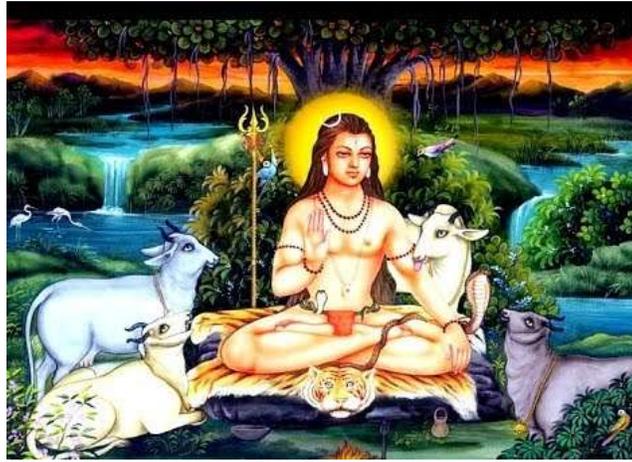


The Lesser-Known Nāth Yoga Sect and Its Insightful Metaphysics

Vijay Srināth Kanchi and Sunil Salunke



Gorakhnāth¹

Abstract

Among the prominent Indian philosophical systems that aim for the attainment of the highest state of consciousness, and thus realize absolute truth, Yoga occupies an important place. While the Yoga technique systematized by Patanjali with its eight limbs (*AsTānga Yoga*) is very popular in both the east and the west, there are many lesser-known yoga streams in India with a varied number of limbs. These varied streams present slightly different philosophical models dealing with the origin of universe and the relation of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul, yet, each stream provides a systematic method for direct realization. One yoga system that attracted less attention, particularly in the academic circles of the west, is the Nāth sect, which has a diverse yet significant philosophy of its own. Although this sect has not attracted much attention among academicians, even today there are millions of practitioners of this sect across the Indian subcontinent, and its teachings are transmitted from preceptors to disciples in an unbroken chain which claims its lineage all the way back to Śiva, the first Yogi.

This paper attempts to bring forth the esoteric tenets of the Nāth school by comparing it with the well-known Patanjali yoga system. The paper uses a number of Sanskrit terms and expressions which for want of English equivalents, are explained in the footnotes at the end of the article.

Introduction

Yoga is one of the most widely recognized features of Indian culture. Much of its popularity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is due to the contributions of yoga advocates like Yogananda, Mahesh Yogi, B.K.S. Iyengar, Ramdev Baba, etc. However, the health-conscious psyche of the modern man is more focused on the *Bahiranga Yoga* or

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the externalities, equating aerobic exercises with yoga and overlooking the more profound inner aspects and the ultimate object of human life. Indeed, yoga aims at gaining mastery over mind and in bringing about cessation of all mental activities, in addition to conditioning the physical body and the life force. The yoga tradition holds the view that, conquering mental activity will lead to different elevated levels of consciousness and at each level, as the practitioner progresses, many supra-mundane powers are bestowed upon the practitioner, and many seemingly miraculous and bizarre phenomena befall within the ordinary realm of a Yogi.

India had seen the birth of many great Yogis and saints who, despite attaining their spiritual objective and the highest aim of human life, continued their physical existence as torchbearers, preaching and grooming their disciples—out of their boundless compassion. The folklore of India, Nepal and Tibet are replete with the accounts of superhuman Yogis who claimed to have acquired total control over all physical phenomenon—including death—through an obscure science called “Kaya Siddhi”² by which they are said to have become immortal. Their disciples claim that these masters still dwell upon this earth in physical form and appear before the serious practitioner at will to assist them in assailing the daunting path of Yoga; for yoga is essentially a practice and not a theory, requiring proper instructions and guidance by a competent guru. Such accounts are extant with respect to the mysterious “Nāth Sāmpradāya”³ in legends that are in vogue in states spanning across the eastern and western ends of India such as Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Punjab, Maharashtra, Kathiawar region of Gujarat, and even as far as North-West Frontier Province (Sindh and Baluchistan regions of Pakistan) and Nepal. They talk, quite reverently, of Nav Nāths or Nine Masters, who are venerated as Lord Śiva incarnates who, defying death and all the other shackles of nature, dwell in physical and esoteric planes without being recognized by ordinary humans.

Who are the Nav Nāths?

Navanth are representative of nine robust saints in the Hindu religion. Tradition has a view that, Lord Sri Krishna directed them to reincarnate in the time of Kali Yuga (the present era of Hindu time scale) to reinvigorate the Yogic tradition. By His direction, nine Yogis of previous *yugas*—Kavi Narayan, Hari, Antariksha, Prabuddha, Pippalayan, Avirhotra, Drumila, Chamas and Karbhajan reincarnated into Machindra Nāth, Goraksh Nāth, Jalander Nāth, Kanif Nāth, Charpat Nāth, Nagesh Nāth, Bharat Nāth, Revan Nāth and Gahini Nāth respectively.

Like many other Yoga schools, Nāth *sāmpradāya* also draws its lineage to Lord Śiva and Guru Dattātreya—the two mythological and mystical figures of Indian tradition. But at a more mundane level, Nāth *sāmpradāya* is known to have been founded by Gorakshanāth or Gorakhnāth and formed into a well-organized religious sect. He is reputed to have been the disciple of Matsyendranāth and the grand-disciple of Adināth. Allen M. Briggs states that Matsyendranāth was the Avalokitesvara (one of the Bodhisattvas in Buddhism with magical powers and unlimited compassion) of Ceylon who was called to Nepal to break Goraksha’s long mental concentration which caused no rain to fall in that region for twelve years.⁴ Matsyendranāth is identified as the Buddhist protector of Nepal whose rivalry with Goraksha is legendary. It is said that Matsyendranāth found Gorakshanāth on a dung heap as a boy of twelve (probably somewhere in Punjab) and made him his disciple. Gorakshanāth eventually gained victory over him and brought Śaivism back into Nepal, partly banishing Buddhism from that land. The *sāmpradāya* holds that Adināth is none other than Lord Śiva himself and Gorakshnāth also is looked upon and revered as identical with Śiva. (Hinduism holds the view that once you attain the highest realm, you become one and identical with the God). Nāth Sāmpradāya’s origins are attributed to him, and his sect has an enormous influence throughout the Indian subcontinent. Places as far as Bengal (Eastern India) and Kathiawar, Gujarat (western India) claim on the strength of their longstanding local traditions to be the place of his birth and

superhuman activities. The literature of these regions are full of references to Gorakhnāth and his disciples, and claim he appeared and disappeared freely in different places at the same time, and sometimes at different times, by virtue of his supernatural yogic powers, in order to shower his blessings upon the people. Keeping aside these claims and counter claims about his time and place of birth, what can be unequivocally stated is the fact that Gorakhnāth was one of most influential personalities India has ever produced after Lord Buddha and Adi Śankarāchārya. His personality and teachings bore such a deep impact on the psyche and religious practices of the people of this land and maintained sway over them for so many centuries that even today there are thousands of followers of Nāth cult in India, rigorously practicing the path of his yoga in Ashrams, and even in jungles, to say nothing of the millions of household devotees.

Nāth Yogis, the followers of Nāth-sāmpradāya, founded by Gorakhnāth are also known as Siddha Yogis as they are understood to attain *siddhi* or self-fulfillment while living in this gross body. Darśini Yogis is another name given to them as they are expected to acquire *darśan*, true vision or perfect insight into ultimate character of reality. They are not expected to aim at or be content with any lower form of Siddhi, occult power or vision, which are trifling things to a true practitioner of Yoga. A Yogi who attains highest state of self-realization is called as *Avadhūta*, for whom the duality of right and wrong, purity and impurity have no meaning. He rises above the forces and laws of nature, and is beyond all distinctions. Sometimes, his demeanor may resemble that of a child or a mad man and only a sagacious eye can distinguish him from the rest.

