

***Kuṇḍalinī*: The Union of Male and Female Principles in Tantric and Yogic Traditions**

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Abstract

Technologies that aid the transcendence of the physical sphere and awaken divine insight have been a pillar in Indian culture as far back as the *Vedas* and possibly even further. That which could not be seen with the physical eye was declared ever-present by the *Rshis*, *Munis* and wandering ascetics who devoted themselves to awakening. Within this culture, understanding the nature of reality through the lens of experience is as much of a discipline as the natural sciences. This is why the literature on the topic of enlightenment has been in abundance over the last 2000 years. To understand the relationship between mind and matter, one must transcend the self. Only then could one ‘see’ the true nature of reality. The vehicle through which this is made possible is the *yogic body*; a subtle body that vibrates beyond our normal sense perception yet governs every aspect of our being. This paper explores the mechanisms behind consciousness and how this manifests as a subtle body. Using the tantric model of the universe as a metaphysical framework, we will look at the union of opposing cosmic (solar and lunar) and physical (*rajas* and *bindu*) principles within *tantric ritual* and *haṭha yogic* systems. Through this worldview, we can understand the function and behaviour of the bi-piston subtle and biological mechanism which brings about the *Kuṇḍalinī* experience and the release of *amṛta*, a divine bliss-inducing nectar.

Key Words: *Bindu*, *rajas*, *yogic body*, *tattwas*, *tantric ritual*, *Kuṇḍalinī Śakti*, *ida*, *pingala*, *suṣumnā*, *amṛta*

Introduction

The development of *Tantra* and *Yoga* in India is one that spans over thousands of years where we see the initial development of God and Goddess worship in the *Vedas* to the development of the yogic body channels in the *Upaniṣads*.¹ Parallel to the development of the yogic body we have an evolving metaphysical framework of the *tattva* system (from the *Sāṅkhya* to *Tantra*). Given the complex timeline

¹ Samuel (2008).

of continually emerging praxis in Indian soteriology, I will only examine one type of yogic body framework in *tantric* ritual and *haṭha* yoga which is that of the sun and the moon.²

We will take a closer look at what *Kuṇḍalinī* is in the fabric of the Tantric universe and our bodies. This metaphysical analysis will act as a framework to hold our understanding of how rituals of transcendence work. We will look in more detail at how the ritual body was purified within the framework of the *tattwa* system in order to bring about psychological transformation.³ By taking a closer look at yoga metaphysics we can gain more insight into the relationship between cosmic forces, the yogic body and the experience of *Kuṇḍalinī*, in the yogic body. By drawing a comparison between the metaphysical framework of the earlier *tantric* universe and the later yogic body in the *haṭha* corpus, we can see how external ritual works on the same cosmic principles as internal psycho-physical yoga.

To unpack this concept further we will look at the relationship between cosmic principles (the sun and moon) and the production of *amṛta/binḍu* in the physical and subtle body. My intention is to understand the energetic mechanisms of *Kuṇḍalinī* and the source of power. Through this investigation of yogic and tantric texts, we can see how the forces in the universe that govern creation are the same forces that animate our minds and bodies. Although the purpose of this study is not to draw comparisons with our current biological model, I will look at the similarities between the yogic body and the physical body. The rituals and practices that I will discuss are related to specific sects; however, they identify commonplace practices seen in many *tantric* and *yogic* texts.⁴

The *Tattwas*, The Goddess and Mind – *Tantric* Metaphysics

When we look at practices from the *Tantric* corpus, we are looking at a system which operates within a matrix of varying subtlety of matter.⁵ Most *tantric* systems of ancient India are built upon the

² We shall refer to the subtle body which brings about a psychic transformation as the 'yogic body'. According to Mallinson (2017) it is important to make the distinction between the physiological beneficial claims of modern yoga and the psychic transformation brought about in premodern yoga. The distinction is important as the 'yogic body' refers to an era of early practices relating to a certain doctrine or ritual which incorporate the subtle channels or *nadi*, psychic centres or *chakras* and psychic knots or *granthis*; it is not a purely physical practice. In the early premodern yogic era, there are as many 'yogic bodies' as there are different practices. Each yogic body may be slightly different depending on the ritual or tradition.

³ The *tattwa* system claims its roots in the *Sāṅkhya* Philosophical system of manifest principles which make up all of matter including mind stuff. However, we can trace this philosophy back further to early vedic times. See Jacobsen, Knut A. (1999).

⁴ The *tattwa* system claims its roots in the *Sāṅkhya* Philosophical system of manifest principles which make up all of matter including mind stuff. However, we can trace this philosophy back further to early vedic times. See Jacobsen, Knut A. (1999).

⁵ See Flood (2006).

metaphysical framework of the *Sāṅkhya tattwa system*,⁶ a list of fundamental states of matter ordered in the stages of manifestation from the subtlest vibrations to the densest matter. When we refer to states of matter, we are referring to *prakṛti*, which includes all manifestations of the mind as well as the corporeal (*prana* or *Śakti* are synonymous terms in the Tantric universe which follows the same principles as the *Sāṅkhya tattwa system*). It is important to note here that there are numerous debates within Indian philosophy that point to the real or non-real nature of *prakṛti*. It is not my intention to debate the nature of *prakṛti*; however, for the purpose of this study, it is important to understand that matter and thought are all differentiations of *prakṛti*. In the *Tantra* and *Sāṅkhya*, we should view *prana* or *Śakti* as the fabric of the entire universe. This ‘fabric’ or energy is an interplay of forces or *guna* which manifest as *sattva* or structure, *raja* or energy, *tamas* or inertia. These forces react with each other causing differentiation in our *pranic* field. Like ripples in a pond creating more complex expanding patterns, so too the interaction of differentiated energies creates all of existence. When this field is predominated with *rajas* and *tamas*, the elements are formed which make up our visible and corporeal reality. The tamasic forces of inertia (*tamas guna*) cause all that is light and subtle to crystallise forming structures of seemingly solid particles. The balance of *sattva guna* holds these structures in a stable form. The energetic *rajasic* forces cause action and reactions to happen between manifest structures. This *pranic field* or *Śakti* is synonymous with *Kuṇḍalinī*; she is the animator of everything that exists, and she will continue to animate the entire universe. The term *Kuṇḍalinī* does not appear until the tantric era much after the development of *Sāṅkhya*; however, her synonymous association with *prakṛti* becomes apparent by what she represents in Tantric ritual.⁷ I will elaborate this point later. Woven into this *pranic* field is pure consciousness, *purusa* or *Śiva*, the silent watcher who *prakṛti* dances for. When one feels a devotion to the ‘silent witness’ *prakṛti* / *Kuṇḍalinī* is steered towards collapsing herself back toward the silent primordial vibration to be with her one true love, *Śiva*, where she stops dancing.⁸

