”⁵⁵ This points to a fundamental yogic tenet: the yoga practitioner should, in the first place, perform the constant eradication (*nirodha*) of mental events (*cittavṛtti*) leading her/him into *asamprajñātasamādhi*, in which *saṃskāras* still persist (YS I.18). *Nirodha* is to be applied to any *pratyaya* that remains, or to sensorial stimuli that might lead to the formation of intellectual notions. In order to obtain the complete emptying of the mind and the state of *kaivalya* (aloneness of seeing), *nirodha* is thus applied to *cittavṛttis*, *pratyayas*, and *saṃskāras*, amounting to a cardinal praxis in *Pātañjalayoga*.

How should we understand the terms *mṛtakavat* and *mṛtavat*, as used by Vijñānabhikṣu and Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa, in light of the above discussion of *nirodha*? As descriptive expressions, *mṛtakavat/mṛtavat* can also function as explicative images for another metaphor occurring in the YBh on YS I.18, namely, *abhāvaprāptam iva*.⁵⁶ This clause may be translated as “...seemingly, [the mind] (*citta*) becomes non-existent.” Commenting on PYŚ I.18, Vācaspatimīśra underscores how the state of being “seemingly void of existence” (*abhāvaprāptam iva*) takes place during *asamprajñātasamādhi* and corresponds to a state in which the causes producing mental events do not subsist anymore (*vṛttirūpakāryākaraṇād*).⁵⁷ Interestingly, both Vijñānabhikṣu and Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa employ the same expression that occurs in the TV, namely *vṛttirūpakāryākaraṇāt* (see YV/PYV on PYŚ I.18). This compound expression can be translated as: “Because of the absence of action [giving rise] to effects in the form of mental activity.” What does *vṛttirūpa* mean here? An initial interpretation of *vṛttirūpa* would read *vṛtti* as an abridged form for *cittavṛtti*, “having the form of a mental activity.” As formulated in Sāṅkhya and the *yogaśāstra*, the materialism of *prakṛti* is grounded in *guṇapariṇāmavāda* (the transformation of the *guṇas*). It seems reasonable to conclude that, as the *cittavṛttis* are substances of material composition (*dravya*) undergoing material changes, as clearly stated in the YV and the PYV on PYŚ I.4, the death-like state applies to not only the

⁵⁵ The expressions employed in YBh/YS IV.29 (YBh 1919: 202, 7–8) to explain *akusīda* are: *na kiñcit prārthayate* (someone who wishes/desires nothing), and *virakta*. *Virakta*, which is a *sāmānyabhūta* form (or *luṅ*), of which *vairāgya* is a related adjective coming from the same verbal form (*vi-rañj*). On *vairāgya* and *paravairāgya*, see also PYŚ I.15–16.

⁵⁶ Cf. YV, PYV, YBh/YS I.18: *cittaṃ...abhāvaprāptam iva bhavati*. Although in a different context, see Freschi (2008) on the Mīmāṃsaka understanding of *abhāva*. Here both *abhāva* and *nirālambana* prominently figure. The Bhaṭṭa school of Pūrvamīmāṃsā, whose representative spokesman was Kumārila (7th cent. CE), is the only philosophical school in classical India which accepts absence (*abhāva*) as an instrument of knowledge (*abhāvapramāṇa*). As already seen, both terms *abhāva* and *nirālambana* occur in PYŚ I.18.

⁵⁷ Cf. TV/PYŚ I.18 (TV 1919: 22, 13–14): *ālambanikaraṇam āśrayaṇam abhāvaprāptam iva vṛttirūpakāryākaraṇān nirbījo nirālambanaḥ*. “It ‘seems as if it were itself non-existent’ because it does not perform its functions as a fluctuation. It is ‘seedless,’ that is, not directed to any supporting-object” (trans. Woods 1914: 43).

body but also to the mind (or *citta*), which is conceived of as having a material substrate.⁵⁸

But what sort of human being can survive the death of the body if not a yoga practitioner? It is probable that the reference to death is merely apparent, and the expression amounts to a metaphorical statement describing the condition of a yoga practitioner who has abandoned the ordinary life in the world in favour of a new life in a different realm where only the light of the true Self shines bright, abiding in its own state. What the yoga practitioner is about to fundamentally abandon is his own empirical self, or the illusory self that is immersed in the field of the objective content of *prakṛti*, which constrains him to the never-ending circle of birth and death. This *prakṛtic* self stands in full opposition to what is regarded as the real Self, which is nothing but the *puruṣa* or contentless consciousness. However, reading the full yoga narrative in this respect, it seems a clear description of the yogi in *samādhi*.

***Mṛta*: Parallels Between Haṭhayoga and Rasaśāstra**

The YV of Vijñānabhikṣu and the PYV of Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa are not the only yoga-related texts where the expression *mṛtakavat/mṛtavat* occurs. There are instances where deeply absorbed yoga practitioners are depicted as cadavers in the literature of Haṭhayoga. The metaphor of death portraying the advanced yoga practitioner is also found in what is generally regarded as the paradigmatic text on Haṭhayoga, namely the *Haṭhapradīpikā* (HP) of Svātmārāma (c.15th century CE).⁵⁹ This text gained wide approval and after the

⁵⁸ That the *cittavṛttis* have a material structure is clearly stated by Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa in his PYV and Vijñānabhikṣu in his YV/PYŚ I.4 (YV 1935: 20, 23–24): *itaratra vyuthāne yās cittasya vṛttayo dīpasya śikhā iva dravyarūpā*: “On the other hand, at the time of emerging in the world state, mental events have a substantial aspect, resembling the flame of a lamp. Both authors comment on PYŚ I.4, employing the same nominal compound in order to describe the material substance of a *cittavṛtti*, that is *dravyarūpā*.”

⁵⁹ On dating the HP, Bouy (1994) represents the most up-to-date scholarship; he is aware of the oldest dated manuscript (1496 CE). Digambaraji and Kokaje (1998: xx–xxi) and Gode (1953: 379–387) date the HP to between 1350 and 1550. There is, however, a shortcoming in the argument formulated by Digambaraji and Kokaje. The earlier terminus for the date of HP is considered to be an alchemical work named *Rasaratnasamuccaya* of Nityanātha, whose date is about the 14th century CE (Digambaraji and Kokaje 1998: xxi). Now, according to Wujastik’s study (1984: 70–71; see also White 1994: 160), Nityanātha is not the author of the *Rasaratnasamuccaya*, but rather of the *Rasaratnākara* (13th CE), which is, nevertheless, a text dealing with alchemy, medicine and magic. Nityanātha was a peculiar and ubiquitous character, a polymath to whom works on different subjects such as Haṭhayoga, alchemy, and tantric sorcery are attributed, and his name figures in both the list of yogic *siddhas* in the HP (I.7) and in the list of *rasasiddhas* in the *Rasaratnasamuccaya* (White 1994: 160). The *Rasaratnasamuccaya* is a treatise concerning iatrochemistry, namely alchemy and *āyurveda*, belonging to the 13th–14th centuries CE, and attributed to Vāgbhaṭṭa II, at



16th century was regarded as a standard and paradigmatic text of *haṭhayoga* practice, due to its formal structure based on four chapters,⁶⁰ and in view of the techniques described.⁶¹ HP IV.107 uses the expression *mṛtavat*, employed *ad hoc* to describe the state of *samādhi*, or, as most commonly referred to in the HP, the state of *unmanī*:

sarvāvasthāvinirmuktaḥ sarvacintāvivarjitaḥ /
mṛtavat tiṣṭhate yogī sa mukto nātra saṁśayaḥ // HP IV.107

Completely released from any single stage of yoga,⁶² void of thoughts

least according to White (1994: 167). As for the later terminus of the HP, Digambaraji and Kokaje (1998: xxi) date the HP to 1650 CE. This thesis is grounded on the discovery of a manuscript of the HP, preserved in the National Library in Kolkata, which is dated *saṁvat* 1868 (1629 CE). In view of the fact that the HP (I.7) presents a list of *mahāsiddhas* containing the name of Nityanātha, it is plausible to assume that the HP was composed slightly after the 13th or 14th century CE, or after Vāgbhaṭṭa's composition of the *Rasaratnasamuccaya*. For another discussion of the date of the HP, which is the main source of the analysis by Digambaraji and Kokaje (1998: xx-xxi), see Gode (1953: 379-87); for a synoptic list comparing the names occurring in the HP and *Rasaratnasamuccaya*, see Bouy (1994).

⁶⁰ Some versions of HP are subdivided into five chapters (HP 1998: xix-xx), while more extended versions containing ten chapters also exist (HP 1998: xx; Birch 2018: 8), as reported in the *Gorakṣasiddhāntasaṅgraha*. For the date of the ten chapters of the HP's texts, see Birch (2018: 8, fn.32).