Mystery of Age and Times of Nāth Gurus

Gorakhnāth, one of the most illustrious Yogis of Nav Nāth Sāmpradāya, is held to have lived in 8th Century AD, the same time as that of Guru Rinpoche or Padmasambhava, the founder of Tibetan Buddhism well known for his superhuman Tantrik powers, though nothing concrete is ever established about the time of

Gorakhnāth's actual physical existence. Legends abound of Yogis who lived around 8th century AD such as Kamala Sila,⁵ Padmasambhava, Adi Śankara,⁶ etc., who displayed various supernormal powers including transmigrating into dead bodies. Such powers were deemed to be commonplace during those times, as the life sketches of a great many Yogis of that period suggest. Dr. Mohan Singh in his book *Gorakhnāth and Medieval Hindu Mysticism*⁷ suggested that Gorakhnāth probably lived in the 9th century and belonged to Punjab. Some other scholars such as Sylvan Levi (1905), the French Orientalist and Indologist and Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah held the view that this illustrious founder of the Nāth-Yogi sect must have lived in the seventh century, if not earlier. Quite enigmatically there is a tradition recorded by an unknown author, whose work⁸ is available in the library of Pratap Philosophy Center, Amalner, Maharashtra, India titled "An Introduction to Nāth-Yoga" which records certain strong traditionally held views and states that Jesus Christ got training in Yoga from a Nāth-Yogi teacher in the Himalayan region, possibly under the discipleship of Gorakhnāth or one of his chief disciples. This view gets support from the great scholar Akshaya Kumar Benerjea in his *Philosophy of Gorakhnāth*⁹ wherein he also recounts these traditional claims. Even today the folklore of Kashmir claims that in his early twenties Jesus made a brief sojourn to Kashmir while on his world travels. Many places in Kashmir are still associated with this strange yet questionable event. There is a tomb associated with Jesus in Srinagar called Roza bal, or Rauza bol, which means "tomb of the prophet" that points east to west, according to Jewish tradition. Stephen Knapp states that "this is the burial place of Yuz Asaph (or Asaf), The name Yuz Asaph is said to relate to Jesus"¹⁰ The early manhood years of Jesus, world scholars admit, is obscure and shrouded in mystery and no one knows for certainty if Jesus had ever been on a world tour; however some researchers claim, he undertook an extensive tour and became enlightened before he was acclaimed as Son of God in Jerusalem. While Christianity's alleged linkage to Nāth

tradition is limited to Jesus' supposed encounter with some Nāth guru, Islam is more closely intertwined with the Nāth sect and Muhammad and the Sufi tradition that thrived in Indian subcontinent are linked to Gorakhnath. Professor G.W. Briggs claims in his work on Nāth cult that "A bit of record strangely states that he was the foster-father and teacher of Muhammad; and another fragment reports him as having taught Guga the Muslim creed. In Sind he is known as Dātar Jāmil Shah."¹¹ Briggs further adds that Guga, also known as Zahra Pir was a Rajput who finally became a Muslim (Muslim) and the disciple of Gorakshanāth.¹²

There are many records which claim that Gorakhnāth was a contemporary of Kabir, the poet Saint. Some curious records, which probably were invented by the disciples and followers of Guru Nanak and Kabir to extol the mastery of occult powers by their gurus, claim that Guru Nanak and Kabir (15th Century AD) once had individual contests with Gorakshanāth in a show of occult powers, wherein Gorakshanāth was overpowered in the display and was subdued. These stories apparently were crafted more out of faith and reverence to their masters than for any historically correct episodes. In some of the works attributed to Gorakhnāth, he calls himself as the son of Matsyendranāth and grandson of Adināth. Saint-poet Bhartrihari (5th Century AD) was also credited to have been a disciple of Gorakhnāth! Such is the enigmatic nature of the age and times of Nāth-Yogis and the origin of their *sāmpradāya*. If we do not discard these claims outright as mere myths and folklore, as deeper study of these tales compels us not to, then the only plausible solution seems to be that Gorakhnāth must have been an adept Yogi who conquered death and appeared and reappeared at different times at his will.

Unfortunately India has a poor tradition of maintaining the accurate historical records and the emphasis had always been on the philosophical content rather than on the records of time and events. Malcolm McLean (1998: 14), points out "India is not interested in historical detail but in the meaning that the lives [of the

saints] had for the devotees and which only the true devotees comprehend."¹³

Distinctive Marks of Nāth-Yogis

A Nāth Yogi is also sometimes called KanphataYogi after the third and final stage of the initiation by the guru, when the central hollows of both the ears are pierced in a ceremony, and two large ear-rings are placed in them. The rings worn by the Yogi are known as *Mudras*, *Darshans*, *Kundals* or *Pabitrīs*. The other monastic members of this order who have not yet undergone the final ceremony of having their ears split but still lead a life of austerities and renounced worldly connections are called *Aughars*. A distinctive feature of both *Aughars* and *Darshini Yogis* is that they wear a sacred thread or *Upavita* or *Janeo* made up of woolen material with a ring called *Pabitri* attached to it. A whistle called *Nada* (meaning primordial sound) and a *Rudraksha* or a rosary bead hang on the *Pabitri*. The *Nada* or whistle symbolizes the *Anāhata Nada* or unbroken sound of *Pranava* (Omkar). The *Rudraksha* (*lit.* the eye of Rudra or Śiva) is the symbol of super conscious vision.

Schools Contemporaneous with Nāth Yoga

At the time of Ādi Śankara's¹⁴ birth (generally held to be around 8th century AD), *Vāmachāra*¹⁵ (*lit.* the left-handed practice) and other Tantric Practices were at their peak and the inclination of the religious practitioners was toward occult powers, sorcery and witchcraft. And so, Ādi Śankara did all he could to banish Tantra from this land and revive *Vedāntic* tradition (the tradition which upholds the inerrancy and supremacy of Vedas and follows their rules and injunctions). Śankara eventually succeeded and while Tantric practices generally declined in India, it found its footing in Tibet, Bhutan and other provinces where it managed to flourish, though some pockets in India such as Bengal, Chattisgarh, Maharastra and Kerala are presumed to have retained these Mantra and Tantra practices undercover. Tantra and yoga were closely intertwined during this period.

Tantra relied on the five “M”s for gaining extra ordinary powers and a glimpse of the ecstatic bliss that accompanies super consciousness. The five “M”s include Maithuna (Sex), Māmsa (meat), Matsya (fish), Madya (wine) and Mudra (could mean parched grain or postures) which are taboo and forbidden by orthodoxy. There were other *Vāmachāra sampradayins* including Aghoris—the ash smeared naked ascetics who lived in *smashans* (cremation grounds) or on dung-hills and professed attainment of occult as well as spiritual powers through the use of forbidden substances and methods. They practiced drinking of alcohol and urine to quench thirst and flesh of a human corpse for food. Human skulls were used as bowls to collect and eat food. Interestingly, the only meat they refused to eat was horse-flesh. This is because, some argue, they excluded themselves from the Vedic Asvamedha or horse sacrifice.¹⁶ There were Mantra Yogis who held that serious recitation of and contemplation on certain syllables or Mantra while fixing the gaze on various parts of the body such as toe, tip of the nose etc., would qualify them to acquire super normal powers. Works like *Prapancha Sāra* and *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, which are presumed to have been written during that time, elucidated the many worldly gains that a practitioner can earn through such yogic practices. The eight Siddhis, namely *Añima*, *Mahima*, *Laghima*, *Garima*, *Prapti*, *Prakamya*, *Ēsitwa* and *Vasitwa*, which are supposed to enable a Yogi to become the smallest, the largest, the lightest, the heaviest etc., were the objects of attainment. It is believed that as the Yogi learns to ascend each of the seven Chakras, he attains the above stated eight Siddhis. The Tantriks were followed in the course of time by Sādhs, Siddhas (adepts of different yogic orders) and Nāths and the succession was taken up later by the saints of the *Bhakti* (devotion) tradition. All these schools, with some variations among their practices and sometimes deriving from one another, were equally in vogue for a considerable period of time.