The interaction of *gunas* creates *tattwas* which are the components of the individual being necessary for the human experience. These components are *Buddhi* or divine intellect, *ahamkara* or the ‘I’ maker, *jnanendriyas* or sensory organs, *karmendriyas* or organs of action, *tanmatras* or subtle elements corresponding to the senses, i.e., smells, images etc, and *bhutas* or five elements.⁹ The first instrument

⁶ The early *Sāṅkhya tattwa system* arguably has its roots in the *Upaniṣads* and there are mentions of the *guna* in the *Mahabharata*; however, its established metaphysical concepts can be seen in the *Sāṅkhyakārikā* (569 CE) (Larson, 1979).

⁷ See Goodall (2015) and Timalina (2010).

⁸ See Jacobsen’s reference to the *Sankhya Karika* (1999).

⁹ The *tattwas* can be divided into further components depending on the doctrine used to describe the nature of reality (Burley, 2007).

of consciousness is *Buddhi*, a reflection of pure awareness which has the discernment to identify a separateness from consciousness. *Ahamkara* or 'I maker' is a more complex *Buddhi* that recognises itself as not only separate from consciousness but an entity in its own right. As the *gunas* continue to interact, consciousness becomes more complex forming more intricate instruments of perception. To a tantric or awakened consciousness, reality is no more than waves of photons. A 'normal' consciousness, however, perceives these waves of photons as objects and meaningful things. It is human psychology that translates waves of photons into shared illusory stories and objects. The perpetual creation of mind-stuff is the nature of *manas* or mind caused by the interaction of our instruments of perception. For example, when our eyes look at an object, recognition of that object takes place, then thought association. These thoughts are considered defilements as they cloud the observer's perception of reality. This concept is refined by the *Sāṅkhya* philosophy which has its roots in the Upanishads and is adopted by many streams of philosophy in the traditions of yoga and meditation.¹⁰

The *tattvas* make up our human instruments of perception but they also mirror larger consciousnesses of which we are apart. These fundamental states of consciousness are considered pure and untainted. To a tantric, different states of consciousness or *tattvas* are objective and exist in and of themselves. That is to say that pure states of consciousness can be experienced by the individual, but they also exist as a vibration in our Universe. The boundaries between the objective and subjective start to blur when we enter paradigms of the non-dual mind. In the tantric system, these pure states of consciousness or *tattvas* are often synonymous with different goddesses. The *Vāmakeśvaratantra*,¹¹ a *Śakta* text describes the relationship between the goddesses and the *tattvas*. In the following extract, we can see the deification of the most subtle principle of matter.

4. Oh, beloved! *Tripurāīsthesupremesarti* –the firstborn from the first. She is the mother in whom the three worlds originate with their gross and subtle components. 5. The whole multitude of swallowed-up *tattvas* is her essence.
*Vāmakeśvaratantra*¹²

¹⁰ See Jacobson (1999).

¹¹ The *Vāmakeśvaratantra* (11th Century) is a text belonging to the *Kaula Tantras* of *Kashmir Śaivism* dedicated to the goddess *Tripurasundari* (the primordial ground of being before the *gunas* manifest). This text is known for its internal and external worship of *shakti* (Finn, 1986).

¹² See Finn (1986).

Other forms of the early *Tantras* such as the *Pancaratra*¹³ used the *tattva* system to map out the cosmological universe. We can see that this was further developed by the *Śaiva Siddhanta* who added a further 11 *tattvas* to the already established 25.¹⁴ According to Goodall,¹⁵ we do not find a conclusive list of 36 *tattvas* until the *Nisvāsakārika-Diksottara*.¹⁶ The extended list of *tattvas* represents the extended range of phenomenological experiences of the *tantrika* into loftier nondual states of awareness.

It is important to note that Tantra has developed over many centuries and there is no clear defining point from which *Tantra* became an established practice. One defining feature, however, is that the *tantric tattva* system gives us a pneumatological rather than psychological framework. This is important when visualising how ritual through *mantra*, *yantra* and various yogic techniques work with the mind.¹⁷ To grasp *tantric* and *yogic* practice we must accept that the body is not only composed of flesh and blood but also a finer material that can only be seen, heard, and felt by the initiated. The *yogic body* acts as a vehicle through which natural forces govern the experience of the individual. By *yogic body*, I am referring to *nadi* (subtle nerve-like channels that carry vital forces throughout the body), *chakras* (vortices of energy which project different *tattvas* or dimensions of reality onto our consciousness), *prana* (life force manifest as the breath) and *kuṇḍalinī* (the differentiating life action that is all of existence) as well as thought and all matters of the heart-mind.¹⁸ These thoughts are considered to be external *things* or vibrations which move through the subtle body system causing distorted perceptions of reality. These defilements or thoughts manifest as stains (*mala*) or knots (*granthi*) in the subtle body.¹⁹ So that the *tantrika* can see the true nature of reality one must remove the subtle thought vibrations which clog the *pranic* pathways. When the subtle body is untainted by thought, the practitioner is able to experience each *tattwa* as an objective reality. To the *tantrika*, all reality is a distorted reality unless the subtle body is free from defilements. These stains or knots manifest themselves in the physical being as a range of physical tensions and mental ailments. The practices within the *Tantric* domain are designed to purify

¹³ The *Pancaratra* was an early form of Hinduism originating from the 1st Millennium BCE whose central deity is *Naranya*, he who rests in a yogic slumber. This yogic slumber is synonymous with *puruṣa*, the ground of all being. This figure is associated with *Viśnu* and later developed into *Vaiṣṇavism*.

¹⁴ See Flood (2006).

¹⁵ See Goddall (2015).