⁶¹ As stated by Birch (2018: 7; 2011: 528) this is evinced in different yoga texts, such as the *Haṭharatnāvalī* (17th c.), which borrowed extensively from the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, as well as from compilations, such as the Godāvaramiśra's *Yogacintāmaṇi* (16th century), which quote the HP at length on matters of *haṭhayoga*, and following Digambaraji and Kokaje (HP 1998: xv), evinced by texts such as the *Haṭhasaṅketacandrikā* and the *Haṭhatattvakaumudī*. However, in the centuries following the HP, the literature concerning *haṭhayoga* and Pātañjalayoga changed significantly. More extensive texts on the four-fold system of yoga and *aṣṭāṅgayoga* were written. Furthermore, as above seen, two expanded versions of the HP, and a new interpretation of Pātañjalayoga, more related to Purāṇa and Vedānta teachings than the PYŚ, YVi, TV and RM, have emerged, as witnessed in the YV of Vijñānabhikṣu and the PYV of Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa, who interpreted the yoga of Patañjali in terms of *bhedābhedavāda* (the doctrine of identity in difference). Moreover, as noted by Birch (2018: 7-8), learned Brahmins attempted to integrate teachings on *haṭhayoga* and *rājayoga* (that is, teaching concerning meditative absorption or *samādhi*) with those of the PYŚ and various Brahmanical texts such as the Upaniṣads, Epics, Purāṇas and Dharmaśāstra, and this resulted in large eclectic compilations on yoga (see Bouy 1994).

⁶² According to HP IV.69, four stages in all types of yoga exist, namely *ārambha*, *ghaṭa*, *paricaya*, and *niṣpatti*: *ārambhaś ca ghaṭaś caiva tathā paricayo 'pi ca / niṣpattiḥ sarvayogeṣu syād avasthācatuṣṭayam*. Taken singularly, these stages are described in HP IV.70-77. These stages are introduced under the topic of *nādānusanadhāna* or *nādoṣāsanā* (cf. HP IV.65), which is a type of meditative absorption on a sound (*nāda*), or a series of different sounds, arising within the body of a yoga practitioner (cf. HP IV.82-102). This sound, although "unstruck" or not externally produced (HP IV.70: *anāhata*), is audible from and within the right ear (HP IV.67: *śṛṅguyād dakṣiṇe karṇe*), reverberating in the *suṣumnānāḍi* (HP IV.68). It has different levels of loudness (HP IV.78) and timbre, described in HP IV. 84-86. For a detailed study on *nāda* and yoga, see Kienhle (1997).

The yogin, remaining as if he were dead, is certainly liberated.⁶³

In the HP this condition of a death-like state is obtained by means of the practice of *nāḍopāsana* or *nādānusandhāna*. This is the practice prompted at the beginning of HP IV. 65. Apart from Vijñānabhikṣu, Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa and the HP, there are other textual sources of Haṭhayoga where death-evoking imaginary is used to describe advanced yoga practitioners.⁶⁴

Besides *mṛtavat*, Svātmārāma employs another curious image describing the yogin in the advanced phase of *samādhi*. In HP IV.106, immediately preceding the verse containing the term *mṛtavat*, the yoga practitioner in the state of *samādhi* is depicted as a log of wood (*kāṣṭhavat*):

*śaṅkhadundhubhinādaṃ ca na śṛṇoti kadācana /
kāṣṭhavaj jāyate deha unmanyāvasthayā dhruvam //* HP I.106

And [the yoga practitioner] no longer hears the sound of a conch or kettledrum. His body surely becomes like a log of wood because of the *unmanī* state.⁶⁵

In *Amanaska* II.76, the so far unknown author uses this and other similes to express the idea of the stillness and lifelessness of yoga practitioner's body while absorbed in deep *samādhi* or in *amanaska*, "the no-mind state." The second chapter can be dated to the 11th or early 12th centuries CE and appears to be among the earliest yoga texts that teach a type of yoga called Rājayoga, which was generally understood in medieval yoga texts to be synonymous with *samādhi* (Birch 2013: 6). In *Amanaska* I.27, the simile comparing the yogin to an inanimate piece of wood (*nirjīvakāṣṭhopama*), which also resembles the *kāṣṭhavat* of HP I.106, is combined with another simile that likens him to a flame in a windless spot (*nirvātasthitadīpavat*). As claimed by Birch (2013: 7, 134–140), the second chapter of the *Amanaska* was one of the sources of the HP's fourth chapter, and its verses can be found in other yoga texts of the same period and in more recent texts.

⁶³ This stanza is also quoted in Bronkhorst (2000: 41): "Being free from all states and devoid of all thought, the Yogin is like a dead person; he is liberated, there is no doubt about it."

⁶⁴ Jason Birch kindly directed me to other textual sources for this concept.

⁶⁵ See also Bronkhorst (2000: 41) who translates HP (I.106) as: "By virtue of the mindless state (*unmanī avasthā*) the body becomes certainly like a piece of wood; it does not at any time hear the sounds of a conch-shell and of a large drum."



Instances of *kāṣṭhavat* are well attested in earlier literature, making it a shared literary image.⁶⁶

*niṣpannākhilabhāvaśūnyanibhṛtaḥ svātmasthitis tatkṣaṇān
niśceṣṭaślathapāṇipādakaraṇagrāmo vikārojhitāḥ /
nirmūlapravinaṣṭamārutatayā nirjīvakāṣṭhopamo
nirvāsthitadīpavat saḥajavān pārśvasthitair drśyate // (Amanaska II.76)⁶⁷*

[The yogin] who has [attained] the natural [no-mind state] is instantly motionless as a result of having realized the emptiness of all states, resides in his own self, his hands, feet and sense organs are all inactive and relaxed, and he is free of disturbances. Because he is one in whom breathing has radically ceased, he is seen by those standing close [to be] like an inanimate piece of wood and like the [steady flame of] a lamp situated in a windless [place].⁶⁸

Besides the occurrence of two metaphors within the same stanza, the only difference between the HP and *Amanaska* seems to be a stylistic one. If compared with Svātmārāma, the unknown *Amanaska*'s author uses metaphors richer in qualifications. For instance, the log of wood is “without life, inanimate.” This stylistic device creates vividness and tension, considering that the yogin is fully absorbed in *samādhi*. Moreover, this state is characterised by stillness which is the result of the inhibition of any psycho-physical activity, the function of breathing included. The complete eradication of breathing (*nirmūlapravinaṣṭamārutatayā*) is the reason for remaining in a motionless condition. Therefore, the aim of *Amanaska* II.76 is clear: when resting in his own self, the advanced yoga practitioner outwardly looks motionless and stays in a still condition.

Concerning the term *mṛta* (or *mṛtaka*), it is interesting to consider also the alchemical context. In *rasaśāstra* and *rasāyana* literature, the term *mṛta* often occurs and is understood as “calcined” or “reduced” (White 1994: *passim*), and the term *māraṇa* (killing) for the process of calcination of a substance. This understanding of the term *mṛta* could shed light on the correspondences between the terminology, culturally

⁶⁶ Birch (2013: 262, fn. 35) tracks several texts where *kāṣṭhavat* recurs: *Mahābhārata* XII.188.5d and XII.294.17a, *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* XIV.83, *Mokṣopāya* XVI.155.5-6a-b, *Kulārṇavatāntra* IX.14, *Haṭhapradīpikā* IV.106, *Nādabindūpaniṣat* 52c-d-53a-b, and *Amanaska* I.27.

⁶⁷ Cf. Birch (2013: 326) for a critical edition of *Amanaska* II.76.

⁶⁸ Translation Birch (2013: 326).

shared assumptions and images used by Vijñānabhikṣu and Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa and by some authors of *rasaśāstra* literature. As stated by White (1996: 57): “...the language of the Nāth Siddhas’ Haṭhayoga is often nothing other than a projection of alchemical discourse upon the human body. The human body is an alchemical body.” Some concepts utilised in *haṭhayoga* literature have echoes in Siddha alchemy, witnessed in early *haṭhayoga* texts, such as the *Amṛtasiddhi*, *Yogabīja*, *Dattātreyaśāstra*, *Goraḥṣāṭaka*, *Vivekamārtaṇḍa*, *Khecarīvidyā*, *Amarauḥaprabodha*, and *Amarauḥaśāsana*. All these texts, except the *Amṛtasiddhi* and *Amarauḥaśāsana*, are considered (Mallinson 2012: 327) to be the sources for early Haṭhayoga’s syncretic systematization into the classical Haṭhayoga of Svātmārāma’s *Haṭhapradīpikā*. Although White’s (1996: 10) overall idea seems to imply a similarity between some of the terminologies of alchemists and *haṭhayoga* practitioners, their practices were nevertheless quite distinct, as noted in *Khecarīvidyā* II.72-79, *Śivasamhitā* III.61, V.112, and *Dattātreyaśāstra* 197.⁶⁹

Although alchemy exhibits more similarities with tantric *haṭhayoga* than with Pātāñjalayoga, it shares a number of assumptions on theoretical and hermeneutical phenomena with Pātāñjalayoga. Briefly, these common assumptions include the *puruṣa/prakṛti* dualism, the *tattvāntaraparīṇāma* (the unfolding of the *tattvas*), *prānāyāma*, *siddhis*, *samādhi*, and *kaivalya*. Since the discovery of the *Amṛtasiddhi*⁷⁰ (second half of 11th century CE) and an early recension of the *Amarauḥaprabodha* (c.end of 12th–first half of 15th century CE),⁷¹ it is now clearer that Haṭhayoga emerged from the interaction of Tantric Buddhist and Śaiva communities.⁷² They used some alchemical metaphors to describe the practices, but did not borrow practices from alchemy and were antagonistic to alchemists, as stated in *Dattātreyaśāstra* 197 (cf. fn. 69). For instance,

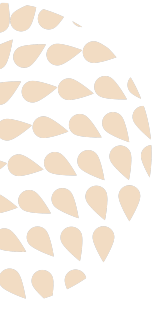
⁶⁹ See Mallinson (2012: 338). However, Mallinson notes how the *Dattātreyaśāstra* (v. 103) is sceptical about alchemy, and how alchemy is an obstacle to success in yoga.