The Main Tenets of Yogic Cults

For all the above mentioned yogic cults and orders, the microcosm or the human body is a miniature replica of macrocosm or the universe. Whatever one finds on the large scale is very much present in a minuscule fashion in the gross human body. If one finds sun and the moon in the sky, the same can be found represented in the human body as well. The sacred rivers of India—Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati and their sacred confluence at Prayag are also thought of as microcosmic realities in the human body. In the same fashion, the Ultimate Reality connoted by Lord Śiva is represented by the human soul—the difference being, the former is unlimited and the soul of the universe while the latter is limited and is the soul of the human body.

For these Yogis, *The Bhagavad Gita* (The Song of the Lord) and other ancient scriptures carry a hidden meaning that is not outwardly revealed. They seek to read the hidden nuances or esoteric meaning attached to every verse or *sloka*. For example, in the eighth chapter of *The Bhagavad Gita* viz., “Vignana Yoga,” Lord Krishna talks about two paths the Yogis take while leaving their mortal body—*Uttarāyaṇa* and *Dakshīyaṇa*¹⁷—and says that those who depart from their mortal coil during *Uttarāyaṇa* would attain salvation and those leaving *through* the *Dakshīyaṇa* would eventually return to this mortal world. For Nāth yoga practitioners, this is symbolic of the two yogic paths of the Ida and Pingala Nadis (the left and right channels) in the human body. They argue that if the meaning of the slokas is taken at face value, it would wrongly mean that all those whose souls depart in *Uttarāyaṇa*, in *Sukla Paksha*¹⁸ and in the daytime, would all eventually attain Moksha (salvation) irrespective of their karma, which is contrary to the very foundations of Hindu Philosophy. It is a well-known fact that many saintly figures left their mortal bodies in *Dakshīyaṇa* or even in the night (darkness), and many apparently sinful persons die during *Uttarāyaṇa*, hence, the necessity to understand the subtle meanings conveyed in scriptures such as the “Gita” from a yogic point of view.

Indeed, the Yogis assign a parallel meaning to all the slokas of the *Bhagavad Gita*. For example, Yagna, an oft repeated concept in the Gita, is not, as it is normally understood, the fire sacrifice involving a physical activity, rather, it is a process of energy conversion from one form to another. For yogis, every transition or conversion of energy is seen as an intermediate state (*Bardo* in Tibetan Buddhism), or a *sandhya* (twilight period—the meeting point between day and night) and hence a crucial opportunity for attainment. This is the reason why Lord Krishna repeatedly speaks of *The Bhagavad Gita* as a secret doctrine (*Guhya* and *Guhyatama Śāstram*).

Similarly, it is maintained that Upanishads like *BrihadāraNyaka* and *Chāndogya* also carry a secret meaning meant only for Yogis. Yagyavalka's (a 7th century BCE sage and philosopher) apparently naïve replies to the Brahma-vids (assembly of the sagacious) in the *BrihadāraNyaka Upanishad*, was a coded version of a secret doctrine. Thus it is held that, the verses of four Vedas, which superficially appear to clamor for mundane accomplishments such as cattle, disciples, bountiful crops, plentiful rain, etc., are, in fact, codified messages representing higher realities that follow a definite syntax and sequence which can be only deciphered by a competent Yogi of considerable attainment. If this was not so, there is no point to the claim that those verses, which outwardly seem to be mere eulogies and supplication for mundane attainments, are the highest knowledge, and that they originated directly from the Lord Himself. This kind of esoteric usage of language is called *sandhyā*

bhāsha or the twilight language, which is found to be extensively employed in many eastern religious works, particularly those belonging to the Tāntric creed.

Nāth Yogis, the followers of Nāth-sāmpradāya, founded by Gorakhnāth are also known as Siddha Yogis as they are understood to attain *siddhi* or self-fulfillment while living in this gross body. Darśini Yogis is another name given to them as they are expected to acquire *darśan*, true vision or perfect insight into ultimate character of reality. They are not expected to aim at or be content with any lower form of Siddhi, occult power or vision, which are trifling things to a true practitioner of Yoga.

Nāth Yoga and the Human Body

Within the physical human body, Yoga and Tantra envisage a complex system of channels, or *nādis*, carrying energy from the transcendental cosmos that pours in through the crown of the head. This network of *nādis* or energy channels is known as the subtle body, which re-radiates part of its accumulated energy to form the self-generated illusion that the material body experiences as the real world. This radiation is thought of as waste, and is sometimes described as a rat, sucking at the Yogi.

The inner radiations of the subtle body condense along the spinal column as *chakras* (wheels) or *padmas* (lotuses). These are identified in Patanjali's *AsTānga Yoga*, as the seven *chakras*, i.e., the center at the base of the spine, the genitals, the navel, the heart, the throat, center between the eyes and the crown at the top of the head. It is useful to keep in mind that different yogic systems have different numbers of *chakras*, depending on the major sojourns they identify in their spiritual journey. Even Nāth Yoga has sometimes six and sometimes even nine *chakras* identified in the human body. Buddhist Tantra locates *chakras* at the base of the spine, the navel, the throat and the crown of the head only. Each *chakra* corresponds to a progressively higher state of awareness, and hence to different levels of experiences and consequently, to different hitherto unencountered worlds.

Enlightenment is always described in male terms, and is thought to be achieved by driving the energy that is coiled at the base of the spine upwards toward the crown chakra. This dormant energy is denoted in feminine terms (the female kundalini or serpent energy). For the Tibetan Buddhists, *kundalini* is a personification of female energy such as a *dākinī*—(remember the *dākinī* Yeshey Tsogyel, the consort of Guru Padmasambhava, whom Guru Rinpoche transformed into a flying tigress that subdued many demonic forces?) To the Hindu, the crown chakra is the seat of Śiva, and the *kundalini* is a manifestation of Śakti. By rousing the normally sleeping serpent, and causing it to shoot up through the body to the crown, the Yogi or the Tantrika re-creates the union of the god and the goddess within himself.

Dualism (or sexual dualism as held by Tantriks) exists in the human subtle body as two vital channels—*ida* and *pingaLa*. The *ida* (Tantrik Buddhists call it *lalana*), which is red, runs along the left of the spinal cord and represents female creative energy, the moon and, ultimately, the void and knowledge. The *pingaLa* (Tantrik Buddhist's *rasana*), which is grey, runs to the right of the spinal cord and is the male creative energy, corresponding to the sun and, ultimately, compassion and practicality. So long as these two channels remain distinct the individual will continue to be trapped in the cycle of death and rebirth. These two paths are realized only by a Yogi and one who masters these two pathways is supposed to gain total control of birth and death. This is the reason why Buddhist Yoga lays emphasis on wisdom coupled with compassion as the highest virtue of a human being as it denotes union or complete balance between these two currents.

The energy generated during yogic techniques of breath control, while performing the Yogic *Mudras* and *Bandhas*¹⁹ stimulates the kundalini, which blends with the unshed semen to produce *bindu* (purified semen). Bindu, like the fetus, is composed of the five elements—earth, water, fire, air and ether—and its formation in the body represents a form of conception. The bindu breaks away from the two channels and generates a new, central channel

called *sushumna* (or *avadhūtika*, the cleansed one) along which it travels to the higher chakras, and ultimately to the “lotus at the top of the head.” There it unifies all the elements of which it is composed, as well as all the dual aspects of the practitioner. The Yogi, or for that matter a Tantrik, therefore, uses various techniques such as Prānāyāma and Āsana or even ritualistic sex to fuel a kind of internal alchemy, thus transforming the material (unshed) semen into spiritual energy in order to unite the various elements of the self.