¹⁶ See Vasudeva (2004). This text describes the intonation of the mantra '*hamsa*' in the heart region. Through the resonant experience in the body, the cranium is pierced, and one can be united with divinity

¹⁷ See Coomaraswamy (1977).

¹⁸ According to Mallinson (2017), one of the earliest mentions of *kuṇḍalinī* is from the pre 10th century text *Sārdhatriśatikālottaratantra* which refers to her as the 'primordial coiled' resting in the heart.

¹⁹ See Dupuche (2003).

and protect the subtle body from defilements and redirect the flow of energy to subtle channels which initiate the experience of more subtle consciousnesses.

Tantric Ritual and Purification

A good example of the purification process is outlined in the *Kaula* system by *Abinavagupta*. A typical ritual procedure within *tantric* practice consists of five parts starting with *Bhutasuddhi* or purification of the body as representing the cosmos. Secondly, *Nyasa*, a process of encoding the body with the symbolic representations of the deity to map the universe onto our physical being. Thirdly, mental and physical offerings to one's God in the performance of a fire sacrifice. Lastly, mantra repetition or *Japa* while visualising the deity associated with the mantra.²⁰ Below is an extract from the *Tantraloka*²¹ 29 describing the purification of the body before *nyasa* from the *Kaula* tradition.

Tantraloka 29

Sl. 20 If he wishes to perform an initiation (the mantra) is then ritually installed on the pathway to be purified. Next, utilizing *śakti* alone, he should bestow immortality on the articles to be purified. ||20||

By way of *nyasa*, a process which involves entextualisation of the body, the *sādhaka* (practitioner) ritually places a *bija* mantra or seed syllable onto particular parts of the body. By doing this, the *sādhaka* is planting the vibratory signature of a particular consciousness into the subtle body of *chakras* and *nadis*.

In the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā Uttarasūtra*²² (5.3-31), one of the oldest surviving *Śaiva Tantras*, we see a practice of dissolution through the *tattvas* whereby the *sādhaka* meditates on each principal component or *tattva*. In *Tantric* practice, each *tattva* is envisioned as a *bija* or seed mantra until the practitioner experiences the phenomenon of dissolution within the body; a practice otherwise known as *laya yoga*. Each aspect of reality from the divine to the corporeal vibrates with the sound of a particular *bija* or sacred syllable. Each vibration of reality is woven into existence from its preceding realm.²³ The *bija* or seed mantra/syllable is a physical manifestation of a letter and sound which represents the vibratory

²⁰ See Goudriaan (1992).

²¹ For *Tantraloka* 29 See Dupuche (2003, 195).

²² The *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā Uttarasūtra* is dated to around the 9th century. It is a Nepalese tantric text and probably one of the oldest surviving complete scriptures of the *Mantramarga* (Goodall, 2015).

²³ See Dupuche (2003).

signature of a principle *tattva* or deity.²⁴ Dissolution of the self consists of a sense of merging with everything beyond the body. The illusion of the self as a separate entity starts to dissolve in order of grossest to subtlest. The *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā* describes one process of entextualisation as follows.²⁵

Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā

2:8 On the right (side of the body) he should place the seeds [=consonants]; on the left, he should arrange the womb [=vowels]. [Thus] transformed into Siva, serene (*prasannatma*), he should begin the worship of Siva.

Goodall interprets this part of the text as the worshipper's body being the microcosm of the macrocosm. The body is identified with *Śiva* and the womb and seed are synonymous with the interplay between *Śiva* (Pure consciousness) and *Śakti* (*prana*, *gunas*, *prakṛti*, all manifest matter subtle and gross). The worshiper must view himself/ herself as *Śiva* before the entextualisation commences. The initiate was able to recite the *bija*, invoking enough resonance fuelled with faith and devotion to awaken and move the *prana* or life force in the subtle body. The *Kaula* system illustrates 12 distinct stages of sound where its vibration is the vehicle of pure consciousness toward self-expression with each body part holding a particular *bija*. This is why mantra plays a central role in practices that awaken consciousnesses. We are a sonic symphony of an entire universe.²⁶

It is through this ideology that we can imagine the self as a mandala of deities expanding out from the central channel (*suṣumnā*) in multiple dimensions. The pictorial representation of the *mandala* is often a two-dimensional map, yet its actual form transcends space and time as we move from gross to subtle aspects of our being, where pure awareness is the centre. This framework is used across many different lineages of practice; however, the recipient Gods, Goddesses and practices may slightly differ according to tradition.²⁷ Here we can see Gods and Goddesses representing different states of consciousness, *Kuṇḍalinī* being associated with the goddess *Śakti*. Within the tantric corpus, one of the earliest mentions of *Kuṇḍalinī* is in the *Sārdhatriśatikālottara* (12.1–2) where this primordial energy lies coiled at the heart.²⁸ Another one of her earliest mentions is in a pre-10th century text the *Tāntrikābhidhānakośa*. Both of these texts associate the ascent of *Kuṇḍalinī* with nectar being released over the whole body

²⁴ See Goodall (2015) and Timalina (2010).

²⁵ See Goodall (2015, 351)

²⁶ See Dupuche (2003) and Dyczkowski (2004).

²⁷ See Dyczkowski (2004).

²⁸ See Mallinson and Singleton (2017).

resulting in bliss and physical rejuvenation. This nectar later became known in hatha texts as *amṛta* a divine liquid produced in the skull which provides us with our physical life force.

Divine Anatomy and the Physical and Metaphysical Process of *Kuṇḍalinī*

We start to see the development of *haṭha* yoga from as early as the 11th Century where ritual becomes internalised through physical practices.²⁹ These practices move or control *prana* or life force around the body through breath retention, yogic postures and stilling the mind. It is from these practices that we see a more emphasis on the yogic body of psychophysical channels through which *prana* moves around the human system, animating the whole being.³⁰ Within the different *Kuṇḍalinī* stimulating yogic systems, there are different practices that give agency to different phenomenological outcomes. There are also several different yogic body models. As the history of the yogic body in Ancient India is complex and vast, I have focused on the model of the Sun, the Moon and *amṛta* in *tantric* and *haṭha* yoga to describe the nature of *Kuṇḍalinī* in the human body. A similar model is also practised in the Vajrayana Buddhist system.³¹

One of the many goals of practice is to move *prana* or *Kuṇḍalinī Śakti* into the central channel, *Suṣumṇā*, so that it can move to the desired subtle channel in the cranium vault. It is through this process that divine nectar or *amṛta* is released throughout the body.³² The experience is a sensation of bliss that drips through the skull saturating every cell. As in the tantric ritual, the central channel is a means to access a realm beyond time and space. A quantum leap into a dimension which transcends the illusory solid world bringing the benefits of longevity, joy, inspiration and mental insights.