⁷⁰ According to Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 3, fn. 1–3), the authorship of the *Amṛtasiddhi* is attributed to Mādhvacandra, its date no later than the second half of 11th century CE, and most likely composed in the Deccan region. It represents a relevant text because, as claimed by Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 3), “It is the first text to teach a system of yoga whose primary method is physical and it introduces many practices and principles fundamental to the yoga method often categorised in subsequent Sanskrit text as *haṭha*.”

⁷¹ According to Birch (2019: 5–6; 12–14) there exist two recensions of the *Amarauḥaprabodha*: a short and earlier recension dated between the end of the 12th and the first half of 15th century CE, and a long and more recent recension dated between the 15th and the 18th century CE. Although early modern publications attribute the *Amarauḥaprabodha* to Goraḥṣanātha, its authorship is still uncertain (Birch 2019: 3–4). Both recensions seem to have been redacted in south India (Birch 2019: 4–5).

⁷² With specific regard of the *Amṛtasiddhi* and the *Amarauḥaprabodha*, the former has a Buddhist Vajrayāna orientation, the latter a Śaiva one.





the *Amṛtasiddhi* mentions *māraṇa* as an alchemical technique where through calcination or oxidation a substance is made inert. *Māraṇa* as well as other derivatives from the root *mṛ* (die) are also used to denote the stilling of either the breath or semen.⁷³ Moreover, it is also plausible that some of *Amṛtasiddhi*'s terminology that derived from *Rasaśāstra*, such as *vedha*, *māraṇa* and *puṭa*, was incorporated by the redactor of the *Amaraughaprabodha*, perhaps because the meaning of these terms was a shared representation also outside of esoteric Buddhism.⁷⁴ To describe the effects of *mahāmudrā*, the redactor of the *Amaraughaprabodha* might have been alluding to the alchemical process of *māraṇa*, namely heating a substance in a burning pit to reduce it into ashes, when he refers to *marañāvasthā*.⁷⁵ In this regard, Birch (2019: 20) claims that:

In the *Amaraughaprabodha*'s description, the pressing of the perineum and the application of the throat lock (*bandha*) seem to create something akin to an alchemical vessel with two halves or lids (*dvipuṭa*). Presumably, this vessel is the central channel after it has been blocked above and below by the locks, which envelop and hold *kuṇḍalinī* in a death-like state (*marañāvasthā*).⁷⁶

From the perspective of yoga, references to Hathayoga appeared in commentaries on the PYŚ, such as Vijñānabhikṣu's YV,⁷⁷ and Nārāyaṇatīrtha's *Yogasiddhāntacandrikā*, shortly after the HP, when Haṭhayoga was absorbed by Brahmanical traditions.⁷⁸ On the alchemical side, White (1996: chapter 3, *passim*) suggests that the conflation of *haṭhayoga*, *rasaśāstra* and Buddhist Tantra, gave birth, around the 13th century CE, to what is termed by White as "Siddha alchemy," namely the blending of external alchemy with internal *haṭhayoga* practice. This type of alchemy is claimed in texts to have been

⁷³ Cf. Mallinson and Szántó (2021: 21).

⁷⁴ Cf. Birch (2019: 15).

⁷⁵ Cf. Birch (2019: 17, fn. 42). The term *marañāvasthā* occurs in the second hemistich of *Amaraughaprabodha* 21.

⁷⁶ In the context of raising *kuṇḍalinī*, as Birch claims (2019: 20), the meaning of *marañāvasthā* is not entirely clear.

⁷⁷ Cf. YV/PYS II.46 (YV 1932: 266, 26–34; 267: 21–23) primarily for references to Vasiṣṭha and the *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* in regard to *āsana*. This text does not call its yoga "haṭha" but it is very close to the *Yogayājñavalkya*; and both teach the same form of *aṣṭāṅgayoga*, which is referred to as *haṭha* in the *Dattātreyayogaśāstra* (which attributes it to Yājñavalkya). Cf. YV/PYS II.49–50 in regard to *prāṇāyāma*. I owe a great deal of gratitude to Jason Birch who kindly shared with me, via email correspondence, the information above (30/10/2023).

⁷⁸ Cf. Birch (2019: 26).

taught by Matsyendra, in perhaps the 10th century CE. However, as noted already, in the Haṭhayoga literature there is no conflation, nor blending of theories and practices besides the borrowing of specific terminology, and the use of some alchemical similes. Moreover, there is not any known text so far blending Haṭhayoga with alchemy in any significant way. As mentioned, Brāhmaṇa tantric and alchemical systems are also deeply informed by Buddhist tantric practices. This is particularly so when considering the Tantra of the Western Transmission, the *yoginī kaula*, and the Nātha Siddha systems.⁷⁹ In light of the *Amṛtasiddhi* and the *Amarauḥaprabodha*, the yogic concept of *mṛta/mṛtaka*—referring to the dead-like body of the yoga practitioner—and the alchemical conception and technique of *māraṇa*, connected with the processing of mercurial preparations and procedures of calcination, indicate particular parallels between practices in *haṭhayoga* and techniques in *rasāyana*. While in yoga there is a transformation of the mind and body of the yoga practitioner, which results in psycho-physical stillness (*mṛtavat*) and ultimately in *kaivalya*, in *rasāyana* the term *mṛta* describes the end product of the long process of mercurial calcination and refining (*māraṇa*).

Life After Asamprajñātasamādhi

Although a considerable amount of *Pātañjalayoga* literature is at our disposal, it is still not entirely clear what the destiny of the yoga practitioner might be after attaining the *mṛtavat* state. As seen, this state is the advanced phase of contentless absorption culminating in *kaivalya*, namely the contentless of seeing the Self abiding in its own state.⁸⁰ This state coincides with liberation or *mokṣa*, which is the absence of bondage to the endless cycle of life and death.⁸¹ Alternatively, *kaivalya* is a non-commingled state (*puruṣasyāmiśrībhāvaḥ*) between the *puruṣa* and the *buddhi*⁸² (*buddhipuruṣa-*

⁷⁹ For a detailed discussion of this topic, see White (1996: 55–57, chapter 3).

⁸⁰ Cf. YBh/YS II.6 (YBh 1919: 64, 4–5): *svarūpapratilambhe tu tayoh kaivalyam eva bhavati*: “When their (*dr̥kśakti* and *darśanaśakti*) real nature is known, there is indeed the contentlessness of that seeing [of the Self].”

⁸¹ Cf. YBh/YS II.23 (YBh 1919: 92, 2–3): *nātra darśanaṃ mokṣakāraṇam adarśanābhāvād eva bandhābhāvaḥ sa mokṣa iti...* (YBh 1919: 92, 4): *ato darśanaṃ jñānaṃ kaivalyakāraṇam uktam*: “In this context [of *Pātañjalayoga*], the vision is not the cause of liberation exactly because of the absence of the non-vision, [thus] *mokṣa* amounts to the absence of bondage [to *saṃsāra*]... Therefore, the vision which is knowledge is said to be the cause of contentlessness of that seeing.”

⁸² Cf. YBh/YS II.25 (YBh 1919: 96, 7–9): *tasyādarśanasya abhāvād buddhipuruṣasaṃyogābhāva ātyantiko bandhanoparama ity arthaḥ. etad dhānam. taddr̥śeḥ kaivalyaṃ puruṣasyāmiśrībhāvaḥ*: “The meaning is that because of the absence of this vision (i.e., correlation between *puruṣa/citta*), the ultimate release of bondage amounts to the non-existence of the relation between *puruṣa* and *buddhi*. This is the case namely the





saṃyogābhāva), and also the ultimate disjunction between the *puruṣa* and the *guṇas*.⁸³ *Kaivalya* is a neuter abstract noun, a *vṛddhi* formation from the noun/adjective *kevala* plus the *taddhita* suffix *ṣyañ*. It conveys the sense of “perfect isolation, abstraction, detachment from all other connections, detachment of the soul from matter or further transmigrations; becoming one with the Supreme; eternal happiness, emancipation, beatitude; exclusiveness, soleness, individuality, totality,” according to Monier-Williams (1994: 311). What sort of experience and meaning does Patañjali refer to through the term *kaivalya*? Does *kaivalya* mean final release from the body, namely death, and might it thus refer in general to yoga as a method to prepare for the departure from the body? Or rather, once *kaivalya* is attained, does the practitioner return from it? Arguments can be made for both interpretations.

It appears that the yoga practitioner who has attained *mokṣa* returns to the world as a *jīvanmukta*, waiting for the burning of the tiny seeds of *karma* that are left over. Once these seeds are fully burnt, he can finally abandon the body as a *videhamukta* at the time of death. The ideal of *mokṣa*, in its aspect of *jīvanmukti* as well as *videhamukti*, represents a central concept in Pātañjalayoga generally, although, as previously mentioned, Patañjali uses neither the term *jīvanmukti* nor *videhamukti*, nor does he explore or explain the life of the yogin after the attainment of *samādhi*.⁸⁴ Although the terms *jīvanmukti* and *videhamukti* are absent from the PYŚ, YBh/YS II.4 nevertheless contains

contentlessness of that seeing is the absence of *puruṣa*’s commingling with the [*guṇas*].”

⁸³ Cf. YBh/YS III.50 (YBh 1919: 168, 14): *puruṣasyātyantiko guṇaviyogaḥ kaivalyam*: “The state of contentlessness of that seeing [of the Self] is the ultimate separation between the *puruṣa* and the *guṇa*.”