It is also said that a Yogi who practices with undivided concentration will hear ten sounds at various stages of the practice. These are the tinkling of small bells, the sound of a conch shell, the flute, the *veena* (the traditional string instrument of India), the sound of thunder, etc. Finally, the Yogi comes to realize that all these sounds—including all those sounds that are produced in the world—originate from one unbroken Omkara (Sound of God) which also resonates in his body at the *Anahata Chakra* or Heart Chakra.²⁰ In fact, all the traditional musical instruments of India—such as *veena*, *mridanga* (a traditional percussion instrument), flute, etc., are based on and are representative of these ten sounds experienced in yogic trance. Ultimately, the Yogi realizes that these sounds are produced because of the movement of ten *Vāyus* (wind currents) in the newly opened Nādi (channels) in his body. He also witnesses certain dramatic visuals through his inner eye in the realm of five Ākāshas, such as: 1) Gunarahita Ākāsha (quality-less space) 2) Para Ākāsha (The Other space, which is different from the space of the physical world), 3) Maha Ākāsha (enormous space), 4) Tatwa Ākāsha (space of primordial principles) and 5) Sūrya Ākāsha (space of sun or illumination). In these *ākāshas* a *Sādhaka* (practitioner) witnesses what are known as ChitkaLās whose description closely matches what Arjuna witnessed during the *Viswarupa Sandarshana* (witnessing of Cosmic Being and the empyrean) during the Kurukshetra war in the *Mahābhārata*.

Another distinctive feature of Nāth Yoga is its understanding of the human body (both gross and subtle), particularly its contention that

each Sanskrit syllable has a distinct place of origin in the body. For example, the syllables Va, Ṣa, Sha, Sa are said to originate in the *Mooladhara Chakra* or base *chakra* near the anus. The *SwadhisTāna Chakra* is supposed to be a six petalled lotus where the syllables Ba Bha, Ma, Ya, Ra and La manifest. In the same vein, the entire syllables of Sanskrit derive their origin from the subtle sounds within the body. Thus the yogic view holds that Sanskrit is not a language with an erratically chosen set of syllables to represent various sounds; rather each syllable has a definite meaning and place of origin in the physical and subtle bodies as well as in the cosmos. This is why Sanskrit is judged to be “the language of the Gods.”

The Religion and Philosophy of the Nāth-Sect

Like the Yoga of Patanjali, the Yoga system followed by Nāth Yogis is a system of physical, psychical, moral and spiritual discipline for the establishment of perfect mastery over the body and the mind and ultimately for the realization of truth and the attainment of absolute liberation from all kinds of bondage and sorrow. A person, so long as he or she leads a mundane life, is not conscious of the immense powers latent within. Through the practice of Yoga, these powers are awakened and manifested, and the person then realizes the glories of his or her own inner nature. Control over the body, senses and mental propensities will lead the yogic practitioner to experience such knowledge and strength, such freedom from want and desire, such calmness and tranquility, such beauty and blissfulness, as appear impossible in the ordinary course of life.

The religious culture of the Nāth-Yogi sect has a *popular* aspect and an *esoteric* aspect. In its popular aspect the culture of the sect consists principally in the ritualistic and devotional worship of Śiva, conceived as the Supreme Lord of the universe and the highest ideal of the Yogis, and of Gorakhnāth, as the great earthly incarnation of Śiva. Śiva is the ultimate ground of being, the regulator of the phenomenal universe endowed with noblest qualities, unlimited power and wisdom and the highest deliverer from all bondage and suffer-

ing. The mercy and generosity of Śiva are especially emphasized. He is conceived as equally accessible to all classes of men and women from the highest to the lowest, irrespective of their caste and creed. This conception of Śiva's supremacy and liberality made Him the most popular God among all classes of people, and particularly among the men and women of those classes which are deprived by Hindu orthodoxy of the right to take part in Vedic sacrifices and solemnized worship.

Philosophically bent Ācharyas (teachers) of this sect tend to equate Śiva with the Vedantic Brahman; but with a chief difference. Unlike the non-dualist Vedantists, they do not regard the Power of Śiva (Śakti- the manifested world) as unreal or illusory. They do not agree with the Vedantists' argument that the phenomenal world is a false or deceptive product of an illusory Power— an unreal Maya or Cosmic Ignorance. For these Yogis, the world is, from the standpoint of phenomenal existence, as real as Śiva or the Supreme spirit. However, from the stand point of the Supreme reality, this world is transitory and hence has a limited real Yet, *it is a reality*. Śakti or the power of Śiva is no different from Śiva and is inseparable from Him. Śiva is held as having a static as well as a dynamic aspect. In his static aspect, He is Pure Spirit, Absolute Reality, Transcendent Consciousness, Eternal Immovable Being, and in his dynamic aspect, He is self-manifesting Power, Intelligent Will and Eternal Becoming. Thus Śiva or Brahman (Absolute Reality) is Being as well as Becoming, Spirit as well as Power, Witness-consciousness as well as self-evolving cause of the world of diversities. In His dynamic aspect—in His aspect as the self-manifesting, self-modifying Power originating, sustaining and regulating the world-order— Śiva Himself appears as Śakti; yet his non-duality is unaffected. Hence in the culture of devotion and popular worship, Śiva is sometimes worshiped as the sole Lord and sometimes worshiped along with Śakti, in the form of *Arthanāriswara*. In the former, the unity of the static and the dynamic aspect is implied, both the aspects being mentioned in the mantras and hymns; while in the latter, the two aspects are separately emphasized as two

Divine Personalities—one male and the other female—eternally and inalienably wedded to each other. Along with the worship of Śiva-Śakti, various forms of Tantric rituals and practices have also entered into this sect. The spiritual aspirants of this sect, as in any other religion or practice, have divergent inclinations toward the various paths—*Bhakti* (devotion), *Jñāna* (Knowledge) or *Dhyāna* (meditation)—which can lead them to salvation. The *Bhaktas* (devotees) of this sect think of themselves as finite and world-bound children of Śiva-Śakti and worship this infinite eternal spiritual ground of themselves and the world with all the admiration, reverence, love and devotion in their hearts. *Jñānis* (the enlightened ones) of this sect prefer to think of the self as pure spirit essentially distinguished from the body and the mind and unconditioned by spatial and temporal limitations and, as such, identical with the Absolute Spirit or Śiva. They become not only indifferent to outer worldly concerns, but also indifferent to all forms of ritualistic worship and the culture of emotional devotion, and devote themselves mainly to contemplation and meditation on the purely spiritual nature of the self and the identity of the individual self and the Absolute Spirit, of Jiva and Śiva.

Yoga Concepts

The esoteric aspect of the religious culture of the Nāth sect principally consists in the practice of Yoga. Superficially, the Yoga system approved and adopted by the Nāth Yogis seems to differ slightly from the AsTānga Yoga as advocated by Patanjali. Nāth sect advocates *Shadanga* (six limbed) Yoga as opposed to the eight limbed Yoga of Patanjali. The first two limbs, namely the Yama (abstinences) and the Niyama (vows) are omitted from the list and hence the Yoga of this cult is held to consist of only six limbs. However, closer inspection would reveal the fact that Nāth-Yogis consider Yama and Niyama as obligatory not only to Yogic practitioners but also to every individual because these abstentions and performances are universal moral rules, incumbent upon every member of the society in the interest of the collective good. Though not a formal part of *Shadanga* Yoga great importance is still attached to the observance of Yama and Niya-

ma as preparatory practices. In place of five forms of Yama and five forms of Niyama prescribed by Patanjali, the teachers of the Nāth-Yogi School enumerate ten forms of Yama and ten forms of Niyama. It is of interest here to note that in the Maitrayaniya Upanishad (ca. 200-300 BCE), yoga is described as *Shadanga-Yoga*. But this six limbed Yoga is different from the *Shadanga Yoga* of Nāths and AsTānga Yoga of Patanjali in a minor way. The uniting discipline of the six limbs (*shadanga*), as expounded in the Maitrayaniya-Upanishad are: (1) breath control (*Prāṇāyāma*), (2) sensory inhibition (*pratyahara*), (3) meditation (*dhyana*), (4) concentration (*dharana*), (5) examination (*tarka*), and (6) ecstasy (*samadhi*).