***Bindu* – The Mind, Life Force, Semen/Menses**

Before I continue to describe the yogic body of *Kuṇḍalinī*, it is important to describe the bridge between the subtle channels and their physical manifestation in the body. By using the *tattva* model, we can see how the constant influence of *rajas*, *tamas* and *sattva* continues to interact creating more complex systems from the subtlest to the grossest. Of *prana*, air is formed; of *prana* and air, fire is formed; of *prana*, air and fire, water is formed; of *prana*, air, fire and water, earth is formed. Of these elements, the corporeal is formed of more concrete systems. From pure states of consciousness, subtle channels

²⁹ The *Amṛtasiddhi* is an 11th century Buddhist text which demonstrates one of the earliest forms of *haṭha* yoga. See Mallinson and Singleton (2017).

³⁰ We see the earliest form of subtle channels as far back as the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (2.1.19). See Olivelle (1996)

³¹ See Gyatso, Geshe Kelsang (1982).

³² See White (1996).

are formed between our instruments of perception to allow the flow of *prana* to animate the bodily systems. Just as the three *gunas* interact with each other creating more complex vibratory *pranic* fields, they do the same for the yogic body in the form of *doshas* (physical constitutions). These are *vata* (air and ether - *sattva*), *kapha* (water and earth - *taṃas*) and *pitta* (fire and water - *rajas*). To keep the body functioning harmoniously we must keep the *doshas* balanced;³³ When the *doshas* are balanced, thought is still and calm.

Bindu, Rasa Amṛta

From as early as the Vedas the term *Rasā* was known to signify the fluids that enable the interaction of biological functions. These are the vital fluids of blood, bile, saliva, semen, sap, etc. and of course, the ocean. If the universe is the flow of *pranic* forces then *Rasā* is the fluid through which physical manifest principles continue to interact and create.³⁴ In Vedic theory, the moon became identified with the vital fluids in all living things as it was the moon that gave us our life-giving water.³⁵ In the Rig Veda we also see a comparison between *soma* (the immortalising elixir only drunk by the gods) being drained from the moon as it wanes.³⁶ As practices of transcendence evolved from external sacrifices of the Vedas to the inner efforts of yoga and meditation (*Āraṇyakas* and *Upaniṣads*), we can see many references to inner fluid essences, of which the most precious is *amṛta*.³⁷ According to many texts and traditions, *amṛta* is a fluid-like substance which builds up in the cranium vault and is governed by the waxing and the waning of the moon.³⁸ *Amṛta* is the purest essence of life which flows through the yogic body channels and nourishes the system as it is broken down into bodily fluids.³⁹

In normal waking consciousness, *amṛta* is said to flow down through *ida*. As it flows down *ida nadi* it nourishes and activates the whole body. The corresponding sympathetic ganglia ready the body for fight or flight and energise the external life. Located in the lower abdomen is a cosmogenic concentrated source of heat and energy, otherwise known as the sun or solar energy. The *Chandogya Upaniṣads*

³³ See White (1996).

³⁴ 10.9 Waters of Life, Rig Veda. See O'Flaherty 1981

³⁵ 9.112 A Hymn to Soma, *The Rig Veda*. See O'Flaherty (1981).

³⁶ 10.85 The Marriage of Sūryā. *The Rig Veda*. See O'Flaherty (1981).

³⁷ Yoga Kuṇḍalinī Upaniṣads. (Aiyar, 2013)

³⁸ *Chandogya Upaniṣad* (5.4.1-5.9.2). See Olivelle (1996).

³⁹ See White (1996).

describe the origin of the female cosmic principle, *rajas*, as the sun.⁴⁰ This female principle resides in every yogi/yogin in the solar plexus providing the necessary heat to initiate the yogic procedure. This could be the earliest reference to *Kuṇḍalinī Śakti*.⁴¹ This solar energy burns up through *pingala nadi* and pervades the body consuming the life-giving force, *amṛta*. As our solar fires consume *amṛta*, the external life is lived. The food that we eat is transformed by this solar energy to create fuel and bodily constituents or *dhatu*s. These constituents are “chyle (*rasa*), blood (*rakta*), flesh (*mamsa*), fat (*inedas*), bone (*asthi*), marrow (*najja*), and finally, in men, semen or sperm (*sukra, retas*). In women, the seventh *dhatii* is uterine or menstrual blood (*sonita, artava*), or, after childbirth, breast milk.”⁴²

Earlier texts such as the 11th century *Amṛtasiddhi*⁴³ describe a substance which is the bridge between the vibratory universe, *prana*, the mind and our life-giving substance or nectar. This life-giving nectar is *bindu*; a substance which can be equated to mind (*chitta*), life force (*prana*) and semen/menstrual fluid.⁴⁴ *Bindu* of the earlier texts is often equated with an actual physical substance. The inner transformation of semen/menses into bliss is brought about by stilling *bindu*. The *Amṛtasiddhi* is the earliest known text to use both cosmic principles, the sun and the moon in the body as a co-dependent life animating system.⁴⁵

According to the text he who can control the winds (*prana*) controls *bindu* as they are the same. This is a significant association as it parallels our tantric worldview of *Kuṇḍalinī* as *prakṛti* and *prana* in her differentiated and undifferentiated state. At the top of the central channel resides *Bindu* or the male principle (*Śiva*) otherwise known as the lunar secretions.⁴⁶ According to the *Amṛtasiddhi* it moves through the left channel or *ida* and nourishes the body. *Bindu* also resides in the central channel and gives life when it takes the form of menstrual fluid and semen.⁴⁷ Solar energy or fire (*rajas*) moves

⁴⁰ See Olivelle (1996).

⁴¹ See Olivelle, (1996).