⁸⁴ Although the term *jīvanmukti* does not occur in the PYŚ, it recurs and is addressed in the commentarial literature, see: TV/PYŚ III.51 (TV 1919: 169, 26–27): *tasya hi bhagavato jīvanmuktasya caramadehasya cittapratīsarṅa eko ’rthaḥ*. “For this Exalted [yogin], released yet alive in the body, whose present body is his last, has as his sole aim the resolving of the mind-stuff [into its primary cause]” (trans. Woods 1914: 287). In the YV, since *jīvanmukti* is individuated within a body which has undergone experience, afflictions and so on, this state is different and distinguished from *īśvara* who is, by definition, eternally free from *karma*, *āśaya* and *vipāka*, see: YV/PYŚ I.24 (YV 1935: 66, 34–35): *ekaśārīrasthatvena tadboghasya eva prasaktatvād iti jīvanmuktasya api īśvarasadrśa eva bhogo duḥkhabhogamātram īśvarād vilakṣaṇam iti*. Still concerning *jīvanmukti*, see: PYV/PYŚ I.2 (PYV 1917: 222, 11): *anyathā jīvanmuktīpratīpādakaśrutyaśaṅgatiḥ syāt*, where Nāgeśa, aiming to justify the CU’s statement, distinguishes between liberation through knowledge and a different one obtained through the arrest of those still-latent stimuli related to acts that have already begun to produce results (*prārabdhakarma*); and: *tasya tāvad eva ciram iti jñānīviṣayakaśruteḥ jīvanmuktīśruteś ca*. Here Nāgeśa quotes the above-mentioned passage from the CU. The same passage from the CU is also quoted in YV/PYŚ I.1 (YV 1935: 11, 23). The overall intent of YV and PYV is to distinguish between *samprajñāta*- and *asamprajñāta-samādhi*, where it is theorised that there is a difference concerning the role of knowledge in both kinds of *samādhi*. Besides the first *pāda* of YV, Vijñānabhikṣu discusses the topic of *jīvanmukti* also in: YV/PYŚ II.2, 4, 7, 11, 13, 14, 18, 24, 27, 32; III.18; and IV.21, 30, 31. For the idea of *jīvanmukti* as theorised by

an interesting phrase, namely *ataḥ kṣīṇakleśaḥ kuśalaś caramadeha ity ucyate*: “Therefore, the skilful yoga practitioner whose afflictions have waned is said to be in [his] last body.”⁸⁵ The topic under discussion here is *kriyāyoga* (cf. YS II.1: *tapahsvādhyāyeśvara-praṇidhānāni kriyāyogaḥ*) and its aims, namely, the coming into being of *samādhi* and the waning of afflictions (YS II.2: *samādhibhāvanārthaḥ kleśatanūkaraṇārthaś ca*).⁸⁶ Here, the afflicted (*kliṣṭa*) mental events (*cittavṛttis*) represent the afflictions, which play a fundamental role, because they shape one’s *karma* deposit (*karmāśaya*).⁸⁷ YBh/YS II.2 explains that the steady practice of *kriyāyoga* does not just enhance the state of *samādhi*, by making the *kleśas* wane, but also that once the *kleśas* have fully waned, they are ineffective (*aprasavadharminas*), just like seeds burnt through the fire of *prasaṅkhyāna* (*prasaṅkhyānāgninā dagdhabījakaḷpān*).⁸⁸ As seen in PYŚ I.18, the yoga practitioner is left with just a remainder of ineffective *saṃskāras*. These *saṃskāras* are not capable of generating new *karma*. Moreover, and this is the relevant point, being in his last body (*caramadeha*), the yogin will not be reborn again. In this regard, the PYŚ does not directly refer to the condition of *jīvanmukti*, but if this reading is correct it is possible to draw a conceptual parallel between the state of *jīvanmukti* and the passages above quoted from PYŚ I.5; II.1, 2, and 4 (see also PYŚ II.10, 11). This parallel concerns the cultivation of *kriyāyoga*, and in turn *samādhi* and *prasaṅkhyāna*, so that the seeds of *karma* become ineffective or fully burnt (*dagdhabīja*).⁸⁹ This condition ensures that the yoga practitioner does not attain a new body, thus interrupting the cycle of *saṃsāra*.

Vijñānabhikṣu, see Nicholson (2010: 114–18). See also Chapple (2008: 83–100) for comment on the ideal of living liberation in Sāṅkhya and yoga. For references on *jīvanmukti* in Pātañjalayoga, see Birch (2020: 229, fn. 108).

⁸⁵ Cf. YBh/YS I.4 (YBh 1919: 60, 3).

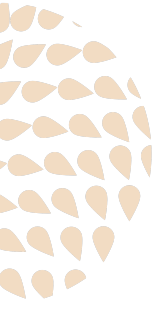
⁸⁶ Cf. YS II.1 (YS 1919: 57, 3–4), YS II.2 (YS 1919: 58, 4–5).

⁸⁷ Cf. YBh/YS I.5 (Maas 2006: 16, 4): *kleśahetukāḥ, karmāśayapracaye kṣetrībhūtāḥ, kliṣṭāḥ*: “[The *cittavṛttis* considered as] afflicted are those whose causes become the base of *karma*’s accumulation.”

⁸⁸ Cf. YBh/YS II.2 (YBh 1919: 58, 6–8): *sa hy āsevya mānaḥ samādhiṃ bhāvayati kleśāṃś ca pratanūkaroti. pratanūkṛtān kleśān prasāṅkhyānāgninā dagdhabījakaḷpān aprasavadharmināḥ kariṣyatīti*: “When properly practised, this [*kriyāyoga*] brings about *samādhi* and weakens the afflictions. [Further], by the fire of meditation, it will render the weakened afflictions unproductive, like parched-up seeds.”

⁸⁹ It is interesting to note how in PYŚ II.26 the metaphor of the burnt seeds is used to refer to false knowledge (*mithyājñāna*). The knowledge reducing *mithyājñāna* to a burnt seed is termed *vivekakhyaṭi*, the “discriminative knowledge” of *sattvapuruṣānyatāpratyaya*, namely the knowledge that discriminates between *sattvaguṇa* and *puruṣa*. Cf. YBh/YS II.26 (YBh 1919: 97, 1–7): *sattvapuruṣānyatāpratyayo vivekakhyaṭiḥ. sā tv anivṛttamithyājñānā plavate. yadā mithyājñānaṃ dagdhabījabhāvaṃ vandhyaprasavaṃ sampadyate tadā vidhūtakleśarajasāḥ sattvasya pare vaiśāradye parasyāṃ vaśīkārasaṃjñāyāṃ vartamānasya vivekapratyayapravāho nirmalo bhavati. sā vivekakhyaṭir aviḥlavā hānopāyaḥ. tato mithyājñānasya dagdhabījabhāvopagamaḥ punaś*





The progressive fading into a death-like state is a literary image that can be contextualized within the wider semantic register of South-Asian asceticism and the ideal of *jīvanmukti*, namely the theme of embodied liberation. Vijānabhikṣu, in his *Vijñānāmṛtabhāṣya*⁹⁰ (VAB) on Bādarāyana's *Brahmasūtras* (BS) IV.1,15,⁹¹ quotes directly from *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (CU) VI.14, 2: "There is a delay for me here only until I am freed, but then I will arrive!"⁹² Vijānabhikṣu understands this passage to mean that there is a delay for those who have already obtained *mokṣa* and aspire to full and final release from the world. The delay (*ciraṃ*) that is mentioned alternates between the final liberation or *videhamukti*, namely the "deliverance through release from the body," and *jīvanmukti*. That delay is due to the necessity to completely burn the karmic residue still persisting in the practitioner's body. However, after the residue is exhausted, the practitioner is permanently free of embodiment. The final act of emancipation is therefore final and irreversible.⁹³ Thus, when *mokṣa* involves the attainment of the

cāprasava ity eṣa mokṣasya mārgo hānasyopāya iti. "The discriminative knowledge refers to the notion of the difference between the *sattva* [*guṇa*] and *puruṣa*. However, when the false knowledge is functional, this [*vivekakhyaṭi*] vanishes. Once the false knowledge is reduced to the condition of a burnt seed, it is useless, then the flux of mental images of discrimination becomes pure. [Thus] the *sattva* is removed from the afflictions connected with the *rajaḡuṇa*, it endures in the highest form of the luminescence of the intellect, [and] in the mastery over the elements of *prakṛti*. Being steady, this discriminative knowledge represents the means of release. Henceforth, the false knowledge is reduced to the condition of a burnt seed, and it is said to be useless. This is the path towards liberation (*mokṣasya*), this is the means of release."

⁹⁰ Cf. VAB (1979: 311) on BS IV.1,15.

⁹¹ BS IV.1, 15 (BS 1863: 1080, 1): *anārabdhakārye eva tu pūrve tadavadheḥ*: "But [for the person aspiring to liberation] only those former acts whose effects have not yet begun [are removed by knowledge], because these deeds last [until the death of the body]" (trans. Thibaut 1890: 357, slightly modified). It should be made clear that the BS does not explicitly address the notion of *jīvanmukti*, and that this term never occurs in this text.

⁹² Cf. CU VI.14, 2 (CU 1998: 256, 4-5): *tasya tāvad eva ciraṃ yāvan na vimokṣaye'tha sampatsya*. (Trans. Olivelle 1998: 257).