The Ten forms of Yama

*Ahimsa satyam asteyam brahmacaryam
kshama dhritih*

*Daya arjavam mitaharah saucham chaiva
yama dasa.*

As noted earlier, the ten forms of Yama in this and other systems are codified as restraints. The first of these is *Ahimsa* or non-violence or harmlessness to all creatures not only in action but also in thought and speech. *Satyam* is truthfulness that is to be practiced in speech, thought and conduct. *Asteyam* is the practice of temperance or the non-inclination towards the property of any person in any form. *Brahmacarya* is celibacy which demands total control over all sensual propensities and particularly the sexual appetite. Strict conservation of the physical and mental energy is sought. *Kshama* describes forgiveness of the faults of others. *Dhriti* can be described as patience coupled with fortitude under all circumstances. *Daya*, compassion or benevolence is the next prerequisite for spiritual aspirants. *Ārjavam* is simplicity in life. *Mitahāra* denotes balance or measure in dietary practices. *Saucham* is the concept that describes the maintenance of a pure mind in a pure body or purity in thoughts words and deeds.

These ten forms of self-restraint in the outer conduct as well as in the inner thoughts, feelings and desires are called Yama and are es-

sential in fitting the body and the mind for the practice of Yoga.

The Ten forms of Niyama or Vows

*Tapah santosha aastikyam daanam
Iswara-pujanam
Siddhaanta-vyaakhya-sravanam hri mati cha
japo hutam
Niyamaa dasa samprokta yoga-saastra
visaaradaih.*

The first of the Niyamas or duties and observances meant for living a healthy and spiritually enlightened and liberated life is *Tapah* or persistence, preservation and austerity. *Tapah* is meant to make the body and mind fit to face any inclemency and to discipline the mind from craving luxuries. *Santosha* is the practice of contentment coupled with a feeling of dwelling ever in happiness and the effort to be accepting and optimistic at all times. *Aastikyam* is faith in the authenticity of Vedas and instructions of the guru. It also denotes unquestioning belief in the existence of God. The practice of charity and sharing is known as *Dana*, which enables one to cultivate the sense of unity with all life. Unless one sees other beings as similar and equal to oneself, one would have little inclination to act generously or charitably. *Iswara-pujanam*, is the devoted worship of God as the True Unchanging Reality and is supposed to cleanse one's mind of impure thoughts and enable one to realize the God in all animate and inanimate things. *Siddhaanta-vyaakhya-sravanam* is the systematic hearing (or study) of the scriptures and Yoga-sastras, in the light of the spiritual experiences of an enlightened guru. This is similar, in essence, to the *Sravana* (attentive listening), *Manana* (mental repetitions) and *Nididhyāsa* (deep contemplative meditation), as put forth by Patanjali. *Hri* means sense of humility and also remorse at the perpetration of any wrong deed or thought. The cultivation of an acute intelligence that can reflect, understand and reconcile conflicting ideas is called *Mati*. A powerful tool for restraining the *citta* (the faculty of memory) from worldly indulgences and sharpening it like an arrow and giving it a one pointed focus is *Japa*, or mantric repetition of the Divine name. *Huta* is the practice of offer-

ing sacrifices to God in the form of food, drink and other objects. As the *Bhagavad Gita* states, *Yagna* (sacrifice) is constantly practiced in the universe in one form or another by all objects, both animate and inanimate, and that sacrifice, which is performed as an oblation to the Supreme Being, is the highest, hence, the significance of *Huta*.

Asana

Of the remaining six limbs, some followers have laid special emphasis on *Āsana* and *Prāṇāyāma*—the chief elements of Hatha Yoga—to establish control over the psycho-physical system. Hatha Yoga is held to increase the power of the will, which is regarded as the basis for rapid progress in the spiritual endeavor. Hatha is a Sanskrit word meaning “sun” (ha) and “moon” (tha), representing opposing energies: hot and cold, male and female, positive and negative, similar to but not completely analogous to the yin/yang of Taoist or Daoist Philosophy. By balancing two opposites, such as the *ida* (mental) and *pingaLa* currents, the *sushumna nadi* (current of the Self) is said to rise, opening various *chakras* until *samadhi* is attained. Interestingly, even dance was held to be a means of attaining the highest objective of human existence in ancient India. Bharata Muni, known to be the first systematic expounder of dance as science in the 2nd century BC, described 108 static *nātya kāranas* in his *Nātya Shastra* which bear semblance to the *Āsanās*. The dynamic aspects—*ida* and *pingaLa* are represented in the dynamism of *Nātya Yoga* (union with the Supreme through dance) by *lāsya* (kinesthetics) as female and *tāndava* (strong movements in dance) as male aspects. These *nātya kāranas* along with the elements of *Bhakti Yoga* are embodied in the contemporary form of *Bharatanatyam* (a south Indian dance form) where the marriage of Śiva and Śakti is depicted as one of the main themes of the dance.

Another unique feature of Nāth Yoga is *Mudra* or special exercises designed to affect the energy flow in the body and the nervous system. Although there is no mention of *Mudras* in the *Yoga Darshana* of Patanjali, this healing modality is given a prominent place in the Nāth

system. Similarly, Shatkriyas (purificatory exercises), for the maintenance of sound health, are another special feature of this sect that was not part of Patanjali's Yoga Sastra. Hatha-Yoga describes 84,000 body postures that mimic 8.4 million animal species supposed to be present in the creation. Mimicking them is meant to bestow the strength, vitality and other unique qualities of those creatures to the practitioners as well as enable him/her to become one with the creation. Of the 84,000 Āsanās mentioned in various treatises on Hatha-Yoga, 84 Āsanās are thought to be the most important and especially useful for Yogic practices. However, greatest value is attached to four kinds of Āsanās—Siddhāsana, Padmāsana, Simhāsana and Bhadrāsana. Siddhāsana (meaning accomplished, perfect or adept), is regarded as the most conducive for stimulating the Kundalini Śakti. Siddhāsana is said to be the purifier of all the 72000 Nadis and the door to liberation.

PrāNāyāma

PrāNāyāma is an essential and inseparable aspect of Āsanās. It deals with the control of *prana* or the vital power in the human body by the conquest of five vital forces namely, PrāNa, Apāna, Vyāna, Samāna and Udāna. The merger of Prāna with Apāna is considered to bring about the dawn of true knowledge in the practitioner. Udāna is believed to catalyze the upward movement of Kundalini as well as the upward movement of unshed semen. In a normal and healthy human being the whole process of inhaling and exhaling with a brief period of suspension of breath in between the two is carried out in about four seconds. This process continues irrespective of whether the person is awake or asleep, and in a 24 hour period, it is carried out 21,600 times. The technique of PrāNāyāma consists in voluntarily lengthening, deepening and regulating the respiratory function. It is said that the brief and imperceptible state between the normal inhaling and exhaling holds a key to the door of realization, and if the interlude between the in and out breathing is concentrated upon, total cessation of mental activity can be attained. This view is held by the *VigNāna Bhairava Tantra* as well. The world renowned Saint

Rajneesh (1931–1990) fully concurs with this view. Eight kinds of withholding the breathing (Kumbhaka) are followed by the yogic practitioners and are greatly extolled in many other Yoga treatises. They are: *Surryabhedana*, *Ujjayi*, *Ṣitkari*, *Bhramari*, *Ṣitali*, *Bhastrika*, *Mūrchha*, and *Plāvani*.²¹ *Hatha-Yoga Pradipika*, whose authorship is attributed to Swami Swātāmārāma, a 15th century India sage, glorifies the wonderful results that one can obtain by the practice of these *Kumbhakas*.