⁴² See White (1996) and Olivelle (1996)

⁴³ The *Amṛtasiddhi* is originally a Tibetan Buddhist text which is translated into Sanskrit. See Mallinson and Singleton (2017).

⁴⁴ See Mallinson (2016).

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ The synonymous relationship between the moon and *bindu* is made clear in chapter 7 of the *Amṛtasiddhi* 7.3 ‘This is *bindu*, this is the moon, this is the seed, this is the ichor. . . This is the element, this vital essence, this is the essence of everything.’ Mallinson and Singleton (2017, p220).

⁴⁷ Ibid (*Amṛtasiddhi* 3.1-4).

up *pingala* (right channel) and ‘pervades the entire body’, as it does so it consumes the lunar excretions bringing the natural order of time and decay to the body.⁴⁸

The *Amṛtasiddhi*

1. The sphere of the sun is at the base of the Central Channel, complete with twelve digits, shining with its rays.
2. The lord of creatures (Prajāpati), of intense appearance, travels upwards on the right. Staying in the pathways in the spaces (*ākāśapatha*) in the channels it pervades the entire body.
3. The sun consumes the lunar secretion, wanders in the sphere of the wind and burns up all the bodily constituents in all bodies.

The sphere of the winds refers to the *prana* that flows around the body nourishing and animating each part via the *nadis*. The goal, therefore, is to keep *bindu* in the head rather than let it drop into the digestive fires of the sun or solar energy. By stilling the mind through certain ‘hatha’ yogic postures and meditation then *bindu* (semen/menses) is not lost. In this model, *Bindu* is a physical substance which must be stored in the head.

Amṛtasiddhi 4.21-23⁴⁹

(21) Nada is *bindu* and that is what the mind is said to be. In the practice, these three are one.

(22) Although these three are present as one in the body, it is when the breath is mastered that they are all certain to attain perfection.

(23) When the breath stops through contact with the middle of the Goddess of the Centre, then *bindu* and the mind stop together with the breath.

Although we have been discussing the physiological aspects of *amṛta/bindu* we must remember that it is also a vibration from the finest material before all of manifestation. It is, therefore, often experienced as a sound or vibration passing through the gross physical body. Here, we can see another parallel to our earlier tantric ritual where sound is the manifest principle of various pure states of consciousness. The *Vimalaprabhā*, an 11th Century *Saiva Tantric* texts also refers to ‘*nada*’ or inner sound as a means to still the breath and *bindu*.⁵⁰ This text describes in more detail how mastering the breath coupled with concentration on the central channel purifies the mind causing a more subtle inner sound which brings about the inner psychic alchemical transformation of the mind.

⁴⁸ The *Amṛtasiddhi*. See Mallinson 2016

⁴⁹ See Mallinson and Singleton (2017).

⁵⁰ See Mallinson and Singleton (2017).

These three elements, the breath, the mind and *bindu* appear to be separate manifest principals when they are not controlled; however, when the mind stops moving *bindu*/mind/breath is undisturbed and spontaneous *pratyahara* or withdrawal of the senses commences. According to the *Amṛtasiddhi*, *rajas*, the ‘cosmic principle’ or solar energy is only awoken in the central channel when *bindu* is still. It is the internal uniting of *bindu* (mind, *prana* and semen/menstrual fluid) and *rajas* (the cosmic solar principle or *Kuṇḍalinī Śakti*) in the central channel that brings about *laya* yoga, dissolution back to the source.

Ida and Pingala – the process of living and dying.

The *Śivasamhitā* is a famous 14th-century Hatha Yoga text which describes the yogic body in more detail.⁵¹ Mallinson states that this text shares many verses with the earlier *Amṛtasiddhi*. According to the *Śivasamhitā*⁵² the body has 350,000 subtle channels or *nadi*, three of which are the most important, *ida*, *pingala* and *Suṣumnā*. *Suṣumnā* corresponds to the central nervous system. We know that the very first part of the foetus to form is the innermost neural tube of the spinal column. *Ida* and *pingala* branch out into a complex system of *nadis* which govern every part of our physiology and psyche. According to Woodroff, *ida* and *pingala* correspond to two chains of nerve fibres of the sympathetic ganglia.⁵³ According to Roney-Dougal, lunar *ida* pays more resemblance to the fight or flight sympathetic nervous system and solar *pingala* the digestive parasympathetic nervous system.⁵⁴ If we are to go by the *amrita*, sun and moon yogic body model, then Roney-Dougal’s comparison makes more sense. I will explain this in more detail later. When *Kuṇḍalinī* flows along with *ida* and *pingala* our senses are engaged and interact with the outside world. The nervous system is in a sense a projector, projecting our experience onto our consciousness.

Below is an extract from the *Śivasamhitā*⁵⁵ where the nature and location of solar energy is described.

Śivasamhitā

2.33 In the region of the abdomen, at the middle of the orb of the sun
and endowed with twelve digits, is a blazing fire which digests food.

⁵¹ Mallinson James (2007).

⁵² See Mallinson James. (2007) The Siva Samhita is an important Yoga text from the 17th century describing the detailed yogic anatomy of *Kuṇḍalinī* and the yogic body. Due to its popularity, it was formed as part of a collection of works into another famous yoga text the Hathapradipika.

⁵³ See Woodroff (2003).

⁵⁴ See Roney Dougal (2002) & Noback, C. R., Strominger, N., Demarest, R., & Ruggiero, D. (2005).

⁵⁵ Mallinson James (2007).

2.34 This Vaisnavara fire is born from a piece of my [Śiva] own fire.

Situated in the bodies of living being, it digests food in various ways.

2.35 Fire lengthens life, invigorates, and nourishes. It also quickens the body and brings about the destruction of disease.