⁹³ In Vijānabhikṣu's YV commentary on PYŚ IV.29, 30, and 31, three levels of the condition of being liberated (*muktitva*) seem to be theorised, although these levels are not fully described in clear terms. The source of Vijānabhikṣu's theory is probably *Tattvasamāsa* XXII, as Vijānabhikṣu quotes this text when commenting on YV/PYŚ IV.32 (though without quoting the title of the text) for the threefold distinction of *mokṣa* (*trividho mokṣaḥ*). Vijānabhikṣu seems to distinguish between:

a) *gauṇamuktitva* (YV/PYŚ IV.30), or the lower level of liberation, amounting to fully removing the causes of sorrow (*duḥkhanidānātyantocchedāya*). This state, following YV/PYŚ IV.28, coincides with the successful practice of *samprajñātasamādhi* and leads to the eradication of the *kleśas* and *vāsanās*. This level is reached once *vivekakhyaṭi*, *prasaṅkhyāna* and *dharmameghasamādhi* are realized and the practitioner can be regarded as a *jīvanmukta*;

b) *paramukti* (YV/PYŚ IV.31), or the higher level of liberation, which coincides with a state in

jīvanmukti state, this state is a preliminary condition to that of *videhamukti*. As already seen, the idea of *kaivalya* is linked with *jīvanmukti*. Patañjali claims (PYŚ II.25) that *kaivalya* takes place once *avidyā* is removed.⁹⁴ The YBh on YS II.25 explains that once the correlation between the Self (*puruṣa*) and the *guṇas* does not persist anymore, then the Self abides in its true nature.⁹⁵ But what does that mean? What happens in the practitioner’s mind and body? It means that once *sattva* has reached its highest state of refinement, it is comparable to the purity of the *puruṣa*.⁹⁶ *Sattva* is the luminescent aspect of *prakṛti* or the most refined among the *guṇas*. At this point, the *sattva* aspect of *prakṛti*, along with *prakṛti*’s other constituents, must have undergone the “process of returning to the original state” (*pratiprasava*). Once the *pratiprasava* is achieved, *prakṛti* itself has no more function to accomplish for the *puruṣa*’s sake, and the *puruṣa*, here referred to as *citiśakti*, can finally abide in its natural form.⁹⁷ Therefore, *kaivalya* refers to the state that occurs when the Self or *puruṣa* is fully detached from the empirical self and the entire totality of its psycho-physical activities and states constituting the object of *puruṣa*’s perception. In this sense, *kaivalya* is contentlessness of that seeing, or the condition when *puruṣa* has no object in sight.

which there is little to know, because of “the full removal of the veiling impurities, due to the perfect level of knowledge reached” (cf. YS IV.31) [YS 1919: 203, 4–5]: *tadā sarvāvaraṇamālāpetasya jñānasya anantyāt jeyam alpam*);

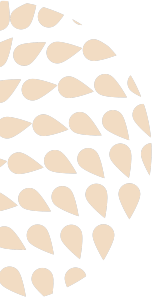
c) *mukhyamokṣa* (YV/PYŚ IV.32) [YV 1935: 448, 37]: *paravairāgyodayena asamprajñāta-paramparyājanyam*, or the main liberation obtained as the result of the superior form of detachment (*paravairāgya*), produced in the gradual progress towards objectless-*samādhi*. This final stage of *mokṣa* is obtained once the *guṇas* have ceased their activity, cf. PYŚ II.22; III.55; and IV.34.

⁹⁴ Cf. YS II.25 (YS 1919: 96, 5–6): *tadabhāvāt saṃyogābhāvo hānaṃ taddrśeḥ kaivalyam*: “With the disappearance of this [*avidyā*], the correlation [between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* also] vanishes. [This is] release, the contentlessness of that seeing.” This state characterising the *puruṣa* can be described as an “abstract” or “pure” perception, in which the perceiving is completely detached from any object. The *puruṣa*, being the contentless consciousness, witnesses objects without being connected or involved with them.

⁹⁵ Cf. YBh/YS II.25 (YBh 1919: 96, 8–9): *taddrśeḥ kaivalyam puruṣasya amiśribhāvaḥ punar asaṃyogo guṇair ity arthaḥ...* (YBh 1919: 96, 10): *tadā svarūpapraṭiṣṭhaḥ puruṣa ity uktam*. As for the idea of Self’s *svaṛūpapraṭiṣṭha*, see YS I.3: *tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe ’vasthānam*. Cf. also YBh/YS I.3: *svaṛūpapraṭiṣṭhā tadānīm citiśaktir yathā kaivalye*.

⁹⁶ Cf. YS III.55 (YS 1919: 174, 10): *sattvapuruṣayoḥ śuddhisāmye kaivalyam iti*: “Contentlessness [of that seeing] takes place when there is identity of purity of both the *sattva* and the *puruṣa*.”

⁹⁷ Cf. YS IV.34 (YS 1919: 107, 2–3): *puruṣārthaśūnyānām guṇānām pratiprasavaḥ kaivalyam svarūpapraṭiṣṭhā vā citiśaktir iti*: “Contentlessness [of that seeing] is a process of returning to the original state of the *guṇas*, which are devoid of purpose for *puruṣa*, or it coincides with the potency of consciousness.”



The state of *jīvanmukti* necessarily concerns *karma*, or its absence, and the related three-fold typology of acts, namely accumulated (*sañcita-*), future (*anāgata-*), and commenced *karma* (*prārabdha-karma*). Even if the seeds of *sañcitakarma* and *anāgatakarma* become ineffective, it is not the same for *prārabdha*, which, already begun, needs to be eradicated if the yogin is to attain *mokṣa*. *Jīvanmukti*, usually translated as “embodied liberation,” corresponds to the delay (*ciram*), mentioned above, during which the liberated person waits for the karmic residue to burn off.⁹⁸ The time when the body falls away is therefore tied to the end of the fruition of commenced *karma* (*prārabdhakarma*). The recognition of the *jīvanmukti* state is crucial, whether from a practical, didactical or pedagogical perspective, because teachers who impart instruction about yogic discipline and theory need to be fully liberated from the ties of *saṃsāra*. In a yogic context, the *guru* needs to recognise and point out paradigmatic yogins whose verbal testimonies, teachings, acts and experiences should be followed.

In trying to make sense of the implications of the terms *mṛtavat* and *mṛtakavat*, it could be asked whether or not they are ever linked to the state of *kaivalya* and *jīvanmukti*. The textual material so far analysed does not furnish an evident answer. However, what seems clear is that “being like a dead body” is the result of the psycho-physical immobility that characterises the advanced phase of *asamprajñātasamādhi*, attained through the constant application of the cessative practice of *nirodha*. As already discussed, this practice lies at the core of Pātañjalayoga. It seems that once advanced

⁹⁸ That the condition of *jīvanmukti* coincides with the extinction of the *kleśas* and *saṃskāras* and entering into the state of *prasaṅkhyāna* is also addressed by Vijñānabhikṣu, when commenting on YV/PYŚ II.2 (1935: 141, 37–39): *pratanūkr̥tāmś ca śuṣkendhanatulyān kṛtān kleśān kriyāyogaḥ svayam uddīpitena prasaṅkhyānāgninā vivekakhyaītivahninā dagdabījavād aprasavadharminō ‘prasavasvabhāvān saṃskārājanakān kariṣyati, jīvanmuktidaśāyām iti śeṣaḥ*: “Moreover, the yoga of action (*kriyāyoga*) will make, by means of the self-awakened flame of *prasaṅkhyāna* as brought forth through discriminative knowledge, the afflictions (*kleśas*) weak, similar to dried kindling, [and it will not cause] the rise of mental impressions which are [now] empty of their own nature [and], just like dried seeds, not capable of producing [anything else]. [To make the meaning clearer] the expression ‘in the state of *jīvanmukti*’ should be supplied in the *Bhāṣya* text.” The wording of the *Bhāṣya* on YS II.2, which Vijñānabhikṣu suggests implies *jīvanmukti*, is: *pratanūkr̥tān kleśān prasaṅkhyānāgninā dagdhabījakalpān aprasavadharmināḥ kariṣyati iti*. On Vijñānabhikṣu’s understanding of *jīvanmukti*, see also YV/PYŚ II.4 (1935: 144, 32–33): *prasaṅkhyānavato vivekasākṣātkāriṇō jīvanmuktasya dagdhakleśabījatayā sammukhībhūte sannikṛṣṭe ‘pi viṣaye ‘sau kleśānām sammukhībhāvāḥ punar na bhavati*. Here the YV states that for a *jīvanmukta* who has obtained *vivekakhyaīti*, the surviving *kleśas* bear no consequences. The same idea is also conveyed in YV/PYŚ II.4 (1935: 145, 30–31): *jīvanmuktānām viṣayasannikarṣe ‘pi kleśān abhivyakteḥ kleśasaṃskāra eva tadā na asti viveke kaivalya iva iti bhramaṃ nirasyati satām iti*. Later in the text, Vijñānabhikṣu relates that the experience, namely *bhoga*, amounts to a secondary factor (*gauṇa*) for a *jīvanmukta*, because experience exhibits an evident aspect of pleasure and so on: cf. YV/PYŚ II.6 (1935: 154, 28): *jīvanmuktasya ca gauṇa eva bhogaḥ sukhādisākṣātkārārūpa ity vākṣyam*. The text alluded to by Vijñānabhikṣu through the words *ity vākṣyam* has yet to be traced.

yoga practitioners have reached the peak of meditative absorption, they become *jīvanmuktas*. A *jīvanmukta* has acquired discriminative knowledge (*vivekakhyaṭi*) and has burnt off karmic residues (*karmāśāya*), mental impressions (*saṃskāras*) and latent-impressions (*vāsanās*), and attained detachment from mistaken knowledge (*avidyā*) and *prakṛti*. A *jīvanmukta* has attained the status of an advanced yogin who has gone through all the stages of meditative absorption up to *kaivalya*. On the yogic path, through the cessative practice of *nirodha*, the *jīvanmukta* eventually seems like a dead body because there is no more psycho-physical activity of any sort. In this sense, being *mṛtakavat* or *mṛtavat* represent the mark or proof of the attainment of the final stage of *Pātañjalayoga*, namely *kaivalya*. Although seemingly cadaverous, the *jīvanmukta* is nevertheless alive but in the *other* realm, namely, that of the Self or *puruṣa*.

Yoga can be understood as a “technology of the self,” namely a technique for abandoning the body at the time of death, in which this act is conceived of as a deliberate way of choosing one's death.⁹⁹ Is yoga a regulated method for the abandoning of the body in general, and a way of inducing one's own death? Is death a necessary condition to achieve liberation (*mokṣa*)? The literature of *Pātañjalayoga* does not seem to offer any specific answers to this question. It is not clear whether or not the *Pātañjalayoga* sources imply that liberation can only be achieved once the practitioner's body is released at the time of death. However, a tentative answer might be found in the last *pāda* of Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa* (1.8):¹⁰⁰ *yogena ante tanutyajām* “At death, [they] abandon their bodies through yoga.” Describing the four stages of human life (*varṇāśrama*), as represented in the behaviour of people depicted in the Raghu dynasty, Kālidāsa tells how through employing yoga practice the body is abandoned at the end of life; it is to be practised by life-renouncers and ascetics. This last group in particular, besides abandoning their social personalities and roles, accepted their own death not only in the sociological but also in the physical sense. However, although the ascetic is ideologically “free,” he is pragmatically limited by the rules of specific monastic communities and regulated interactions with the laity. What is salient here is the

⁹⁹ On yoga as a technique for dying, see Gerety (2021). The evidence presented in this study—from the *Mahābhārata* and *Bhagavad Gītā*, *Jaiminīya* and *Kaṭhuma Sāmaveda*, *Śvetāśvatara*, *Chāndogya*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Katha*, and *Maitrāyaṇīya* Upaniṣads, and PYŚ—show that this technique is grounded in a Brahmanical milieu, and on a contemplative praxis organized around the *om* meditation, and that this meditation takes place at a crucial threshold at the moment of death. However, discussing *om* reciting in the PYŚ, Gerety (2021: 238) notes that in it there is no mention of the moment of death; it departs significantly from the Brahmanical soteriologies he examines.

¹⁰⁰See Kale's edition of *Raghuvamśa* (1922: 5). I am grateful to Peter Pasedach, who kindly pointed me to Kālidāsa's stanza.





association between death and yoga practitioners, or more generally asceticism. Renunciates, whether of Brahmanical, Buddhist, or Jaina affiliation, are structurally outside the cycle of birth and death and are thus regarded as “technical operators of death.”¹⁰¹

But what about the case in which the transition from *jīvanmukti* to *videhamukti* is implied? Is there a way to relate *mṛtakavat/mṛtavat* and *jīvanmukti* with *videhamukti*? Kālidāsa’s *Raghuvamśa* (1.8) offers supportive evidence on how the practice of yoga can be connected to the final release from the body:

*śaiśave 'bhyastavidyānām yauvane viṣayaiṣiṇām /
vārdhake munivṛttinām yogenānte tanutyajām //*

[I will tell about the dynasty of the Raghus who] spent their adolescence in the study of letters, enjoyed pleasures in their youth, led an anchorite’s life in their old age, and who, at the end [of their lives], released their bodies through yoga [fixed their mind in meditation upon Brahman] (slightly modified translation from Kale [1922: 2]).

Mallinātha’s commentary, entitled *Saṅgīvanī*, on *Raghuvamśa* 1.8, provides support for the understanding of Kālidāsa’s stanza, which depicts through adjectives, declined in the locative case, the various stages of life (*śaiśave*, *yauvane*, *vārdhake*, and *ante*) of people in the Raghu dynasty.¹⁰² Commenting on the second half of the *pāda* (1.8), namely *yogena ante tanutyajām*,¹⁰³ referred to above, Mallinātha¹⁰⁴ states that the word *ante* occurring in the stanza refers to the time of abandoning the body (*śarīratyāgakāle*), which is a reference to the time of death. The term *yogena*, occurring in the instrumental case, points to yoga as a means, namely a meditative practice grounded on the contemplation on the higher Self (*paramātmadhyānena*). Immediately after, Mallinātha quotes verbatim from Amarasimha’s thesaurus, entitled *Amarakoṣa* or *Nāmalingānuśāsana* (III.3.22). The

¹⁰¹ This expression and topic are also discussed by Samuel (2008: 128–31).

¹⁰² The specific reference to the Raghu dynasty could be read here as an example of a paradigmatic or universal pattern of existence and living in the world, which could be instantiated in the life of any person (Brāhmaṇa) who follows the example of the Raghus. In this sense, as suggested by Mallinātha’s commentary (Kale 1922: 5), a reference to the well-known four *varṇāśramadharmas* (*brahmācārīn*, *gṛhastha*, *vānaprastha*, *saṃnyāsīn/bhikṣu*) is implied in this context.

¹⁰³ This expression and topic are also discussed by Samuel (2008: 128–131).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Kale (1922: 5).

Amarakośa presents five meanings for the lexeme “yoga”:¹⁰⁵ a) *sannahana*, “making one’s self ready,” “stripe,” “tying together,” “equipment, armour”; b) *upāya*, “means, instrument”; c) *dhyāna*, “concentration, meditation”; d) *saṅgati*, “relation, union”; and e) *yukti*, “reasoning.” What seems to be implied in Kālidāsa’s verse and Mallinātha’s analysis is a reference to the practice of yoga as a means to brace oneself for the departure from the body, namely death. Also suggested by the various meanings attributed to the term *yoga* occurring in the *Amarakośa*, hinted at by Mallinātha, is that yoga is thus a “method” to cope with the process of the abandonment of the body.

Although not ensuing from Pātañjalayoga literature, other textual sources in the Vedas and epics connect the practice of yoga with abandoning the body. This topic has been referred to elsewhere as “dying as a yogic event” (White 2009: 68), in the context of chariot warriors described in the *Mahābhārata*. In some passages, the hero performs a self-willed death and is referred to as a *yogayukta*. In this sense, the practice of yoga leads the practitioner to abandon the body as a *videhamukta* at the time of death, as other literature would term this event. Various passages from the Upaniṣads¹⁰⁶ and the epics indicate that the practice of yoga at the time of death will ensure definitive liberation. For instance, in the *Mahābhārata* (XVI.5.18–25), when Kṛṣṇa decided that the time had come to leave the body, he restrained together (*sannirudh-*) his senses, speech and mind and reached *mahāyoga*. Yet in the *Mahābhārata* there are several cases of individuals, such as Bhiṣma, Droṇa, Bhūrīśravas and Śuka, who are depicted as *yogayukta*, a term that most often appears in narratives in which dying warriors prepare themselves for the final journey to the world of the gods and enter the disk of the sun.¹⁰⁷ According to White (2009: 33, 60), there exist two types of beings who are

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Kale (1922: 5): *yogaḥ sannahanopāyadhyānasaṅgatiyuktiṣu ity amaraḥ*. For *Amarakośa*, cf. *Nāmaṅgīnūśāsanam* (Sharma and Sardesai 1941: 274). See also Squarcini (2015: xlii–xliii), where the author provides other meanings also according to *Nānārthamañjarī* III, 264–265: *yogaḥ saṁnahanopāyadhyānasaṅgatiyuktiṣu // yogasūtre dravyalābhe viṣkambhādau ca bheṣaje*; and the *Śabdaratnapradīpa* 1.51: *yogo jātir viśeṣaś ca saṁyogo yoga ity api // yogaś cāgāmilābhaḥ syāt samādhir yoga ucyate*.

¹⁰⁶ See Gerety (2021: 225–233).

¹⁰⁷ See White 2009: 67. The reference to the ascension to the immortal realm is a theme that permeates all major schools of Indian thought, stretching back to the early Vedic fire sacrifice. Malamoud (2002: 14–15) claims that in the Vedic tradition, witnessed, for example in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* X.5, 2, 8–13 (c.8th cent. BCE), there is the notion that each living being is connected to the sun by means of a *raśmi* (ray) attached to the centre of the heart. See also, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* VII.6.5–6 (c.7th–6th cents. BCE; Olivelle 1998: 279), and *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* I.2.11 (3rd–1st cents. BCE; Olivelle 1998: 441). By the time of the early Upaniṣads, this concept is internalized in the body of the ascetic, where the process of ascension is understood to occur along a central channel running from the heart up through the crown of the head to the sun beyond. Along this channel are situated various points of concentration, such as the heart. The ascetic, by drawing his





capable of piercing the orb of the sun and entering the immortal realm for good: the *parivrājaka* (wandering ascetic) and the *yogayukta*, one who is “yoked to yoga” at the time of death. In the *Mahābhārata*, the notion of yoga is generally aligned with the PYŚ understanding of yoga as *samādhi*, and this can also be also recognised in the practices engaged in by the *Mahābhārata*’s *yogayuktas* at the time of death. Sitting down, holding together the breaths and the senses, the ascetic—and also the warrior in the case of the *Mahābhārata*—yokes himself to yoga, and with eyes focused on the goal (eyes turning upwards), hitched to his *prāṇa* (his subtle chariot), he ascends along the ray (*raśmi*) from the central channel to pierce the sun (crown of the head) and attain *brahmaloka*.¹⁰⁸

Within the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhagavad Gītā* (c. 2nd cent. BCE–2nd cent. CE) offers a narrative of the hero’s dying as yogic event. Through yogic dying the hero can transcend his death. In this regard, Gerety (2021: 233) quotes Malinar: “Dying is not regarded as the end, but as a ‘threshold’ which brings about another state of being.” Death is thus a transition that must be carefully prepared for by a specific training in meditation. The *Gītā* (VIII.10–13)¹⁰⁹ also has relevant verses that concern the practice of yoga at the time of death:

prayāṅakāle manasācalena
bhaktyā yukto yogabalena caiva /
bhruvor madhye prāṇam āveśya samyak
sa taṃ paraṃ puruṣam upaiti divyam // VIII.10 //
yad akṣaraṃ vedavido vadanti
viśanti yad yatayo vītarāgāḥ /
yad icchanto brahmacaryaṃ caranti
tat te padaṃ saṃgrahaṇa pravakṣye // VIII.11 //
sarvadvārāṇi saṃyamya
mano hṛdi nirudhya ca /
mūrdhny ādhāyātmanaḥ prāṇam
āsthito yogadhāraṇām // VIII.12 //
om ity ekākṣaraṃ brahma
vyāharan mām anusmaran /

senses inwards and focusing his breath on this central channel, is equipped to ascend to the sun and enter the immortal realm. Over the next millennium, this ascension-body model is progressively developed into a number of systematised, internal, yogic maps of the body.

¹⁰⁸ This belief can be traced back to *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* VI.10–11 (Olivelle 1998: 401).

¹⁰⁹ As translated in McLaughlin (2021: 10). For the Sanskrit text, see GRETIL edition, accessed: http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskr/2_epic/mbh/ext/bhgce_u.htm.

yaḥ prayāti tyajan deham

sa yāti paramāṃ gatim // VIII.13 //

At the time of death, with unmoving mind, and yoked with devotion by the power of *yoga*, having caused the *prāṇa*, the vital breath, to enter the middle of the eyebrows, he, fully absorbed, goes up to the divine Supreme Being (VIII.10).

That which the knowers of the Vedas call the imperishable, which the ascetics, free from passion, enter, desiring which they undertake the celibate life, that step I will explain to you briefly (VIII.11).

Having closed all the gates to the body, and restrained the mind in the heart, having placed one's vital breath in the head, established in the concentration of *yoga* (VIII.12).

Uttering “*Om*,” the single-syllable that is Brahman and remembering me, he, who dies abandoning the body [in this way], goes to the supreme (VIII.13).

Concerning the topic of “dying as a yogic event,” it is interesting to note how in current Hindi parlance the term *samādhi* is used to refer to a burial site. In South Asia, since the time of the older Upaniṣads (McLaughlin, 2021: 9–13), it is common practice that when death comes to exemplary yoga practitioners or sages, their perfected body is generally buried rather than cremated, and the burial site indicated by a special marker.¹¹⁰ Such a burial site is called a *samādhi*. In its functional aspect, the *samādhi* shrine has resonances with Buddhist and Jaina *stūpas* and Sufi *dargāhs* (tomb/shrine). Jñāneśvar's *samādhi* shrine is believed to date from the late 13th century, after which time many of the datable Hindu *samādhi* sites were established.

Conclusion: Fading Into Death Through *Nirodha*

In conclusion, this study has aimed to provide evidence for the occurrence, use and meaning of the death simile *mṛtavat/mṛtakavat*, when connected with the cessative practice of *nirodha*. The similitive expression *mṛtavat/mṛtakavat* simply describes not only how the yoga practitioner outwardly appears like a cadaver, but it also conveys the

¹¹⁰ See Bühnenmann (2007); Bakker (2007). In some ascetic traditions, the deceased body of the *guru* is immersed in water, a practice known as *jalasamādhi* (water burial). See Kane (1974: 938–42); Pandey (1969: 256–57).



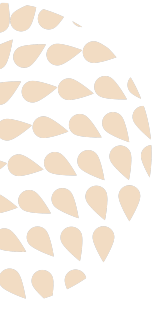


image of the extraordinary psycho-physical immobility or stillness of *asamprajñātasamādhi*, which is a condition that is necessary to attain the purpose of *Pātañjalayoga*, namely, the state of *kaivalya*. Moreover, remaining in a quasi-death-like state is proof of the orthopraxis of yoga. It signifies the mastery of the yoga praxis of cessation (*nirodha*), achieved mainly through breath control and seated meditation posture (*āsana*) practice (PYŚ II.46-47). This mastery leads to the full attainment of *asamprajñātasamādhi*, which conquers death and the five afflictions (*kleśa*), including the will to live (*abhiniveśa*, cf. PYŚ II.9). Having attained contentless *samādhi*, two paths are viable: to return to the world as a *jīvanmukta*, in the case where the practitioner still has seeds of karma to burn; or to abandon the body at the time of death as a *videhamukta*. In the former case, this state is apparently connected to the condition of death, temporarily entailing the cessation of any sort of psycho-physical stimuli. Although the yoga practitioner has voluntarily ceased his psycho-physical functions, he is nonetheless able to return to his body and the ordinary functions of the mind. In the latter case, by inducing one's own death, yoga can also be a method to abandon the body at the time of death.

As discussed above, the term *nirodha* describes the fundamental cessative attitude and all-encompassing practice that applies to all of the psycho-physical stages of *Pātañjalayoga*, which the practitioner has to observe. This reading and comprehensive definition of yoga as *nirodha* (cf. YS I.2: *yogaś cittavṛttinirodhaḥ*) is also suggested by Vācaspatimiśra.¹¹¹ It is only through the steady and persistent performance of *nirodha* that the practitioner fades into the dead-like state depicted as *mṛtavat* or *mṛtakavat*. What follows is a hypothetical reconstruction of the process of *nirodha*, as described in the *yogaśāstra* of Pātañjali. The texts present a precise technique of meditative absorption, in which the mind is progressively emptied of its content. This psycho-physical vacuum is realized through a process, sketched below, of the inhibition of the mind's states and functions, following four different registers of *nirodha*:¹¹²

¹¹¹ Cf. TV/PYŚ I.1 (TV 1919: 2, 23–24): *pravṛttinimittam tu yogaśabdasya cittavṛttinirodha eveti paramārthaḥ*. In his previous statement, Vācaspati stated that the use of the term *yoga* is to be derived from the verbal root *yuj-* in the sense of *samādhi*, namely absorption, and not in the sense of (ordinary) conjunction (*yuja samādhau ity asmād vyutpannaḥ samādhyaṛtho na tu yujir yogē ity asmāt saṃyogārtha ity arthaḥ*). In this reading of *yoga*, *samādhi* results exclusively from yogic practices (*vyutpattinimittamātrābhīdhānaṃ ca etad yogah samādhir iti*).

¹¹² This reconstruction is hypothetical and elaborated for heuristic reasons, as the PYŚ does not provide specific details of the dynamics of *nirodha*. However, scattered in the PYŚ a distinction can be discerned between different levels or aspects of *nirodha*. Among these, two generic forms can be detected, which, in turn, can be further analysed into four sub-forms. The two main typologies of *nirodha* can be here labelled as generic forms, namely *samprajñātasamādhi* and *asamprajñātasamādhi*. These two concern the distinct

1. *Cittavṛttinirodha*: the first negation is achieved by accomplishing cessation (*nirodha*) of any sort of *cittavṛttis*, that is to the five-fold classification of mental occurrences (cf. YS I.6: *pramāṇaviparyayavikalpanidrāsmṛtayah*). This level can be characterized as full awareness of *vivekakhyaṭi*.

2. *Pratyayanirodha*: the second negation comprises a further application of *nirodha* to any stimulus that stimulates *cittavṛttis*. This practice, known as *virāmapratyaya*, eradicates any concept (*pratyaya*) in the mind. In this state, the mind's content is marked only by the subliminal impressions that are left over (*saṃskāraśeṣa*) from the practice of *virāmapratyaya*. This form of practice is described in YS I.18, III.9. Once this threshold is surpassed, the door to *dharmameghasamādhi*, *ṛtambharaprajñā*,¹¹³ *nirbījasamādhi*,¹¹⁴ and *asamprajñātasamādhi* is opened.¹¹⁵

3. *Samskāranirodha*: this practice leads to the cessation of *saṃskāras* and their relative deposits (*āśaya*, cf. YS I.24; II.12), whose function consists, through the *vāsanās* (cf. YS/ YBh IV.8), in giving shape to individual psycho-physical stimuli (*pratyayas*) and mental

application of *nirodha* to *citta* in its emergent state (*vyutthāna*) and the different levels of *samāpatti* up to *asmitā*, and to *citta* in its *niruddha* state.

¹¹³ The expression *ṛtambhara* occurs in YS I.48 and YBh/YS III.51, but it does not receive a specific explanation, except for a tautological one in YBh/YS I.48: *tasmin samāhitacittasya yā prajñā jāyate tasyā ṛtambhareti saṃjñā bhavati. anvarthā ca sā satyam eva bibharti na tatra viparyagandho 'py astīti. Ṛtambhara*, according to YBh/YS III.51 (YBh 1919: 169, 3), is a peculiar state taking place in those yoga practitioners of the *madhubhūmika* class: *ṛtambharaprajñā dvitīyāḥ*. The complete taxonomy of the types of yoga practitioners also includes *prathamakalpika*, *prajñājyotis* and *atīkrāntabhāvanīya*, cf. YBh/YS III.51 (YBh 1919: 169, 1–2): *catvāraḥ khalv amī yoginaḥ prāthamakalpiko madhubhūmikaḥ prajñājyotir atīkrāntabhāvanīyaś ceti*.

¹¹⁴ *Nirbīja* is mentioned in YBh/YS I.2 (*atas tasyāṃ viraktaṃ cittaṃ tām api khyātiṃ niruṇaddhi. tadavasthaṃ saṃskāropagaṃ bhavati. sa nirbījaḥ samādhiḥ*); as already seen, in YBh/YS I.18 (*eṣa nirbījaḥ samādhir asaṃprajñātaḥ*); in YS I.51 (*tasyāpi nirodhe sarvanirodhān nirbījaḥ samādhiḥ*) and in YS III.8 (*tad api bahiraṅgaṃ nirbījasya*) where it is stated that the three *antaraṅgas*, namely *dhāraṇā/dhyāna/samādhi*, are regarded as “outer members,” that is aids (here *bahiraṅgas*, in the sense of auxiliary or secondary means), to attain contentless absorption.

¹¹⁵ *Asamprajñāta*, as well its opposite, is an interesting expression which has often puzzled translators such as Jha (1907) who renders it as “unconscious,” or Dvivedi's (1943) “Ultra-cognitive.” However, considering that the form *a/samprajñāta* is a past passive participle, and as such is rendered as “distinguished, discerned, accurately known.” If this term is not properly contextualized, it may lead one to ignore the function and role of the object of concentration/absorption, which amounts to what is known or not-known in *samādhi*. Cf. YBh/YS I.1, where *asamprajñāta* is related to *nirbījasamādhi*: *sa nirbījaḥ samādhiḥ / na tatra kiṃcit saṃprajñāyata ity asaṃprajñātaḥ*; in YBh/YS I.2: *sarvavṛttinirodhe tv asaṃprajñātaḥ samādhiḥ*; YBh/YS I.18.





events (*cittavṛttis*).¹¹⁶ The cessation of *saṃskāras* can also be described as *sarvanirodha*, mentioned in YS I.51, which is also characterised as *nirbījasamādhi*.¹¹⁷ This represents the final application of *nirodha* to the *saṃskāras*, whose annihilation leads to *kaivalya*, the ultimate goal of yoga.

4. *Nirodhasamādhi*: this state is one in which there is the complete cessation of any mental stimulus. It is equivalent to *nirbījasamādhi*, and corresponds to *kaivalya* (*dr̥śeh kaivalyam*).¹¹⁸

It is in reference to this last form of *nirodha* that the various similes of death become fully pertinent. Chronologically, these kinds of metaphors are evident in the *Haṭhapradīpikā* of Svātmārāma (who uses the terms *kāṣṭhavat* and *mṛtavat*), the YV of Vijñānabhikṣu (who refers to *mṛtakavat*), and the PYV of Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa (who also uses the term *mṛtavat*). As analysed above, the seemingly dead-like state attained by the yoga practitioner during *asamprajñātasamādhi* is the final goal of *Pātañjalayoga*. It is not an actual death, rather its opposite, which is the condition of being fully alive in the realm of *puruṣa*, even though psycho-physical bodily functions are put to rest. To realise the *puruṣa* and let it fully shine, effort and world-renouncing practices are therefore imperative.¹¹⁹ In this sense, by inhibiting and renouncing social bonds, and finding stillness of mind and body, the yoga practitioner seems as if *dead*.

¹¹⁶ It is interesting to note that the PYŚ talks of two varieties of *saṃskāras*, as stated in YS III.9: a) *vyutthānasamskāra*, namely the subliminal-activators of the emergent-state of consciousness; and b) *nirodhasamskāra*, the subliminal-activators of the restricted-state of consciousness. In YS I.50 another *saṃskāra* is mentioned. This *saṃskāra* is born from insight (*prajñā*) and obstructs the other *saṃskāras*. That the *saṃskāras* are related to past activities can be read in YS III.18, where is told that they are the causes, in the form of subliminal traces (*vāsanā*), of memory and afflictions, and also the causes of fruition (*vipāka*) of right or bad actions (*dvaye khalv amī saṃskārāḥ smṛtikleśahetavo vāsanārūpā vipākahetavo dharmādharmarūpāḥ*).

¹¹⁷ Cf. YS I.51: *tasyāpi nirodhe sarvanirodhān nirbījaḥ samādhiḥ*: “Since everything has ceased when even [*prajñāsaṃskāra*] has ceased, seedless *samādhi* arises.

¹¹⁸ Cf. YS II.25 (YS 1919: 96, 5–6): *tadabhāvāt saṃyogābhāvō hānaṃ tadr̥śeh kaivalyam*: “By means of the annihilation of this [*avidyā*, cf. YS II.24: *asya hetur avidyā*], the correlation disappears. This is cessation, the contentlessness of that seeing.” Also cf. YBh/YS II.25 (YBh 1919: 96, 8–9): *tadr̥śeh kaivalyaṃ puruṣasyāmiśrībhāvaḥ punar asaṃyogo guṇair ity arthaḥ*: “This is the cessation, the contentlessness of that seeing, the unmixed state of the Self; in other words, the state in which [the *puruṣa*] is not again correlated with world-constituents (*guṇa*).”

¹¹⁹ In the commentarial literature, there are nevertheless critics of *Pātañjalayoga*. Abhinavagupta’s first *āhnika* of *Tantrāloka* (see Torella 2019) lists the uselessness of *yogāṅgas* (*yogāṅgānupayogitva*); and in the ninth chapter of the *Haṃsavilāsa* of Haṃsamitṭṭhu, a *śaiva* Gujarati author born in 1738 CE (see Vasudeva 2011), there are similar objections. An anonymous opponent’s opinion is reported by the *naiyāyika*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Jason Birch, Peter Pasedach, Dagmar Wujastyk, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and insights. I especially thank Matthew Clark for his very generous work on the English and editing of this paper. I am also grateful to the J. Gonda fund, granted by the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW, Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen), and to the IIAS Institute at Leiden University and its staff members.

ABBREVIATIONS

BS	<i>Brahmasūtra</i> by Bādarāyana
CU	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i>
HP	<i>Hathapradīpikā</i> by Svātmarāma
PYŚ	<i>Pātañjalayogaśāstra</i> (YS and YBh)
PYV	<i>Pātañjalayogasūtravṛtti</i> by Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa
RM	<i>Rājamārtaṇḍa</i> by Bojarāja
TV	<i>Tattvavaiśāradi</i> by Vācaspatimīśra
VAB	<i>Vijñānamṛtabhāṣyam</i> by Vijñānabhikṣu
YBh	<i>Yogabhāṣya</i>

Pakṣilasvāmin Vātsyāyana (4th–5th cents. CE) in regard to *apavarga*, or liberation. As quoted in Bronkhorst (2000: 37, fn. 114), although not here directly addressing the *yogadarśana*, Vātsyāyana in his *Nyāyabhāṣya* on *Nyāyasūtra* I.1.2 (1967: 150), citing an example of wrong ideas (*mithyājñāna*), states that, “Emancipation (i.e., liberation) is dreadful. It consists, as a matter of fact, in the cessation of all effects. Since emancipation is separation from everything, much that is good is lost in it. How could, therefore, a wise man find pleasure in this state of emancipation, in which all happiness has been cut off and which is without consciousness?” (*apavargo bhīṣmaḥ / sa khalv ayaṃ sarvakāryoparamaḥ sarvaviprayoge 'pavarge bahu ca bhadraḥ lopyata iti kathaṃ buddhimān sarvasukhocchedam acaitanyam amum apavargaṃ rocayed iti*). That final release, namely *apavarga*, is central to the Nyāya philosophical system is clear in Gautama's *Nyāyasūtra* (cf. I.1.2: *duḥkhajanmapravṛttidoṣamithyājñānām uttarottarāpāye tadanantarāpāyād apavargaḥ*), where it is referred to as the result of the progressive cessation of sorrow, birth, activity, defect, and wrong ideas (*mithyājñāna*). That the *Pātañjalayoga* is not the type of yoga promoted by the *Nyāyasūtra* and *Bhāṣya* is discussed by Bronkhorst (1981: 310), and Bhattacharya (2004: 6 fn.1, 93). However, in the sense of liberation, the term *apavarga* occurs thirteen times in the PYŚ, and is witnessed in YS II.18 (cf. YS 1919: 81, 5–6: *prakāśakriyāsthitiśīlam bhūtendriyātmakaṃ bhogāpavargārthaṃ dṛśyam*), where the term is used in combination with experience (*bhoga*) to qualify the fundamental objectives of *dṛśya*, “that which is to be seen, or the object,” namely *prakṛti*.



- YVi Pātañjalayogaśāstravivaraṇa/Pātañjalayogasūtrabhāṣyavivaraṇam by Śaṅkara (?)
YS Yogasūtra
YV Yogavārttika by Vijñānabhikṣu

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YOGA STUDIES

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CITATION

Cestola, R. 2024. “Fading into Death through *Pātāñjalayoga*: On the Apparent Dead-like State of the Yoga Practitioner Absorbed into Contentless *Samādhi*” In *Journal of Yoga Studies* (2024), Vol. 5: 69–123. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34000/JoYS.2024.V5.003>.