After the practice of Āsana and PrāNāyāma, Mahāmudra (the great gesture) is to be practiced. Ten such higher forms of Mudras with Bandhas and Bedhas are expounded in *Hathayoga Pradipika*. They are: *Maha-bandha*, *Maha-bedha*, *Khechari*, *Uddyana*, *Mula-bandha*, *Jalandhara-bandha*, *Viparitarani*, *Vajroli* and *Śakti Chalana*.²² The aim of all these Mudras is to activate the *Sushumna Nadi* that is held to lie between *Ida* and *PingaLa Nadis*.

The other limbs, viz., *Pratyāhara*, *Dhāraṇa*, *Dhyāna* and *Samādhi* are identical to both Patanjali and Nāth-Yogi systems. Attainment of Mukti (enlightenment or salvation) while living (Jivanmukta), is strongly encouraged by the *Nāth sāmpradāya*. When a Yogi perfectly realizes Śiva within himself, he is supposed to become inwardly identical with Śiva, though outwardly he may live and move in the world as a normal individual among others. This system also professes that yogic concentration may be practiced even upon finite and non-eternal beings, and that such practice leads to the attainment of various *siddhis* (supernormal occult powers). Such concentration, however efficient, cannot generally lead to the final spiritual goal of human life and may even cause the downfall of the aspirant. When the mind, instead of concentrating upon any relative ideal or object, is concentrated upon the Supreme Ideal and the whole energy is directed towards the realization of the identity of the self with the Absolute Spirit, then the process becomes Yoga in the truest sense of the term, and is called Raja-Yoga (the kingly union). All true followers of this sect agree that the practice of Raja-Yoga should be the end and aim of every Yogi and that Hatha-Yoga (yoga of physical body) should be practiced as

subsidiary to the practice of Raja-Yoga. They assert that without Raja-Yoga, Hatha-Yoga is useless for a spiritual aspirant, and that without Hatha-Yoga, Raja-Yoga is ordinarily impracticable since psycho-physical obstacles in the path are not easy to overcome.

Mantra-Yoga is also held in high esteem, wherein it is believed that repetition of and concentration upon particular mystic mantras in accordance with prescribed methods and procedures produces wonderful results and is greatly helpful in spiritual *Sadhāna* (practice). *Praṇava* or OM is regarded as the highest mantra and intensive search for and concentration upon *Nāda*, the subtlest and purest sound that is held to emanate unbroken and continuous from the *Anāhata Chakra* of *Hridaya* (Heart chakra, hence the name *Anāhata-nāda*), is believed to be a potent means for the illumination of consciousness and the vision of *Brahman* or the all-pervading consciousness. This practice is known as *Nādānusandhāna* (merger with the primordial sound).

Ajapa-Gayatri and Its Significance

Another unique feature of *Nāth-yogi sāmpradāya* lies in its according of a spectacular nature to ordinary breathing process. As noted previously, a normal person breaths 21,600 times during a day. The air that is carried into the body while inhaling (*pūraka*) produces a sound similar to “So” (meaning He or the Universal Spirit in Sanskrit), while the air that moves out (*rechaka*) makes the sound of “Hum” (meaning *Aham* or I or Ego). This natural process of out-breathing and in-breathing is contemplated as the process of the *Jiva*’s going out into the universe and unifying itself with the Universal Self or the Absolute Spirit and then drawing-in the universe or the Universal Self into itself so that the whole being is filled with the Absolute Spirit. Thus it is deemed that a natural attempt is continuously being made through every involuntary act of respiration to unify the individual self with the

Universal Self, the inner with the Outer, the part with the Whole. A spiritual truth-seeker is instructed to pay attention to each breath, as it naturally goes on, with a devoted heart, and to deeply contemplate on its spiritual significance. He is expected to maintain vigil over his own breathing so that no breath, at least in the waking state, passes unnoticed. This is known as *Ajapa-Gayatri*, which is rhythmically recited by every creature in every state. As such, it is a beautiful and sublime conception of our normal breathing function as taught by *Guru GorakhNāth*.

Cosmology and Metaphysics

None of the works attributed to *GorakhNāth* or his school dwell elaborately on the philosophical aspects and stay away from the polemical argumentations with other schools of thought. The emphasis has always been on the practical realization rather than on verbose speculation and logical reasoning. However, occasionally, the works seem to deal with the cosmological sequencing of various *Tattvas* and *Bhutas* and even discusses the sequel of manifestation of the human organism in both the psycho-physical and spiritual planes.

According to the *Nāth* school, *Śiva* is synonymous with *Brahman* or *Paramatma* and is frequently referred as *Para-Sambit*. He is no different from the Absolute spirit and is above and beyond all names and forms, above time and space and causality and relativity, and above all possible objects of intellectual conception and mental imagination. He is self-luminous, self-revealing and self-enjoying, and is realizable directly without any mental process by a *Yogi* in his highest state of *Samadhi*.

The dynamic nature of the Absolute Spirit is splendidly manifested in the beginningless and endless order of the phenomenal universe with its countless orders of *Jivas*. He eternally reveals Himself in innumerable orders of plurality in the magnificent spatiotemporal system, which is called *Jagat*, the ever-changing, ever-

renewing world process. In this ceaseless act of His self-revelation in diverse relative forms, He requires no special will and effort, no change in His blissful and tranquil transcendent self-

consciousness, since His nature is perfectly and eternally dynamic and there is no resisting force of any kind to fight against or overcome. His transcendent character is in no way affected by the spontaneous self-expressions of His eternal and infinite Śakti. The Absolute Spirit is thus eternally Śiva and at the same time eternally Śakti, eternally *Nirguna* (without quality and attribute) and *Niskriya* (activity-less) and eternally *Saguna* (manifest in form)

and *Sakriya* (active and procreating), eternally *Advaita* (non-dual) and eternally *Dvaita* (diverse and divergent).²³ Thus the metaphysical view of GorakhNāth and his school is described as *dwaita-advaita-vivarjita* (devoid of dualism and non-dualism) and *pakshapata-vinirmukta* (free from partisanship and not advocating any special doctrine or refuting others).

Therefore, the Nāth Yogic realization of Ultimate Reality is in perfect tandem with most other major philosophical doctrines of the Eastern religions. However, not surprisingly, since each philosophy attempts to describe in the best possible way the same basic truth, various formulations may give more emphasis to certain aspects of the truth. These attempts appear to differ with one another only superficially owing to the different standpoints taken by various teachers to vociferously put forth a certain understanding of the Absolute Reality which they consider necessary to assert. Nevertheless, the core of their philosophies is the

same, since no true and great philosopher ever dared to bring into the world a new approach or a new school of thought without first attaining its realization.

Like the Yoga of Patanjali, the Yoga system followed by Nāth Yogis is a system of physical, psychical, moral and spiritual discipline for the establishment of perfect mastery over the body and the mind and ultimately for the realization of truth and the attainment of absolute liberation from all kinds of bondage and sorrow..... Through the practice of Yoga, these powers are awakened and manifested, and the person then realizes the glories of his or her own inner nature.

Conceptions of the Ultimate Truth as described by different systems can seem to be contradictory. But such inconsistencies are only owing to the limitations of the language and the conceptual capabilities of the human mind. While traveling to a given destination a traveler may not attach much attention to all the stations that fall along the way and his travelogue may not contain a description of them, whereas other passengers may give importance to stations which the former de-

cidated to overlook. Similarly, one's instincts and predispositions greatly influence the language one chooses and so the attributes of the destination he describes would *appear* differently from the description of the same destination by the other travelers. That does not mean that these travelers failed to reach the identical destination. Nor would it mean that the destination of the former was different from the other traveler's destination. In an effort to steer away from such futile argumentation and focus all their energies on realizing the Highest Truth, Nāth Yogis produced no extensive philosophical texts. What philosophical thoughts that were conveyed in their treatises were only meant to convince and discipline the minds dwelling in the lower levels.