Our parasympathetic system burns energy by experiencing life through our senses. Here, we can see that *pingala* corresponds to the digestive parasympathetic system. When these two systems are aroused enough and calm enough life is less stressful and the body functions harmoniously. This mental and physical homeostasis provides the body with perfect health and a strong immune system; a perfect foundation for meditative states where *Kuṇḍalinī* can enter the central channel. We know that an overactive sympathetic system (*ida*) can cause stress and physical burnout; the parasympathetic system (*pingala*) must work extra hard to balance out the system which ultimately leads to a depleted life force.⁵⁶

The bodily processes of *ida* and *pingala*, moon and sun, *amṛta* and digestive fires are all that aid the living, growing and dying process. The source of this digestive fire is *Kuṇḍalinī* energy. While animating the mind and the body in an extroverted interaction with an ‘outside’ world, *Kuṇḍalinī* resides coiled three and half times like a snake at the bottom of the spine with her mouth covering the aperture to the *Suṣumnā nadi* or central column like a snake eating its tail. Earlier tantric texts such as the *Yogabija* describe *Kuṇḍalinī* as coiled in the solar plexus or below the navel around a khanda or bundle of *nadis* by the base of the spine.⁵⁷ In this state, she drains any remaining *amṛta* into her mouth, creating and experiencing *maya*, our illusory reality. Much like our earlier *tantric* thought, yogic theory affirms that interaction with the outside world creates defilements in the mind and causes a state of ‘ignorance’. The more we interact with the outside world the more our solar energy consumes our life-giving nectar. This keeps us trapped in the process of ageing and dying. As *Kuṇḍalinī* remains coiled with her mouth over *suṣumnā nadi*, she is unable to move to her primordial state in the central channel and experience union with non-dual pure consciousness, releasing us from our mortal coil. Her ascent through the central channel can be equated to the earlier tantric model of *Laya Yoga* where the dissolution for the self occurs by experiencing each *tattwa* as a pure objective reality until the ultimate *tattwa* is realised. When *Kuṇḍalinī* reaches her final destination through the central channel *amṛta* is released throughout the body and immortality is realised. *Immortality* being the direct experience of non-dual reality free from the dimensions of space and time.

***Viśuddha Amṛta* and the Moon**

⁵⁶ Noback, C. R., Strominger, N., Demarest, R., & Ruggiero, D. (2005).

⁵⁷ See Mallinson and Singleton (2017).

Our connection to the movement of the sun and moon is more than a mythic cosmology. According to the Ayurvedic model of the year, as the earth moves around the sun our system is influenced by the seasons and the solstices. The relationship between the moon and the sun is one of life-giving and life-taking respectively. As the sun rises high in the sky, she draws life force to the extremities of all living beings creating abundance in the illusory world. She also feeds our inner solar energy which consumes our life-giving nectar. As the sun lowers in the sky and life force has been drained, introverted replenishment of *rasā* or *amṛta* by way of the moon begins.⁵⁸ The Indian Ayurvedic seasonal model tells us that the sun begins its return on the 14th of January where our own solar energy is calm, and our inner moon is brimming with *amṛta*. It moves away on the 14th of July after depleting *amṛta* from our system.⁵⁹ Another cycle within the annual cycle is the lunar month. As the moon waxes, the *rasā* or moon substance, *amṛta*, rebuilds itself internally. As the moon wanes into the darker fortnight the *rasā* is depleted as it energises the body and mind, and the external life is lived.

The *tattwas* which were represented as *bija* in early tantric ritual develop into a chakra system. The chakras become the centres that govern the lived experience of each *tattwas* from the grossest at the base of the spine to the most subtle at the crown of the head.⁶⁰ In our sun moon model, the governing centre of *amṛta* is located at the *Viśuddha cakra* and is known to have 16 petals that are associated with 16 digits or *kalās*.⁶¹ The *kalās* represent the passing of time or phases of the moon; sixteen divisions including the new moon (when *amṛta* is depleted) until the full moon (when *amṛta* is full) and then another sixteen divisions including the full moon to the new moon. The sixteenth digit is when the moon falls out of time to be with its source.⁶² This mechanism is governed by the *Viśuddha Chakra* which could be paralleled to the thyroid and parathyroid glandular system at the throat. The glandular system then controls the metabolic system which governs how much energy is available to the individual. The thyroid system is controlled by the neurochemistry of the pineal ‘master’ gland (*Ajna Chakra*) which is affected by our circadian rhythms of the sun and the moon, day and night.⁶³

⁵⁸ We can see an early reference to this in the Chandogya Upanishad (5.4.1-5.9.2). See Olivelle (1996).

⁵⁹ See White (1996).

⁶⁰ See Mallinson and Singleton (2017).

⁶¹ See Woodroof (2003).

⁶² See White (1996).

⁶³ See Roney Dougal (2002).

The Viśuddha Chakra controls the movement of *amṛta* from its source (*bindu*) to *ida nadi* or to the tenth door. In some texts, the tenth door is associated with a small *chakra* located at the uvula called *Lalanā* where *amṛta* is stored.⁶⁴ There are also many references to a curved duct known as *banka nala* or *Sankhini nadi*. This duct joins the hollow in the palatal region to the tenth door or *daśamadvāra*, where *amṛta* gathers.⁶⁵ The *Sankhini channel* is described in the *Goraksa-vijaya*⁶⁶ as a serpent with a mouth at both ends where *Mahā-Rasā* or *amṛta* passes through. *Lalanā*, *Sahasrāra* and *Viśuddha* function together when *Kuṇḍalinī* enters the central channel as the directional flow of *amṛta* is governed by *Viśuddha*. *Viśuddha chakra* normally sends the *amṛta* to *ida nadi*; if *Viśuddha* is awakened then she purifies *amṛta* and sends it to *Sahasrāra* where it rains bliss over the body. If the yogin/yogini can absorb the nectar himself or herself via *Sahasrāra* before it is consumed by the fire in *pingala*, then the yogin/yogini can experience immortality. We can see an example of this in a 14th-century text the *Khecarīvidyā*.⁶⁷

Khecarīvidyā 5.4.2

Between Idā and Piṅgalā is the luminous Suṣumnā. (9) There is an undecaying light there, free of the qualities of colour and shape. She who looks like a sleeping serpent is the great Kuṇḍalinī. (10) Gaṅgā and Yamunā are called Idā and Piṅgalā. [The yogi] should insert that goddess, in the form of the supreme amṛta, between Gaṅgā and Yamunā, (11) as far as the abode of Brahmā, O goddess. Truly he becomes identical with Brahmā and automatically gets an immortal body for ever. (12) The goddess, having reached the abode of Śiva, the place beyond the Supreme Lord, satiated by the pleasure of enjoying that place and filled with supreme bliss, (13) sprinkling the body of the yogi from the soles of his feet to his head with the dewy, unctuous, cool nectar, O supreme goddess, (14) proceeds again by the same path to her own home, O goddess. This is the secret yoga taught [by me], O you who are honoured by the master yogis.

In the texts, practices, and yogic bodies from the 14th century onwards we see an overlay of tantric practices which use the chakras and *Kuṇḍalinī* to release *bindu/amṛta* over the body as rejuvenating bliss

⁶⁴ Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati 6.79–91 See Mallinson and Singleton (2017).

⁶⁵ See Das Gupta (1960) and White (1996).

⁶⁶ 17th or 18th-century text belonging to the Natha cult (Akademi, 1997). The text tells stories of two heroes *Matsyendrānath's* and *Gorakānath's* search for immortality in the *haṭha* yogic tradition.

⁶⁷ See Mallinson and Singleton (2017).

resulting in dissolution rather than keeping *bindu* in the head as we have seen from the *Amṛtasiddhi*.⁶⁸ This overlay of *tantric* traditions upon *hatha* yogic practices is why there are some contradictory processes regarding the storage or release of *bindu/amṛta*.⁶⁹

Awakening *Kuṇḍalinī*

In most traditions of yoga and meditation in the East, the ability to still the mind is a paramount feature of enlightenment. Through all the *nadis*, *prana* carries vibrations and impressions of various activities and interactions with the outside world. By withdrawing the senses from all outside activity, even the thought processes, *prana* becomes still in the *nadis*. As *prana* stills and the mind becomes more introverted, *prana* becomes more active in the central channel or central nervous system and stirs the primordial *Kuṇḍalinī*. That which we focus on becomes more apparent. In this case, by focusing on the very essence of life itself we animate *Kuṇḍalinī*, in her purest form.⁷⁰ By channelling all the *prana*, which usually flows through the 350,000 *nadis*, into the central channel we can arouse this sleeping *sakti*. We can also do this by actively calming the sympathetic system (*ida*) and the parasympathetic system (*pingala* and solar digestive fires). By reducing the stresses of an extroverted life, one's metabolism, heart rate and adrenals slow down leading to a longer healthier life.

We can see another reference to the movement of *amṛta* in the *Kāmakalāvīlāsa*⁷¹ and the *Śivasamhitā*.⁷² These texts describe *Suṣumṇā* as a collective unit of three *nadis*. One inside the other, the outer layer being *Suṣumṇā*. Within *Suṣumṇā* is *Vajrini*, which is the white nervous matter of the spinal cord. Within this *nadi* is *Citrini*, otherwise known as *Brahma nadi*, the finest and most subtle *nadi* within *Suṣumṇā*. It is within this *nadi* that the *Kuṇḍalinī Śakti* must enter to access *amṛta* where it is stored in the cranial vault.

Śivasamhitā

⁶⁸ The *Yoga Kuṇḍalinī Upanishads* are a part of the *Kṛṣṇa Upanishads* and may be much earlier than the 14th century.

⁶⁹ There are many *hatha* texts which describe a practice called *khichari mudra*. *Amṛta* is prevented from falling into the digestive fires by turning to tongue up to block it from falling from a cavity above the soft palate. This practice is said to result in rejuvenation.

⁷⁰ See Mallinson (2007), *The Siva Samhita*.

⁷¹ Woodroof's *Serpent Power* is largely responsible for the introduction of tantra and yoga to the west and how the six-chakra system of the became widely known.

⁷² A *hatha* yogic text from the 14th Century. See Mallinson and Singleton (2017).

(2.16) In the middle is the *Chitra nadi*. She is beloved of me. In her is the aperture of Braham, which is considered to be extremely subtle.

(2.17) Resplendent in five colours, she is pure, goes through the middle of *Suṣumṇā*, is the substrate of the body, and has a different appearance from *Suṣumṇā*.

(2.18) This divine path is said to bestow immortality and bliss. Merely by meditating on it a master yogi destroys all his sins.

The *Yoga Kuṇḍalinī Upanishads*, a minor Upanishad, written after the Yoga Sutras is said to be an earlier text on detailed practices to awaken *Kuṇḍalinī* in the central column. In this text, we see an interesting reference to the moon residing in the central channel and when it is heated by *Kuṇḍalinī* it moves up. Simultaneously, the moon residing in the head, “*Mandala* (sphere) or the moon”, begins to flow as a result of the blood in the body being transformed (into bile?) by the heat of *Kuṇḍalinī*.⁷³

Yoga Kuṇḍalinī Upanishads

(63) When the impurities (of Chitta) are thus removed and Prana is absorbed in Susumna, he becomes a (true) Yogin.

(64) Apana, which has a downward tendency should be raised up with effort by the contraction (of the anus) and this is spoken of as Mulabandha.

(65) Apana thus raised up mixes with Agni and then they go up quickly to the seat of Prana. Then Prana and Apana uniting with one another go to Kundalini, which is coiled up and asleep.

(66-67) Kundalini being heated by Agni and stirred up by Vayu, extends her body in the mouth of Susumna, pierces the Brahmagranthi formed of rajas and flashes at once like lightning at the mouth of Susumna.

(68-69(a)) Then it goes up at once through Vishnugranthi to the heart. Then it goes up through Rudragranthi and above it to the middle of the eyebrows; having pierced this place, it goes up to the Mandala (sphere) of the moon.

(69(b)-70(a)) It dries up the moisture produced by the moon in the Anahata-Chakra having sixteen petals.⁷⁴

(70(b)-71) When the blood is agitated through the speed of Prana, it becomes bile from its contact with the sun, after which it goes to the sphere of the moon where it becomes of the nature of the flow of pure phlegm. How does it (blood) which is very cold become hot when it flows there?

(72) (Since) at the same time the intense white form of moon is speedily heated. Then being agitated, it goes up.

⁷³ See Aiyar (2013)

⁷⁴ This model describes the heart as having 16 petals rather than the Vissudha Chakra.

(73) Through taking in this, Chitta which was moving amidst sensual objects externally, is restrained there. The novice enjoying this high state attains peace and becomes devoted to Atman.

In this text we also see another reference to removing the impurities in *citta* (mind) and moving *prana* into the central channel.

In the earlier model of the sun, the moon and the *bindu* from the *Amṛtasiddhi* we see a practice where the aspirant must still the *prana* in his/her body to retain *bindu* in the cranium vault and not waste the seed of vitality. In later models, we see a mechanism where *prana* is moved into the central column and *bindu/amrita* is melted and flooded through the system providing vitality and bliss. In both models, stilling the mind is an important part of the activation process yet the mechanisms slightly differ.

Case Study 1

Although this paper is not a phenomenological study, I have included two case studies to highlight the very visceral, physical and psychic experience of *Kuṇḍalinī* rising. Intense experiences such as the ones below are often spontaneous and consume the body beyond the control of the person. For the sake of privacy, we shall refer to case study 1 as Jon.

Jon had been awake for a few days and had not eaten nor slept. He was not delirious nor hungry, but he felt hypersensitive and hyper-aware of everything. As he lay awake on his back, he felt a strong movement of electricity spiral around the area of his solar plexus. In absolute terror at this intense experience, the feeling subsided. Later that evening as he lay there awake, a complete rigidity came over him and a single stream of light began to move slowly up his spine until it reached the base of his skull. From this point the light branched out into seven beams from a point in the nape of his neck; one beam moved over the top of his head and three on the left and three on the right to re-join at his forehead. As this was happening, he said he was able to see in multiple dimensions simultaneously. His point of view was everywhere. As the beams of light separated over his head an overwhelming sensation of bliss and ecstasy dripped over his body. He describes the feeling as a mixture of electricity and orgasm through every cell. It is interesting to note that this event took place on the full moon in May (Weysak). Jon meditated very little during this time, but he felt compelled to live a strictly moral life to the point of not wearing or eating any animal products. During this time, he was often in a state of devotion to divinity. He did not know what was happening to him during the experience and had never heard of *Kuṇḍalinī* before.

Not long after this experience, Jon reported that he felt a continual flow of a silky ‘phlegm’ like substance flow from his nasal cavity. This event happened spontaneously, and the ‘flow’ continued for a few hours and never happened again after. He reported not having a cold or any other sinus issue during this time.

Case Study 2

A second anecdotal experience of *Kuṇḍalinī* rising happened to a 21-year-old female. Laying in her bed she felt her navel heat up as well as the corresponding point on her spine. As this was happening, she could see all her boyfriend’s thoughts and emotions as he lay next to her. Waves of intense energy welled up and burst out through her whole body. There was energy which felt like a rod of highly charged electricity spiralling around her navel. The intensity of the feeling frightened her and made her curl up into a ball. An external force then made her body straighten out beyond her control. So much so that it felt like there was space between each vertebra. When her spine could straighten no more, she felt and saw intense blue electric energy shoot out from the base of her spine out of the top of her head very fast. The flame seemed to have a wide circumference and it seemed to burst out a foot or so above her head. She describes the sensation as very physical, as though it was moving through her spinal column. It was also visible through an internal eye. She drifted in and out of sleep after this event. In the night she was awoken with a loud noise in her head like the rushing of a jet engine. The jet engine turned into the rustling of the trees and the insects outside. The noise was so loud it was maddening. She relayed that it felt as though it was coming from inside her head. She relays that it was a full moon and after the experience, she felt very alive. There was no sensation of bliss, but every sense was alive with vivid clarity. There were many experiences which lead up to this point. She was not practising yoga or meditation at the time, yet she reports being very devoted to divinity.

Both interviewees described these events as completely life-changing to both individuals. Both individuals describe a number of psychic phenomena which lead to *Kuṇḍalinī* rising. The events involved psychic insights into the primordial state of the universe and its unfolding.

Conclusion

I have discussed this phenomenon as the driving force behind all of creation which culminates in the mechanism of the internal bi-piston hydraulic sun and moon system in the body. We have only viewed a handful of texts which describe *Kuṇḍalinī* in this context; however, there are hundreds more, some of which are still being translated. The evolutionary path of the textual and practice tradition of arousing *Kuṇḍalinī* can be seen as a movement of the ritualised cosmogenic principles meditated upon and envisioned as the body as well as ritually encoded into the body through *nyasa*, to the internalisation of cosmic principles as differentiated substances from the most subtle as nada and the grossest as semen. What does remain a constant throughout the ages is a transmutation of the mind from the grossest mundane engagement with the world to supra sensual dissolution back into our primordial origins. The

earlier tantric metaphysical framework has acted as a scaffolding to support the psychological transformation of the tantric as a result of ritual; however, the living teaching of *Kuṇḍalinī* as a lived phenomenon has always been the key to union with pure consciousness. The nature of reality will never change but the lens through which it is observed will continue to evolve. We can see that the later hatha texts focus less on the metaphysical framework and more on the mechanisms within the yogic body. This is arguable due to the growing need to collapse the sectarian divide between different yogic *sampradaya* or traditions due to conflicting doctrines. Yoga is for everyone and not reserved for those belonging to a particular sect.

As we can see from the history of texts, we have a constantly evolving yogic body that details the internal mechanism of *Kuṇḍalinī*. We can continue to advance this model by merging horizons between our understanding of our physiology and mysticism. By widening our scope even further we are looking at a mechanism that provides insight into the very nature of the fabric of the universe. Insights that align the human being towards a larger cycle of connectivity. Today we are learning more about the biological and symbiotic nature of the world around us. From models of quantum consciousness to the effects of the moon and sun on our biorhythms. The interconnectivity of the body and the world around us is another example of how *Kuṇḍalinī* is the mother creatrix of our lived experience.

Some issues with studying the textual references to *Kuṇḍalinī* are the many contradictions of practice, yogic bodies and phenomenological outcomes. This may be in part due to the long complex history of different yogic and tantric sects with different political and spiritual agendas. The path of practice also depends on the social conditions of the practitioner, for example, the householder or celibate ascetic.

Kuṇḍalinī, the mother creatrix has created a universe of biological systems which are conducive to self-realisation. *She* is greater than the individual and if viewed with this reverence she can take you to deep insights and bliss. The point is to dissolve into her glorious blaze and life becomes a reflection of synchronicity and harmony. Her patterns of mystical mathematics present themselves to the devotee like a multidimensional theatre, a *Rasā lila* or divine dance.

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