From the cosmological and metaphysical points of view, Yogis are *parināmavadins*, akin to Śakti, and as revealed in the temporal order in what is called *parināma* or self-modification, involving the theory of transformation, causation, change, creation, continuity and destruction. Yogis envision the universe as

ceaselessly undergoing alternating phases of *Vikāsa* (expansion or evolution) and *Sankócha* (contraction or involution) resulting in diversification and unification—a point of view which closely matches with the Big-Bang Theory of the modern Astro-Physics.²⁴ In between the two phases of *sankocha* and *vikasa* in the visible universe, the Nāth-Yogis say, only the Supreme Being or Śiva remains, and in whom time (kal) and space (dik) merge together. From His bosom, the world with all its temporal and spatial limitations spurts out in the form of vibrating universe once the *vikasa* state is resumed. This vibrating universe is the eternal dance of the *Mahā Kāli* on the bosom of *Sadā Śiva* (eternally tranquil transcendental Reality) and is in fact, the inseparable feature of Him. *Sadā Śiva* is incomprehensible to the human mind, and this manifested universe is the quality through which His presence can be inferred. The whole world is composed of the same substance, but it appears as different objects owing to the different frequencies at which it vibrates. Thus *Ākāsha*, *Vāyu*, *Apo*, *Agni* and *Pridhvi* (the five primordial elements) and all their derivatives are essentially constituted by the same substance, but just as water is in a liquid state at one temperature and becomes solid at lesser temperature and vapor at higher temperatures, similarly different vibrating frequencies bring about different qualities to the same substance. The turning of non-physical state of Supreme Being into a vibrating substance which becomes the perceptible universe is regarded as inexplicable mystery which only the Yogis can realize in their *Samādhi* state.

The Significance of Maha Kali and Śiva

The ultimate reality or the Supreme Soul is worshiped as Śiva by the Nāth-Yogis, while existence and the visible universe is represented by *Mahā Kāli*. *Kāli* is symbolized as dancing eternally on the boundless bosom of Lord Śiva. Students of physics would know that the universe can be mapped using three co-ordinate axes (Length, Breadth, and Height) which stand perpendicular to each other (as though standing on each other's bosom!). Time is a fourth dimension necessary to map an event. But unless the observer is present and

identified, no observable event can be taken as occurring. Events occurring in the absence of an observer fall in the category of uncertainty and are classified as both equally occurring and non-occurring. (Remember Schrödinger's cat?). Hence, it is necessary that we have a fifth dimension that can be assumed to lie perpendicular to other co-ordinate axes (which represent the three-dimensional world with time as its fourth dimension), to indicate the observer or human soul in case of personal events, or the Supreme Soul to map the universal events. This fifth dimension is conceived as Lord Śiva, the Supreme Soul of the universe.

Nāth-Sect and its Literature

Nāth-cult, which draws its roots from Yogi Gorakhnāth branched out in the course of time into twelve sub sects or *paās*, yet the bond of unity among them in terms of their revered literature and philosophy is intact. The *Yogi sāmpradāya* associated with the name of Gorakhnāth has a vast literature in Sanskrit and other vernacular languages of India. The authorship of a good many works of this sect are attributed to Gorakhnāth himself. Old records in Hindi, Rajasthani and Bengali contain some very instructive and inspiring short poems whose authorship is again attributed to Yogi Maharaj Gorakhnāth. Several Sanskrit treatises such as *Goraksha Samhita*, *Goraksha Śataka*, *Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati*, *Yoga Siddhanta Paddhati*, and many others are considered to have been written by this great Yogi, though whether all these works are originally authored by Gorakhnāth is debated by scholars. What is certain is that all of these treatises contain a great deal of information and instructions which have served as invaluable and proven guides for Yogic practitioners. Matsyendranāth, who is regarded as the Guru of Gorakhnāth, is also held to have authored a number of valuable works, such as: *Matsyendra Samhita*, *Kaula Jnana Nirnaya*, *Kulananda Tantra*, *Jnana Karika*, *Akula Vira Tantra*, etc. Additionally, mention must be made of some of the later Upanishads that are held in high esteem by Yogi practitioners. Some of which are: *Nada-Bindu Upanishad*, *Dhyana-Bindu Upanishad*, *Tejo-Bindu Upanishad*, *Yoga-Chudamani Upanishad*, *Yoga-Sikha Upani-*

shad, Jabala Upanishad, etc. One Upanishad—which is known as *Goraksha Upanishad* is also in vogue among Yogic circles. Mention shall also be made to certain treatises which specialize in yogic practices and concepts and which seem to have been written by later-day disciples of this sect. These include *Nātha Sutra*, *Śiva Gita*, *Avadhuta Gita*, *Śiva Samhita*, *Suta Samhita*, *Dattatreya Samhita*, *Savara Tantra*, *Gheranda Samhita*, *Hatha-yoga Pradipika*, *Jivanmukti Viveka* and *Seetha Ramanjaneya Samvadamu*. *Siddha Siddhanta Samgraha*, *Goraksha Siddhanta Sangraha*, *Goraksha Kaumudi*, *Goraksha Sahasranama* and *Yoga Manjari*.

The Special Status of a Yogi Over a Philosopher

*An ounce of practice is better than a ton of theorizing.*²⁵

The main argument of practitioners of the Yogic school is that just as imagining and rationalizing on a lamp with all its illumination does not cast off darkness and just as subjugation of hunger requires eating of food rather than mere rhetoric on the nature and means to subdue hunger, similarly, mere rationalizing and indulgence in intricate logical arguments about ignorance, its causes and the means to dispel it do not grant anyone with the actual experience of true knowledge. Theorizing and rationalizing is only a first step in convincing and disciplining the mind about the existence of higher states of consciousness and existence. Essentially, the highest truth cannot be inferred nor attained theoretically and only practical experience through systematic discipline of body and mind would eventually lead a person to the highest knowledge. Thus a Yogi is a person in an advanced stage as compared to a philosopher in their mutual quest for realizing, experiencing and attaining True Knowledge.

Why the Nāth-cult and other Sects Went into Comparative Oblivion

The revival of the *Vedāntic* school by Śankara and others after 8th century CE drew the masses back to traditional religious means and methods. There was general aversion toward some of the ghastly and dastardly practices of

certain Tantrics. Charlatans in the guise of Tantrics with an eye on sexual pleasures and worldly possessions had also contributed to the stigmatization of tantric forms of yoga. Attainment of occult powers and their misuse by unscrupulous elements was also one of the causes of decline. Moral decay and mere insistence on physical postures and outward practices invited strong attacks by learned men, which made the conversion back to Gnana or Jnana Yoga²⁶ quite easy. Another significant factor that brought about the comparative decline of these cults was the flourishing of the *Bhakti* cult in the later medieval period, particularly the Vaishnava²⁷ Sāmpradāya. A large number of illustrious saints and reformers such as Sri Chaitanya, Guru Nanak, Tulsidas, Ramananda, Tukaram, etc., who professed the simpler and easier method of Nama-japa and Nama-sankirtana (recitation of the Sacred Name), bore tremendous influence on the religious emotions and sentiments of the classes and masses alike and drove the ascetic Saiva cult and the arduous yogic methods of Nāth-yogi Sāmpradāya into the background.

Conclusion

With such a deep insight into the psychophysical aspects of human existence and a clear philosophy of life's Ultimate Object, Nāth Yoga occupies an important place in the Indian philosophical system. Though not radically different from what Patanjali's Eight-Limbed Yoga teaches, Nāth Yoga continues to maintain its uniqueness with its greater elaboration of *yama*, *niyama* and its *Shadanga Yoga*. There are still millions of practitioners of this yoga in India and Nepal, but they prefer to stay away from the sight of ordinary humans and are mostly confined to their monasteries located in the secluded regions of the lower Himalayan ranges. With their distinctive appearance and rather striking features, Nāth yogis are easy to identify. However, with the fast-changing times people's interest in a life requiring serious yogic practice and seclusion is dwindling. Nevertheless, the Guru-sishya tradition²⁸ of the Nāth sect still holds a strong hold among its practitioners, making it one of the stronger schools of yoga in India surviving to this day.

- ¹ Painting of Gorakhnāth, in the public domain at: [wiki-yoga-vidya.de](#).
- ² *Kaya Siddhi*: Literally Kaya is the physical body and Siddhi is attainment. A set of dietary regimens, coupled with ingestion of certain (alchemical) compounds and rigorous Yogic exercises that are presumed to make the human body immortal.
- ³ *Sāmpradāya*: Any Hindu religious system based upon a succession of Masters, with a discreet set of customs and practices that are exclusive and unique to that group.
- ⁴ George Weston Briggs, *GorakhNāth and the Kanphata Yogi* (Calcutta: London : YCMA Publishing House & Motilal Banarsidass, 1938), 181.
- ⁵ Kamalaśīla was an Indian Buddhist and one of the systematic writers on Buddhist logic.
- ⁶ Ādi Śankara was one of most revered Hindu philosophers and theologians from India who consolidated the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta.
- ⁷ Mohan Singh, *Gorakhnāth and Medieval Hindu Mysticism*, ed; Mohan Singh Uberoi, Francis Edward Younghusband and Betty Heimann (Lahore, Pakistan: Oriental College, 1937).
- ⁸ Author Unknown. *An Introduction to Nātha Yoga*, Gorakhnāth Mandir, Gorakhpur, India.
- ⁹ Akshaya Kumar Benerjea, *Philosophy of Gorakhnāth* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass: 2014), 316.
- ¹⁰ Stephen Knapp, *Visiting the Grave of Jesus in Srinagar, Kashmir*. Online at: http://www.stephen-knapp.com/visiting_the_grave_of_jesus_in_srinagar.htm (accessed February, 2, 2015).
- ¹¹ George Weston Briggs, *GorakhNāth and the Kanphata Yogis*, 221.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Malcolm McLean, *Devoted to the Goddess: The Life and Work of Ramprasad* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), 14.
- ¹⁴ Ādi Śankara: The age of Ādi Śankara is generally held to be the 8th Century AD by most scholars. However, traditional accounts of lineage as depicted in two of the four monasteries established by him at the four corners of India, place him much further back into antiquity. Some Indian researchers such as Kota Venkatachalam (http://true_indian_history_kvchelam.blogspot.in/2009/04/age-of-sri-adi-sankaracharya.html) also disagree with this date and place him much further back in time. Some scholars such as David Reigle point out

that the 8th Century Śankara was indeed not the Ādi Śankara but was another one known as Abhinava Śankara who authored a great number of works including the much famed *Brahmasutra Bhashya*. It is suggested that his works are mistakenly attributed to the original Ādi Śankara and this led to mistaken inference of his time. For further details in this regard refer to: <http://www.easterntradition.org/original%20sankaracarya.pdf>.

- ¹⁵ *Vāmāchāra*: The left hand or unorthodox Tantric practice that involves use of prohibited substances. The traditional and conservative schools despise them and sometimes look upon them as inferior schools. The *Vāmāchāra* is practice oriented and requires rigor and steadfastness on the part of the practitioner and can be learned only through discipleship.
- ¹⁶ For additional information on the inner or esoteric aspects and symbolism of the Vedic “Asvamedha” or horse sacrifice, see “Vedic Ritual and its Symbolism, by Usha Choudhuri at: http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/i_es/i_es_choud_ritual_frameset.htm.
- ¹⁷ *Uttarāyaṇa* and *Dakshināyaṇa*: From the astronomical perspective of Hindu ephemeris, Uttarāyaṇa refers to the period after the Winter Solstice, when the sun travels between Capricorn and Cancer. However, high religious and spiritual significance is attached in the Hindu culture to the movement of sun transiting various zodiac signs along the ecliptic. Uttarāyaṇa is called *devamārga* (the path of gods) and it is stated that he who travels on this path never returns to the mortal world. Dakshināyaṇa on the other hand refers to the periods when the sun apparently travels toward the south on the celestial sphere or from Cancer to Capricorn. This is called *pitrmārga* or the path of the Manes. This period is also considered as demonic and the slaying of demons by the Goddess is celebrated as the chief festival during this period. Auspicious activities are normally deferred during this period. These two periods may also refer to states of mind: positive, auspicious, a time for flowering and realization (Uttarāyaṇa) and negative, a time for inner striving (Dakshināyaṇa).
- ¹⁸ *Sukla Paksha and Krishna Paksha*: Paksha in Sanskrit is fortnight and Sulka means white and bright; whereas Krishna refers to black and dark. Thus the fortnight in which the moon waxes is called Sukla Paksha and the fortnight of waning moon is called Krishna

Paksha. In other words the period between New moon and Full moon is Sukla Paksha and between Full moon and New moon is Krishna Paksha.

¹⁹ *Mudras* and *Bandhas*: The daily yogic practice involves arresting and directing the inner currents through several body postures (*Mudras*) and bodily contractions (*Bandhas*). Some of the Tantric *Mudras* involve sexual postures during coition and are taboo for the orthodox. As regards to *Bandhas*, they are chiefly three in number. They are *Mūla Bandha*, *Jālandhara Bandha*, and *Uddyāna Bandha*, and are highly eulogized in various Yogic treatises.

²⁰ Parasuramapantula Pantula Lingamurti Gurumurti, *Sri Sita Ramānjanēya Samvādam*, trans: Vijay Srinath Kanchi (Jalgaon, India: ViViDhaTa Research & Training Centre, 2009), 105-112.

²¹ See for example: *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, by Yogi Swami Svatmarama, published by George Alien & Unwin, for additional information on eight kinds *Kumbhaka*.

²² See the section on *Mahāmudra* in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*.

²³ *Dwaita* or *Dvaita*: A philosophy which states that dichotomy is eternal; that there is fundamental distinction between Ultimate Reality, individual souls and the Nature which are irreducible into one another. *VisisTādvaita* on the other hand describes the subservient character of the individual soul to the Supreme Soul and underscores devotion as the sole means to enlightenment.

²⁴ *Big Bang*: Mathematical calculations of the mass of the universe vis-à-vis its density, the

amount of gravitational pull each constituent object exerts on the each other and the velocity with which each stellar object is moving outward, reveal that at present the universe is rapidly expanding and is likely to continue for couple of billions years more before the gravitational pull takes the reigns and the universe starts to implode and crumble... ultimately making a big mass of stellar material so dense with infinite amount of gravitational pull that time and space will have no separate existence and combine together to form what is called *singularity* and no event can be ever assumed or recorded in that situation. Some physicists argue that this super mass object of minuscule size would again explode and the process of explosion and implosion continue eternally, just like the in breathing and out breathing of living creatures. Hindu scripture describe creation and dissolution of the phenomenal world as the inhalations and exhalations of *Nārāyana* the Supreme Soul.

²⁵ This quote has been attributed to Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) and others.

²⁶ *Gnana* or *Jnana Yoga* is the “Path of Knowledge.” *Gnana Yoga* are followers of nondualistic or *advaita Vedanta*.

²⁷ *Vaishnava Sāmpradāya* is one of the four theistic schools of ancient India that propagates the theology of duality in unity.

²⁸ The *Guru-sishya* refers to the Guru - disciple tradition and is based on a succession of teachers and disciples in traditional Indian culture and religions such as Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism.