

Uncoiling a concept: *Kuṇḍalinī* in the early Haṭha corpus

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ABSTRACT

Premodern Sanskrit texts on Haṭhayoga describe *kuṇḍalinī*, ‘she who is coiled’, as the female gendered serpent energy sleeping at the base of the yogic body. The texts prescribe physical, breathing and meditative techniques to awaken *kuṇḍalinī* and raise energy through the yogic body for empowerment and liberation. This paper reads passages on *kuṇḍalinī* from the Haṭha corpus alongside one another to analyse the language, function, and development of this key concept. Passages are selected from the *Amṛtasiddhi*, *Amanaska*, *Amaraugha*, *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā*, *Vivekamārtaṇḍa*, *Goraḁsaṣataka*, *Yogatārāvalī*, *Yogabīja*, *Khecarīvidyā*, *Śivasamhitā* and *Haṭhapradīpikā*. These sources have not before been brought together in such a synoptic reading.

Through a close reading of passages I question *kuṇḍalinī* in terms of characterisation, technologies, function and development within the corpus. I find that the central metaphor of *kuṇḍalinī* as a snake forcefully struck and forcefully rising defines the core meaning of *haṭha*: the yoga of force. *Kuṇḍalinī* as *śakti* is the *prōcreātrix* whose union with *śiva* defines yoga. In the corpus *kuṇḍalinī* is an interiorisation of sexual desire. She cannot be directly manipulated, her arousal being an effect of other techniques. If for Heesterman (1985) the Upaniṣads interiorise the Vedic sacrifice, then the *haṭha* corpus interiorises and enacts the tantric sexual ritual. The *Goraḁsaṣataka* 101 concludes, ‘We don’t embrace, *āliṅgāmaḥ na*, the body, *tanuṃ*, of a beloved, *kāntā*, curved, *kuṭila*, like a sprout *aṅkura*, [instead we embrace] the *suṣumnā* channel, *nāḁikāṃ*.’

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Introduction

Kuṇḍalinī, ‘she who is coiled’, is an esoteric aspect of the yogic body.¹ She is characterised as a snake coiled at the base of the torso, a blockage that stops breath, *prāṇa* or *vāyu*, entering the central channel, *suṣumnā*² or *brahmarandhra*. She is to be awoken by heat, fanned by technologies of the breath, in order that the breath or *kuṇḍalinī* herself can rise through the yogic body. A form of *śakti*, *kuṇḍalinī* is instrumental in the *yogī*’s liberation. The *yogī* is to employ various techniques to awaken and at times raise *kuṇḍalinī*. It appears that her rising is a consequence of other techniques, rather than a direct action the *yogī* can undertake.

The literature on *haṭhayoga* has been advanced by the team of researchers at SOAS working on the five-year Haṭha Yoga Project which drew to a close in 2020. This paper is particularly indebted to the generosity of James Mallinson and Jason Birch in sharing their critical editions. The Adyar Library and Kaivalyadhama have published significant editions of many of the texts considered here. Scholars working recently on *kuṇḍalinī* include Shaman Hatley (2015) and Olga Serbaeva (2020) though they specialise more in *tantra* than *haṭha* material. The work of scholars of *tantra* such as Lilian Silburn (1988), André Padoux (1990), and before them the scholars around John Woodroffe (1974) helped establish the field of *tantra* studies beyond India. Rather than comparing the *haṭha* materials with such treatments in *tantra*, or drawing on the reception or experiential history of *kuṇḍalinī* in modernity, such as Carl Jung (1932) and Gopi Krishna (1971), I focus on the premodern, Sanskrit textual sources on *haṭhayoga*. Padoux notes that *haṭha* probably draws on *tantra* and asks in parenthesis, ‘Mais *haṭhayoga* et tantrisme sont-ils séparables?’ I am sympathetic to this line of reasoning but engaging the question is beyond the scope of this piece.

In this paper I ask the following questions:

1. How is *kuṇḍalinī* characterised in the early *haṭha* corpus?
2. What techniques are recommended for awakening *kuṇḍalinī* and do these techniques work directly or indirectly on *kuṇḍalinī*?
3. What is the functional role of *kuṇḍalinī* in the yogic body, and her status in *haṭhayoga*’s soteriological scheme?

¹ I use the feminine pronoun for *kuṇḍalinī* because she is grammatically feminine, internally to the corpus designated as a goddess, and her function in the yogic body turns on a gendered polarity with *śiva*.

² I have not systematised variations in spellings such as *suṣumṇā* or *suṣumnā*, and *kunda* or *kuṇḍa*.

Methodologically this paper attempts to uncoil the concept of *kuṇḍalinī* through text-critical readings of passages related to *kuṇḍalinī* in texts that teach the physical practices of *haṭhayoga*. I have not limited the enquiry to texts that define themselves as teaching *haṭhayoga* but include those that teach physical yoga as defined in the *Haṭhapradīpikā*. I have selected texts that shed light on the development of *kuṇḍalinī* from the c. 11th-century *Amṛtasiddhi* to the c. 15th-century *Haṭhapradīpikā*. I will not consider antecedent or contemporaneous Śaiva or Vajrayāna literature though of course *kuṇḍalinī* does not appear from nowhere: a potentially very early instance is the *Sārdhatriśatikālottara Tantra* (ST) 12.1–2 (Hatley 2015:2). Here there is a primordial coil, *ādyā kuṇḍalinī*, in the heart in the shape of a sprout, *aṅkura*, possessed of moon, fire, and sun, and associated with flowing nectar.³

Theoretically this paper seeks to expose the soteriological and metaphysical role of *kuṇḍalinī* through refusing to assign her the status of mere concept. Rejecting *kuṇḍalinī* and more broadly the yogic body as a mediating device or *yantra* between the Cartesian polarities of body or mind (Samuel and Johnston 2013:xiiv) foregrounds her divine materiality; building on Geoffrey Ashton's argues in relation to *prakṛti* in Sāṃkhya, *kuṇḍalinī* could be viewed as *haṭhayoga*'s *prōcreātrix* (2020:19). This paper is structured as followed: first, a summary of my findings, second, an introduction to the corpus, third, an analysis of *kuṇḍalinī*.

Summary of findings

In relation to research question one, how *kuṇḍalinī* is characterised in the early *haṭha* corpus, she is associated with the recurrent metaphor of a sleeping snake at the base of yogic body which when awakened becomes straight. The uncoiling of *kuṇḍalinī* is the aim of *haṭhayoga*. In some sources she is a blockage to be removed from the entrance to the central channel. In others she herself rises upwards. *Kuṇḍalinī* is associated with light, sound, and an eightfold nature. Leaning on Geoffrey Ashton's analysis of *prakṛti* in Sāṃkhya I believe *kuṇḍalinī* can be seen as the *prōcreātrix* in *haṭhayoga*. *Kuṇḍalinī* is characterised as an internalisation of conventional sex. No explicit association is made between *kuṇḍalinī* and snake venom, though conditioned existence is likened to being poisoned and liberation is the removal of poison and the consumption of nectar.

³ ST 12:1- 2: *candrāgniravi samyuktā ādyā kuṇḍalinī tu yā | hrīpradeśe tu sā jñeyā aṅkurākāravatsthītā || 12.1 || sṛṣṭinyāsaṃ nyasettattra dvirabhyāsapaderitam | sravantaṃ cintayettasminnamṛtaṃ sādhakottamaḥ || 12.2 ||*

In relation to research question two, the techniques used to awaken *kuṇḍalinī*, a recurring motif is burning her with heat. This fire is fanned with the breath. In later sources all the techniques of *haṭhayoga* are thought to work on *kuṇḍalinī* and she is the support of all practices. *Kuṇḍalinī* herself is not a technique: she herself is not amenable to direct manipulation. It is through other practices that she is stimulated. The stimulation of *kuṇḍalinī* is overwhelmingly characterised by violence and only occasionally by reverence. She straightens like a snake rearing upwards when it has been hit with a stick. The implication of the violence is a definitional association between her and *haṭhayoga*: the yoga of force. Descriptions of *kuṇḍalinī* using alchemical terminology describe the body as a crucible and *kuṇḍalinī* being killed within it. These descriptions cannot be reconciled with accounts where she unites with *śiva* in the head. However, the death of *kuṇḍalinī* implies violence just as does hitting her with a stick.

In relation to research question three, the function of *kuṇḍalinī* in *haṭha*'s soteriology, awakening *kuṇḍalinī* facilitates the union of *śakti* and *śiva*. *Kuṇḍalinī* as *śakti* unites with *śiva* in the union that demarks yoga: the fusion of *kuṇḍalinī* with *śiva* is yoga. The consequence of raising *kuṇḍalinī* is the accomplishment of yoga, whether that is *siddhi*, success or power, or *utkrānti*, the casting off of the body. *Kuṇḍalinī* is the medium through which conventional desire or affect is sublimated into soteriological power. *Kuṇḍalinī* as a personification or *saguṇa* form of *śakti* functions as Rādhā to the *gopīs*: the individuated beloved who is the focus of the *yogī*, a synecdoche for *śakti*. I turn now to overviews of the sources before seeking to justify these findings.

Amṛtasiddhi

The 11th-century *Amṛtasiddhi* (AS) does not mention *kuṇḍalinī*. The text does however provide a map of the yogic body remarkably susceptible to the overlay of *kuṇḍalinī*. The *Amṛtasiddhi* accords status to the oft-extolled goddess of the centre, *madhyamā*. *Madhyamā* is a synonym for, *inter alia*, *avadhūtī*, *ādhārā*, *sarasvatī*, and *suṣumnā*,⁴ the central channel through which in later iterations *kuṇḍalinī* moves. *Madhyamā* is the creator of all and the destroyer of ignorance⁵: ‘All the mighty goddesses are located at her door of [pro]creation’ (Mallinson and Szántó in press:109),⁶ 109presumably one of whom could be, or comes to be in later texts, *kuṇḍalinī*.

⁴ AS 2.6: *avadhūtīpadaṃ kecicchmaśānaṃ ca mahāpathaṃ | kecidvadanti ādhāraṃ suṣumnāṃ ca sarasvatīm ||*

⁵ AS 2.4cd: *sarveṣāṃ jananī proktā ājñānasya kṣayamkarī ||*

⁶ AS 2.5ab: *sṛṣṭīdvāre sthitāścāsyāḥ sarvā devyo mahābalāḥ |*

Amanaska

The *Amanaska* (AM) consists of two chapters in both of which *kuṇḍalinī* occurs. The first chapter is c. 16th-century and the second chapter is c. 12th-century (Birch 2013). Both chapters reject *mudrās* and *bandhas*. The central teaching of the *Amanaska* is absorption or *laya* in a no-mind state, *amanaska*. I will focus only on the second chapter as it was a source for the *Yogatārāvalī* and *Haṭhapradīpikā* in order to confine the period to the early *haṭha* corpus. The *Amanaska* states that *kuṇḍalinī* does not cause the transition to the no-mind, *unmani*, state; rather, immersion bestows *siddhis*.⁷ The text teaches the internal gaze of *śāmbhavī mudrā*. *Kuṇḍalinī* is not emphasised in this text because *haṭha* is not emphasised: this underscores the point that *kuṇḍalinī* moves due to force.

Amaraugha

The *Amaraugha* (Am) dates to between the *Amṛtasiddhi* and *Haṭhapradīpikā* and is the first surviving text to teach *haṭha*- and *rājayoga* (Birch 2019). Here I look at the text identified by Birch as the *Amaraugha* rather than the longer perhaps 14th-century *Amaraughaprabodha*. Whilst the *Amaraugha*'s sparse 46 verses include but do not elaborate on *kuṇḍalinī*, there is a description of *kuṇḍalinī* that involves both the snake metaphor and an alchemical crucible, Am 20-21.

Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā

The 13th-century *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* (VS) is a dialogue between the sage Vasiṣṭha and his son Śakti. There is no obvious connection between the name of the interlocutor and the female gendered energy, *śakti*, the generic correlate of the more specific *kuṇḍalinī*. There are two sections in which *kuṇḍalinī* occurs. The opening of chapter two describes the yogic body and locates *kuṇḍalinī* curved above *mūlacakra* (inferred from VS 2.14).⁸

Vivekamārtaṇḍa

The influential 12th-13th-century *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* (VM) ascribes *kuṇḍalinī* an important status in granting liberation, VM 31-39.⁹ Framing the teachings on *mudrās*, *kuṇḍalinī* is described as sleeping above the *kunda*, binding the foolish and granting liberation to *yogīs*.¹⁰ Then the

⁷ AM 2.14: ūrdhvādhaḥkuṇḍalībhedaḍ unmanyāṃ naīva saṅkramah | anusandhānamātreṇa yogo 'yaṃ siddhidāyakaḥ ||

⁸ VS 2.15cd: tasyordhvaṃ kuṇḍalīsthānaṃ nābhes tiryagadhordhvataḥ |

⁹ Verse numbers taken from James Mallinson's critical edition.

¹⁰ VM 39cd: bandhanāya ca mūḍhānāṃ yas tāṃ veti sa yogavit ||

bandhas and *mudrās* are enumerated that when known by the *yogī* grant liberation: *mahāmudrā*, *nabhomudrā*, *uḍḍīyāṇa*, *jalandhara* and *mūlabandha*.¹¹ Mallinson and Singleton argue that the implication of this pair of verses is that *mudrās* work on *kuṇḍalinī* (2017:231).

Gorakṣaśataka

The 13th-century *Gorakṣaśataka* (GŚ) has an extensive treatment of *kuṇḍalinī* whereby she rises upwards and disappears as a result of the practice of *śakticālana*. The *Gorakṣaśataka* culminates in a closing statement that interiorises conventional sex, embracing the *suṣumnā nāḍī* rather than a ‘sweetheart’, *kāntā*.¹² Whilst *kuṇḍalinī* is not named a similarity is asserted between the beloved, *kāntā*, and *suṣumnā*: both are curled, *kuṭilā*, like a sprout, *aṅkura*. *Kuṭila* is synonymous with *kuṇḍalinī*.

Yogatārāvalī

The 14th-century *Yogatārāvalī* (YT) teaches *haṭhayoga* as the chief means to *rājayoga* (Birch 2020:206) and was a source text for the *Haṭhapradīpikā*. Two of its 29 verses feature *kuṇḍalinī*.

Yogabīja

Printed editions of the *Yogabīja* (YB) are no later than the 17th-century and here I discuss the earlier, c. 13th-14th-century shorter recension identified by Birch (2020:218). This version of the *Yogabīja* affirms the description of *kuṇḍalinī* with eight coils, *kuṭilī*, and enjoins the practitioner to stop the breath firmly and straighten the coils through the practice of *śakticālana*.¹³

Khacarīvidyā

The 14th-century *Khacarīvidyā* (KhV) discusses *kuṇḍalinī* at length in the third chapter. Preceding this lengthy treatment are two noteworthy discussions of *kuṇḍalinī* in chapter two: one on raising *kuṇḍalinī* and nectar and the other an embryological account of *kuṇḍalinī* and piercing.

Śivasamhitā

¹¹ VM 40: *mahāmudrāṃ nabhomudrām uḍḍīyāṇaṃ jalandharam | mūlabandham ca yo vetti sa yogī muktibhājanam ||*

¹² GŚ 101ef: *āliṅgāmo na kāntāṅkurakuṭilatanuṃ nāḍīkāṃ tām suṣumnām |* James Mallinson has published a translation of the *Gorakṣaśataka* in White, 2011. I therefore do not comprehensively include the Sanskrit and translations here except to clarify the discussion. This particular verse has been amended by Mallinson since that publication from *kuśa* to *aṅkura* following Dominic Goodall’s observation that *kuśa* is straight not curved.

¹³ YB 82: *nirudhya mārutaṃ gāḍham śakticālanayuktitaḥ | aṣṭadhākuṭilībhūtām rjvīm kuryāttu kuṇḍalīm ||*

The c. 14th-century *Śivasamhitā* (ŚS) has extensive treatment of *kuṇḍalinī* and like the *Khecarīvidyā* emphasises elaborate visualisation.¹⁴ Whilst references to *kuṇḍalinī* occur throughout the text there is extensive treatment in chapter five. In *Śivasamhitā* 2.23 *kuṇḍalinī* is introduced as the great goddess *paradevatā*, in the form of a streak of lightning coiled three and one-half times, delicate and resembling a snake, *sārddhatrīkarā kuṭilā sūkṣmā bhujagasamṇibhā*. This number becomes iconic in later textual works and representations (Ramos 2020:76) but is the only time she is described by this number in the works considered here.

Haṭhapradīpikā

The c. 15th-century *Haṭhapradīpikā* (HP) is the *locus classicus* of *haṭhayoga*. It is derivative of much of the earlier *haṭhayoga* materials and its treatment of *kuṇḍalinī* is no exception.¹⁵ In HP 3.1 *kuṇḍalinī* is cited as the support of all practices. In a micro-macrocosmic correlation between the body and the world *kuṇḍalinī* is cited as the support, *ādhāra*, of all yoga practices, just as the great snake, *ahi*, presumably Vasuki, is the support of the world.¹⁶ This final point brings us full circle to our first text, for the *Amṛtasiddhi* also describes the body as the microcosm of the universe, but more so: ‘The elements which [exist] in the three worlds are all [found] in the Body [but] the elements which are in the Body do not [all] exist elsewhere’ (Mallinson and Szántó in press).¹⁷ Having introduced the corpus I turn to the analysis.

Kuṇḍalinī: snake-woman

Kuṇḍalinī is associated with the recurrent metaphor of a sleeping snake at the base of yogic body which when awakened becomes straight. Her uncoiling results from the force of *haṭha* yoga. The *Amarāgha* describes a snake simile before the description of *kuṇḍalinī*: just as a snake, *sarpaḥ*, when hit with a stick, *daṇḍāhataḥ*, becomes straight,¹⁸ so the *kuṇḍalinī śakti* suddenly becomes straight, *ṛjvī*. The *Vasiṣṭhasamhitā* has *kuṇḍalī* flashing from the space of the heart in the form of a snake, a great blaze.¹⁹ The *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* describes her as vibrating

¹⁴ I have not included the Sanskrit because there is a published edition, Mallinson in 2007. A new edition is being prepared by Peter Pasedach at the University of Hamburg. The first chapter is available at https://muk.li/upama/sivasamhita:1:ss-1-p?upama_ver=gkctzyk7w9.

¹⁵ A new five-year project began in 2021 to critically edit the *Haṭhapradīpikā*. Various editions and translations of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* have been published so for clarity I include the Sanskrit in footnotes.

¹⁶ HP 3.1: *saśailavanadhātṛnām yathādhāro 'hināyakaḥ | sarveṣāṃ yogatantrāṇām tathādhāro hi kuṇḍalī ||*

¹⁷ AS 1.19: *trailokye yāni tattvāni tāni sarvāni dehataḥ | śarīre yāni tattvāni na santanyatra tāni vai ||*

¹⁸ Am 20: *kaṇṭhe bandhaṃ samāropyā dhārayedvāyūmūrdhvataḥ | yathā daṇḍāhataḥ sarpo daṇḍākāraḥ prajāyate ||*

¹⁹ VS 2.18: *sphuranī hṛdayākāśān nāgarūpā mahojjvalā | yoginām hṛdayākāśe nṛtyantī nityamadhyamā | vāyur vāyusukhenaiva tato yāti suṣuṃṇāyā ||*

like a snake *prasphuradbhujagākārā*, pure, *śubhā*, resembling the fibre of a lotus stalk.²⁰ The *Goraṅśāṣataka* states that like a snake struck by a stick, hissing and straightening, GŚ 56, she flashes upwards like a streak of lightning, GŚ 79. The *Yogatārāvalī* does not name *kuṅḍalinī* as such but notes that when the snake-woman, *uragāṅganā*, is awakened by *uḍyāṇa*, *jālandhara* and *mūlabandha*, the breath enters and *suṣumnā* and ceases ‘to come and go’, i.e. inhalation and exhalation cease.²¹ It seems that the *bandhas* have turned her mouth around, *pratyāṅmukhatvāt*, presumably away from covering the mouth of the central channel. In YT 12, *kuṅḍalinī* is named as *kuṅḍalī*: awakened, she consumes the remainder of the breath before *prāṇa* goes by the path at the back, *praticīnapathena*, to merge in the middle of the place of *viṣṇu*.²²

The *Yogabīja* notably does not describe her as a snake but does describe her as *kuṅḍilī* and consisting of eight coils which are to be made straight by means of *śakticālana*.²³ In *Śivasamhitā* 2.23 she is introduced as the great goddess *paradevatā* in the form of a streak of lightning coiled three and one-half times, delicate and resembling a snake. In her mouth she has inserted her tail, ŚS 5.79; she is like a sleeping serpent and sparkles with her own light, made of links like a snake she is the goddess of speech and is called *bīja*, ŚS 5.80. The *Khecarīvidyā* describes a progressive concatenation of splendour: *kuṅḍalinī* has the appearance of a single spider’s web, KhV 3.1cd, a sleeping serpent, KhV 3.9cd, she shines like ten million suns, *koṭisūryapratīkāśam*, KhV 3.33cd, the fire at the end of time, *saṃvartānala*, KhV 3.35ab, is radiant like a strobe of lightning, *taḍidvalayabhāsūrām*, KhV 3.36ab, likened to ten million lightning bolts, *taḍitkoṭipratīkāśam* KhV 3.37cd and ten million suns, *koṭisūrya*, KhV 3.41ab. Thus all the texts examined here describe *kuṅḍalinī* as a snake apart from the *Amṛtasiddhi*, *Amanaska* and *Yogabīja*.

Kuṅḍalinī: blockage

In sources that do not emphasise *haṭhayoga* she is a blockage to be removed from the entrance to the central channel. In sources that foreground *haṭha* she is awoken with force and rises with force. In the *Vasiṣṭhasamhitā* *kuṅḍalinī* is the blockage, the awakening of which allows the

²⁰ VM 50: *prasphuradbhujagākārā padmatantunibhā śubhā | prabuddhā vahniyogena vrajatyūrdhvaṃ suṣumnāyā || 50 || udghāṭayetakapāṭam tu yathā kuñcikayā haṭhāt | kuṅḍalinīyā tathā yogī mokṣadvāraṃ vibhodayet || 35 ||* Verse 50 cited here is from the Nowotny expanded edition of the *Goraṅśāṣataka*. See Birch (2011) for an analysis of the emergence of the term *haṭha*.

²¹ YT 6: *uḍyāṇājālandharamūlabandhair unnidritāyām uragāṅganāyām | pratyāṅmukhatvāt praviśan suṣumnām gamāgamau muñcati gandhavāhah ||*

²² YT 12: *pratyāḥṛtaḥ kevalakumbhakena prabuddhakuṅḍalyupabhuktaśeṣaḥ | prāṇaḥ praticīnapathena mandaṃ vilīyate viṣṇupadāntarāle*

||

²³ YB 82: *nirudhya mārutaṃ gāḍham śakticālanayuktitāḥ | aṣṭadhākuṭilībhūtām rjvīm kuryāttu kuṅḍalīm ||*

breath to be raised.²⁴ The verse continues, describing her as always staying, *sadā sthitā*, stopping the movement of breath, *vāyu*.²⁵ Encircling, *samāveṣṭya*, with her mouth the mouth of the *brahmarandhra*, she awakens at the time of yoga by means of *apāna* and fire.²⁶ With flamboyance she is described as flashing from the space of the heart in the form of a snake, a great blaze, always the centre dances in the hearts of yogis, before the breath, eased by the breath, goes through *suṣumnā*.²⁷ The snake wakes up but does not move upwards.

Kuṇḍalinī recurs in *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* chapter three following a description of raising *apāna* to the place of fire: fire goes and burns *kuṇḍalinī*.²⁸ When it has awakened and vibrated the practitioner is instructed to raise the breath to the *brahmarandhra* in *suṣumnā* whilst meditating on *om*.²⁹ This practice culminates in the option not to be born again, *na pūnarjanma*.³⁰ This section is reworked in the later *Yogayājñāvalkyā* which clarifies that *kuṇḍalinī* is heated by fire and made to move by breath so that she automatically spreads out her hoods and then wakes up.³¹ Clearly in the *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* it is the breath that should be raised. Whilst *kuṇḍalinī* flashes forth she herself is not explicitly expressed as being raised.

***Kuṇḍalinī*: straightening and rising**

The *Amṛtasiddhi* does not reference *kuṇḍalinī* but there is a goddess element, *devītattva*, at the base in which the female generative fluid, *rajas*, rests. *Rajas* is to unite with *bindu* at the esoteric top of the body,³² implying but not specifying an ascent of the female principle. *Rajas* undergoes an ascent (Westoby 2021) similar to that undertaken by *kuṇḍalinī* in later texts.

In the *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* *kuṇḍalinī* is named the highest goddess, *parameśvarī*, and sleeps with her mouth covering the door of the path leading to the pure place of *brahman*.³³ She is awoken by the yoga of fire, mind and breath, and like a needle taking a thread she goes upwards by

²⁴ VS 3.51: *prabodhe saṃsphuraty asmin vāyū āropayet tataḥ | brahmarandhre suṣumnāyām dhyāyann omkāram akṣayam ||*

²⁵ VS 2.16: *aṣṭaprakṛtirūpāsāv aṣṭadhā kuṇḍalikṛtā | akārādīkṣakārāntā kuṇḍalīty abhidhīyate | yathāvad vāyucāraṃ ca nirudhyaiṣā sadā sthitā ||*

²⁶ VS 2.17: *mukhena sā samāveṣṭya brahmarandhramukhaṃ tathā | yogakāle tv apānena prabuddhā saha vahniṇā ||*

²⁷ VS 2.18: *sphuranāṃ hṛdayākāśān nāgarūpā mahojjvalā | yoginām hṛdayākāśe nṛtyantī nityamadhyamā | vāyur vāyusukhenaiva tato yāti suṣumnāyā ||*

²⁸ VS 3.50: *kuṇḍalīm yāti vahniṣ ca dahaty atra na saṃśayah | tataḥ sa vahniṇā nāgaḥ prabodham yāti vāyunā ||*

²⁹ VS 3.51ab: *prabodhe saṃsphuraty asmin vāyū āropayet tataḥ | brahmarandhre suṣumnāyām dhyāyann omkāram akṣayam ||*

³⁰ VS 3.56ef: *brahmaivāsau bhaved putra na punar janmabhāg bhavet ||*

³¹ YY 6.69-71ab: *etena nābhimadhyasthadhāraṇenaiva mārutaḥ | kuṇḍalīm yāti vahniṣ ca dahaty atra na saṃśayah || 6.69 || santaptā vahniṇā tatra vāyunā cālītā svayam | prasārya phaṇabhṛdbhogam prabodham yāti sā tadā || 6.70 || prabuddhā (em from °e) saṃsaraty asmin nābhimūle tu cakriṇī (em from °i) | 6.71ab*

³² AS 7.11-12: *yonimadhye mahākṣetre javāsindūrasaṃnibham | rajo vasati jantūnām devītattvasamādhr̥tam || binduścandramayo jñeyo rajaḥ sūryamayastathā | anayoḥ saṃgamaḥ sādhyah kūtāgāre tidurghate ||*

³³ VM 33: *yena mārgaṇa gantavyam brahmasthānam nīramayam | mukhenācchādya tadvāram prasuptā parameśvarī ||*

way of *suṣumnā*.³⁴ Vibrating like a snake *prasphuradbhujagākārā*, pure, *śubhā*, resembling the fibre of a lotus stalk, awakened by the yoga of fire, [she] goes up through *suṣumṇā*. Finally in this passage the *yogī* is instructed to burst the door as with a key of force. *Kuṇḍalinī* is compared to the key, *kuñcikā*, that the *yogī* uses to forcefully open the double door, *kapāṭa*, of liberation.³⁵ Jason Birch, following Brahmānanda, argues that this metaphor is key to the meaning of *haṭhayoga*: ‘the implication is that the force of Haṭhayoga is the forceful effect of its practice on *kuṇḍalinī*’ (2011:538).

In the *Goraḥṣaṣataka* *kuṇḍalinī* is a blockage and she moves upwards. In the announcement of the teaching of *śakticālana*, the stimulation of the goddess, the goddess, *śakti*, is described as coiled, *kuṇḍalī*.³⁶ *Śakticālana* moves her from her home to the centre of the eyebrows,³⁷ and the two central means for accomplishing this stimulation, *cālana*, of *sarasvatī* and, in GŚ 18, restraint of the breath, *prāṇarodha*. These methods will make *kuṇḍalinī* straight.³⁸ The *Goraḥṣaṣataka* specifies that it is through making *sarasvatī* move that *kuṇḍalinī* herself moves.

Mallinson has argued that the practice of *śakticālana* involves tying a cloth around the tongue and moving it vigorously, GŚ 20-26 (2012). The result is to draw the end of *suṣumṇā* upwards slightly so that *kuṇḍalinī* extracts her mouth from *suṣumnā* and *prāṇa* can enter. Through a combination of *śakticālana*, contracting the throat and inhaling, wind moves up on both sides, GŚ 26. In the description of the techniques of *mūlabandha*, GŚ 53-58, the overheated *prāṇa* heats the sleeping *kuṇḍalinī* and wakes her up. The simile of a snake struck by a stick is given whereby *kuṇḍalinī* hisses and straightens herself, before entering the channel of *brahman*, the *brahmanāḍī*.³⁹ Here we have an analysis of *kuṇḍalinī* as both the blockage and that which moves upwards. The violence of striking with a stick will be discussed below.

In the *Yogabīja* *kuṇḍalinī* is again both a blockage and moves upwards. *Kuṇḍalinī* has eight coils, *kuṭīlī*,⁴⁰ and the practitioner is to stop the breath firmly and straighten the coils through the practice of *śakticālana*.⁴¹ The set-up for *śakticālana* is to sit in *vajrāsana* and practise for

³⁴ VM 34: *prabuddhā vahniyogena manasā marutā saha | śūcīvad guṇamādāya vrajatyūrdhvaṃ suṣumṇayā ||*

³⁵ VM 50: *prasphuradbhujagākārā padmatantunibhā śubhā | prabuddhā vahniyogena vrajatyūrdhvaṃ suṣumṇayā || 50 || udghāṭayetkapāṭam tu yathā kuñcikayā hathāt | kuṇḍalinyā tathā yogī mokṣadvāraṃ vibhedayet|| 35 ||* Verse 50 cited here is from the Nowotny expanded edition of the *Goraḥṣaṣataka*. See Birch (2011) for an analysis of the emergence of the term *haṭha*.

³⁶ GŚ 16cd: *kuṇḍalyeva bhavecchaktistasyāḥ saṃcālanakramah |*

³⁷ GŚ 17ab: *svasthānādā bhruvornadhyam śakticālanamucyate | tatsādhanē dvayam mukhyam sarasvatyāstu cālanam ||*

³⁸ GŚ 18ab: *prāṇarodhamathābhyaśādrjvī kuṇḍalinī bhavet |*

³⁹ GŚ 56: *daṇḍāhatā bhujamgīva nīsvasya ṛjutām vrajat | bile praviṣṭe tato brahmanāḍyantaram vrajat ||*

⁴⁰ Variants *kuṇḍalī*, *kuṇḍalī*, and *kuṇ+ilī* (Birch in press).

⁴¹ YB 82: *nirudhya marutam gāḍham śakticālanayuktitāḥ | aṣṭadhākuṭīlībhūtām ṛjvīm kuryāttu kuṇḍalīm ||*

half a month.⁴² The fire is enflamed by the breath and continually burns *kuṇḍalinī* who is the power of life, *jīvaśaktir*, who is ‘the enchantress of the three worlds’, *trailokyamohinī* (Birch in press).⁴³ She enters the *suṣumṇā* and along with breath and fire she pierces *brahmā*’s knot.⁴⁴ Then *kuṇḍalinī* herself pierces the *viṣṇugranthi* and remains in *rudragranthi*, and the breath is to be held firmly after inhaling repeatedly.⁴⁵ There follow two similes. The splitting of the knots in the spine by the breath are compared to the splitting of knots in bamboo by a red hot spike.⁴⁶ The itching that arises in *suṣumṇā* due to constant practice by the breath is compared to the itching that arises from the touch of ants.⁴⁷

In the *Khecarīvidyā* *kuṇḍalinī* clearly rises upwards. In the chapter two description she goes upwards along with the nectars. At KhV 2.32ff five individually named *kalās* or nectars are described at the base, *ādhāra*, between the anus and testicles. From these drip the supreme *amṛta*.⁴⁸ Also at this location is situated the *ādyā* or primordial *kuṇḍalinī*, the supreme goddess, *paramā śakti*, KhV 2.34. The *yogī* is instructed to contract that region and hold the breath and by means of *mūlaśakti* attain the cool *amṛta* situated there, KhV 2.35. The *yogī* should lead the *amṛtas* via *suṣumṇā* from *svādhiṣṭhānā* and other lotuses, thinking of himself as being sprinkled with a rain of nectar up to the skull, *brahmāṇḍaka*, KhV 2.36. In KhV 2.37 it is clearly the great goddess, *śaktiḥ śrīkuṇḍalī parā*, who goes to the abode of *brahmā*. The *yogī* should recollect her pervading the body from the feet to the head, bathed in a surfeit of the nectar produced by the five *kalās* at the root, KhV 2.38. By practicing this technique for five months absorption, *laya*, into the five elements arises and the *yogī* becomes equal to *śiva*, KhV 2.39. Here there is a strong connection between *kuṇḍalinī* and the elixirs, and it is *kuṇḍalinī* as the great goddess who rises up through the *suṣumṇā*. There is a notable use of visualisation as well as contraction of the base and holding the breath.

The *Khecarīvidyā* is the only work treated here in which she goes up and comes back down. In chapter three *kuṇḍalinī* is to be raised upwards as part of the practice of *khecarī* and the *yogī* drinks nectar and his body is satiated by nectar, KhV 3.4. She not only drenches the body in nectar but also returns to her home in the base, KhV 3.14ab.

⁴² Note on possible variations of this length, see Birch, in press, 99n65. YB 83cd: *vajrasanagato nitya māsārdham tu samabhyaset |*

⁴³ YB 84: *vāyunā jvalito vahniḥ kuṇḍalīm dahate ’niśam | samtaptā sāgninā jīvaśaktirtrailokyamohinī ||*

⁴⁴ YB 85: *viśate vajradaṇḍe tu suṣumṇāvanāntare | vāyunā vahninā sārḍham brahmagranthirvibhidhyate ||*

⁴⁵ YB 86: *viṣṇugranthim tato bhittvā rudragranthau ca tiṣṭhati | tatastu kumbhayedgāḍham pūrayitvā punaḥ punaḥ ||*

⁴⁶ YB 87: *bhidante granthayo vaṃśe taptaloḥaśalākayā | tathaiva pṛṣṭhavaṃśe tugranthibhedastu vāyunā ||*

⁴⁷ YB 88: *pipīlikā yathā lagnā kaṇḍūstatra pravartate | suṣumṇāyām tathābhyāsāt satataṃ vāyunā bhavet ||*

⁴⁸ KhV 2.33 see Mallinson 2007 for the Sanskrit and translation. I do not include the Sanskrit here.

In the *Śivasamhitā*, following a discussion of *vajroli*, *sahajoli*, *amaroli* and a little on *śakticālana*, ŚS 4.78ff, the *yogī* should firmly move the sleeping *kuṇḍalinī* and force, *balāt*, her upwards on the rising *apāna* wind, ŚS 4.105.⁴⁹

The analysis of the description of *kuṇḍalinī* so far has focused on her assignation as a snake that is sleeping, is to be awoken, and either removed from blocking the base of the central channel or is herself raised upwards through the central channel. I would like to return to the analysis of *kuṇḍalinī*'s nature in terms of metaphysics, her relationship to real women, and snake venom, after discussing techniques.

***Kuṇḍalinī*: technique**

It seems that *kuṇḍalinī* is not susceptible to manipulation. She is not a technique that can be leveraged. Instead, her awakening and straightening is the effect of other technologies. We have seen that *kuṇḍalinī* is to be awakened through heat and hitting. The heat is fanned by *prāṇa*. The technologies employed to work on the breath – and at times directly on *kuṇḍalinī* – include *mudrās*, *bandhas*, *laya*, *amanaska*, and visualisation.

In the *Amṛtasiddhi* the perineum lock, *yonibandha*, is said to work on the goddesses.⁵⁰ Of the three central techniques taught, *mahābandha*, *mahāmudrā* and *mahāvedha*, the first is divided into two types, the perineum lock, *yonibandha*, for the goddesses and the throat lock, *kanthabandha* for the god.⁵¹ In *Vasiṣṭhasamhitā prāṇa*, fire and heat awaken *kuṇḍalinī*, VS 3.46-50. It is the breath, eased by the breath, that moves through *suṣumnā*.⁵² Breath is to be raised whilst meditating on *om*.⁵³ For the *Vivekamārtaṇḍa mudrās* work on *kuṇḍalinī* whilst in the *Gorakṣaśataka* it is *śakticālana* and restraint of the breath. The teaching on awakening *kuṇḍalinī* is repeated from GŚ 74ff as part of the method for attaining *samādhi* when the *yogī* has stimulated *sarasvatī* and controlled his⁵⁴ breath (Mallinson and Singleton 2017:214–15). According to the *Yogabījā* the *yogī* must sit in *vajrāsana* and firmly and repeatedly hold the breath, YB 86. The *Khecarīvidyā* instructs the *yogī* to contract the base and hold the breath, KhV 2.35, gives visualisations and recollections, KhV 2.38-39, and its signature practice of

⁴⁹ ŚS 4.105: *ādhārakamale suptāṃ cālayet kuṇḍalīm dṛḍham | apānavāyūm āruhya balād ākr̥sya buddhimān ||*

⁵⁰ AS 12.2: *bandhaśca dvividho jñeyo yathā bindurudāhṛtaḥ | yonibandho hi devīnām kaṇṭhabandho hi daivataḥ ||*

⁵¹ AS 12.2: *bandhaś ca dvividho jñeyo yathā bindur udāhṛtaḥ | yonibandho hi devīnām kaṇṭhabandho hi daivataḥ ||*

⁵² VS 2.17: *mukhena sā samāveṣṭya brahmarandhramukhaṃ tathā | yogakāle tv apānena prabuddhā saha vahninā ||*

⁵³ VS 3.51: *prabodhe saṃsphuraty asmin vāyūm āropayet tataḥ | brahmarandhre suṣumṇāyām dhyāyann omkāram akṣayam ||*

⁵⁴ For indeed it usually is a he: *haṭhayoga* authors, audience, practitioners and redactors generally appear to have been male.

khecarīmudrā, KhV 2.123-124 and chapter three. The *Śivasamhitā* describes elaborate visualisations, specifies the grace of the guru in teaching the *mudrās* that awaken *kuṇḍalinī*, ŚS 4.21. The *yogī* is to make every effort to practice *mudrās* in order to awaken the goddess, ŚS 4.22.

In the *Haṭhapradīpikā* *kuṇḍalinī* is the support of all practices of yoga.⁵⁵ The *mudrās* are intended to awaken *kuṇḍalinī* which causes *rājayoga* or the state of *samādhi*. Prior to its description of *mudrās* the *Haṭhapradīpikā* insists that every effort should be made in the practice of *mudrās* to awaken the goddess, *īśvarī*, i.e. *kuṇḍalinī*, asleep at the door of *brahmā*.⁵⁶ *Kuṇḍalinī* herself is not a technique. She is not amenable to direct manipulation. It is through other practices that she is stimulated.

Violence

The stimulation of *kuṇḍalinī* is overwhelmingly characterised by violence and only occasionally by reverence. She straightens like a snake rearing upwards when it has been hit with a stick. The implications of the association of *kuṇḍalinī* with violent techniques foregrounds her as the central metaphor of *haṭhayoga*: the yoga of force.

The simile of *kuṇḍalinī* straightening as a snake hit by a stick is strikingly violent and potentially sexual. In the *Haṭhapradīpikā* a pejorative term, *bālarāṇḍā*, for a young widow, is a descriptor of *kuṇḍalī* who should be seized by force, *balātkāreṇa grhṇīyāt*.⁵⁷ The force with which she is seized mirrors the force, *haṭhāt*, with which she rises up.⁵⁸ The language of force and pejorative metaphors, if read as a parallel of social relations, suggests not only patriarchy but misogyny. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper, and methodologically dubious, to attempt to read the *haṭha* corpus as social commentary. A contrast with this harsh terminology is the devotional reverence also articulated in the *Haṭhapradīpikā*: ‘Salutations to the Suṣumnā, to Kuṇḍalinī, to the nectar flowing from the Moon, to the Manonmanī [state] and to the great Power in the form of pure Consciousness’ (Raja 1972:73–74).⁵⁹

Alchemy

⁵⁵ HP 3.1: *aśailavanadhātrīṇām yathādhāro 'hināyakaḥ | sarveṣāṃ yogatantrāṇām tathādhāro hi kuṇḍalī ||*

⁵⁶ HP 3.5: *tasmāt sarvaprayatnena prabodhayitum īśvarīm | brahmadvāramukhe suptām mudrābhyāsaṃ samācaret ||*

⁵⁷ HP 3.105 (according to the etext numbering and 3.109 in Rāja): *gaṅgāyamunayor madhye bālarāṇḍām tapasvinīm | balātkāreṇa grhṇīyāt tad viṣṇoḥ paramaṃ padam ||*

⁵⁸ HP 3.106: *pucche pragrhya bhujagīm suptām udbodhayec ca tām | nidrām vihāya sā śaktir ūrdhvam uttiṣṭhate haṭhāt ||*

⁵⁹ HP 4.64: *suṣumnāyai kuṇḍalīnyai sudhāyai candrajanmane | manonmanyai namas tubhyaṃ mahāśaktyai cidātmāne ||*

In some of our sources *kuṇḍalinī* is connected to an alchemical metaphor. The channel she obstructs and in some instances enters is a parallel for the alchemical chamber or crucible in which mercury is killed, *marañam*. This concept of death within the central channel appears in the *Amṛtasiddhi* and *Amarauḡha*. Whilst alchemy is not a predominant theme in discussions of *kuṇḍalinī* the killing of *kuṇḍalinī* links to the theme of violence.

In chapter six the *Amṛtasiddhi* describes *brahmā* and the other gods as unable to carry out their functions without breath⁶⁰ before the instruction to use the breath to cut off the breath,⁶¹ presumably rendering the gods to a death-like state. Chapter seven continues this thread, noting that all the elements in the body move when breath moves and are stilled when breath is stilled.⁶² Further, it is through contact with the inside of *madhyamā*, the goddess of the centre, that breath is stilled, *mriyate*, at which point *bindu* and mind are also stilled.⁶³ An effect of *mahābandha* is the death, *māraṇam* of breath and making the breath enter *madhyamā*.⁶⁴ The throat and root lock together are described as *samputa yoga* and glossed as *mūlabandha*.⁶⁵ Chapter 20 describes the second or pot stage, *ghaṭāvasthā*, and notes it is called the pot because there is *samputa yoga* in this stage.⁶⁶

In the *Amarauḡha kuṇḍalinī* enters a deathlike state, *marañāvasthā*,⁶⁷ and resides in a *dvipuṭa*. This vessel of two parts is used in alchemical procedures. A correlation is being made between the body, sealed with *bandhas* at the throat and *yoni*, described as *mahāmudrā*,⁶⁸ and the sealed alchemical crucible. The teaching on *haṭhayoga* is announced in the same verse that describes the great seal, *mahāmudrā* (*mahāmudrā* is not named as such).⁶⁹ Then the throat should be locked and the breath held upwards before a snake simile precedes the description of *kuṇḍalinī*: just as a snake, *sarpaḥ*, when hit with a stick, *daṇḍāhataḥ*, becomes straight,⁷⁰ so the *kuṇḍalinī śakti* suddenly becomes straight, *rjivī*. *Kuṇḍalinī* is then described as entering a death-like state, *marañāvasthā*, and residing in, *āśritā*, a double chamber, *dvipuṭa*.⁷¹ Thus the effect of the locks on the yogic body render it similar to an alchemical vessel, *dvipuṭa*. The activation or pot stage,

⁶⁰ AS 6.18: yadī brahmādayo devā tiṣṭhanti triḡuṇānvitāḥ | na kurvanti svakāryāṇi yadā vāyu vivarjitā ||

⁶¹ AS 6.20: ḡṛhītvā vāyukhadḡam ca chitvā vāyorgāgamam | bhittvā brahmādimārgam ca bhukṣvānandamayam sukham ||

⁶² AS 7.24: vyaṅgāni sarvatattvāni śarīre nivasanti ca | caranti vāyusaṃcāre mriyante vāyumāraṇāt ||

⁶³ AS 7.23: yadāsau mriyate vāyur madhyamāmadhyayogataḥ | tadā binduśca cittam ca mriyate vāyunā saha ||

⁶⁴ AS 14.14: māraṇam kālayogena rasadvayasya melakam | madhyamānupraveśo pi yogino `bhyāsayogataḥ ||

⁶⁵ AS 12.16: ayaṃ ca samputo yogo mūlabandho `pyayaṃ mataḥ | yogatrayamanenaiva sidhyatyabhyasyatām satām ||

⁶⁶ AS 20.8: dvitīyāyāmavasthāyām vāyusamputayogataḥ | tenāsyāḥ sarvato lokairghaṭa ityabhidhīyate ||

⁶⁷ Am 21: rjubhūtā tadā śaktiḥ kuṇḍalī sahasā bhavet | tadāsau marañāvasthā jāyate dvipuṭāśritā ||

⁶⁸ Am 22: mahākṣēdayo doṣā bhidyante marañādayaḥ | mahāmudrām ca tenaivā vadanti vibudhottamāḥ ||

⁶⁹ Am 19: pādāmūlena vāmena yoniṃ sampīḍya dakṣiṇam | padaṃ prasāritam dhrtvā karābhyām pūrayenmukhe ||

⁷⁰ Am 20: kaṅṭhe bandham samāropyā dhārayedvāyūmūrdhvataḥ | yathā daṇḍāhataḥ sarpo daṇḍākāraḥ prajāyate ||

⁷¹ Am 21: rjvībhūtā tathā śaktiḥ kuṇḍalī sahasā bhavet | tadāsau marañāvasthā jāyate dvipuṭāśritā ||

ghaṭa, where the breath goes in the middle channel,⁷² could relate to the alchemical metaphor of the *dvipuṭa*. Amongst the benefits in the *Amaraugha*, the firm application of *mahāmudrā* grants success.⁷³

In a recapitulation of the *Amaraugha*'s verse for the *Haṭhapradīpikā* the *śakti kuṇḍalī* goes to a deathlike state in the *dvipuṭa*.⁷⁴ This is a result of the throat lock, holding the breath upwards, and the *śakti kuṇḍalī*, becoming straight like the snake hit by a stick.⁷⁵ The death of *kuṇḍalinī* is at odds with her union with *śiva*. The *Amṛtasiddhi*'s death of the gods could be a precursor to the *Amaraugha*'s *maraṇa* of *kuṇḍalinī*.

***Kuṇḍalinī* by numbers: eightfold**

Kuṇḍalinī is frequently described as having an eightfold nature which appears to relate to her metaphysical or ontological status by referencing the *tattvas* or categories of Sāṃkhya. In one of the *Bhagavadgītā*'s proto-Sāṃkhya sections, 7.4, Kṛṣṇa describes his material nature as divided into eight: earth, air, fire, wind, ether, mind, intelligence, and ego (Johnson 1994:34).

The *Śivasamhitā* describes *kuṇḍalinī* as coiled three and one half times, ŚS 2.23. In later literature and representations this number becomes iconic in its association with *kuṇḍalinī*. However in the works considered here she is overwhelmingly associated with having an eightfold nature. Her reptilian features have been foregrounded in the above discussion and are a recurrent feature of the sources. Yet she is also associated with light and sound. Leaning on Geoffrey Ashton's analysis of *prakṛti* in Sāṃkhya I believe *kuṇḍalinī* is the *prōcreātrix* of *haṭhayoga*. *Prakṛti* and *śakti* as ultimate constituents of the cosmos are connected terms. *kuṇḍalinī* is often used synonymously for *śakti*. But I would argue that *kuṇḍalinī* is not coeval with *śakti*. Instead *kuṇḍalinī* is a particular manifestation of *śakti*.

There are manifold references to *kuṇḍalinī*'s eightfold nature in these sources. In the first instance of which I am aware in the *haṭha* corpus, the *Vasiṣṭhasamhitā* describes *kuṇḍalinī* as eightfold, *aṣṭadhā*, with the form of the eightfold *prakṛti*.⁷⁶ *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* notes that above the *kuṇḍa* resides the eight coils made from *kuṇḍalinīśakti*, VM 32. The *Gorakṣasataka* departs

⁷² Am 37ab: *dvīṭīye saṅghaṭīkṛtya vāyurbhavati madhyagah |*

⁷³ Am 23ab: *mahāmudrā dṛḍhā yena sādhaḥ 'yam prasīdhyati |*

⁷⁴ HP 3.11: *tadā sā maraṇāvasthā jāyate dvipuṭāśrayā ||*

⁷⁵ HP 3.10: *kaṅṭhe bandhaṃ samāropya dhārayed vāyum ūrdhvataḥ | yathā daṇḍahataḥ sarpo daṇḍākāraḥ prajāyate | rjvībhūtā tathā śaktiḥ kuṇḍalī sahasā bhavet ||*

⁷⁶ VS 2.16ab: *aṣṭaprakṛtirūpāsāv aṣṭadhā kuṇḍalikṛtā |*

from the description of *kuṇḍalinī* having an eightfold nature and instead describes her as going to the place which takes the form of the right constituents of nature, *prakṛtyaṣṭakarūpaṃ*, GŚ 86. Whilst the *Yogabīja*'s *kuṇḍalinī* has eight coils which are to be straightened through *śakticālana*, YB 82, and the *Sivasamhitā*'s *kuṇḍalinī śakti* has eight coils, *aṣṭaveṣṭanā*, ŚS 5.164, the *Khecarīvidyā* has its notable account of *kuṇḍalinī* as part of a fivefold embryological iteration, KhV 2.120-124. For the *Khecarīvidyā* the results of recollecting the *śaktiḥ śrīkuṇḍalī parā* pervading the body for five months is absorption, *laya*, into the five elements arises and the *yogī* becomes equal to *śiva*, KhV 2.38-39.⁷⁷

In addition to these numerical references *kuṇḍalinī* is closely associated with *śakti*. The *Amṛtasiddhi*'s *madhyamā* is creator of all and destroyer of ignorance.⁷⁸ She is the source of the knowledge of *prāṇa*, VM 31, and as such may have a cosmogonic role. The *Vivekamārtanda* gives a classic formulation of *kuṇḍalinī* where she is the highest goddess, *parameśvarī*, VM 33. Later in the text *bindu* is *śiva* and *rajas* is *śakti*.⁷⁹ The concepts of *rajas* (female generative fluid) and *śakti* come so close as to almost collapse into one another. Prior to the description of *bandhas* and *mudrās* *kuṇḍalinī* is described as the source of knowledge of *prāṇa*: the *gāyatrī* and she who supports *prāṇa* is made from *kuṇḍalinī*, thus do the knowers of yoga know the knowledge of the breath.⁸⁰ The alphabetic (and thus cosmogonic) nature of *kuṇḍalinī* is then linked to her eightfold nature: above the *kuṇḍa* resides the eight coils made from *kuṇḍalinīśakti* permanently and with ease covering the opening of the door of *brahman*.⁸¹ In a similar vein the *Gorakṣaśataka* describes the result of *śakticālana* as the combining of *rajas* and *śukla* in *śiva*, GŚ 87. The *Gorakṣaśataka* also specifies that it is through making *sarasvatī*, also known as *arundhatī*, move, that *kuṇḍalinī* herself moves. We have seen in the *Yogabīja* that *kuṇḍalinī* is the *jīvaśaktir trailokyamohinī*, the power of life who is the enchantress of the three worlds, YB 84 (Birch's term).

The *Khecarīvidyā* 2.34 posits the *ādyā*, primordial *kuṇḍalinī* who is the supreme goddess, *paramā śakti*, at the *ādhāra* base and also defines her as the great goddess, *śaktiḥ śrīkuṇḍalī parā*, KhV 2.37. The *haṭha* corpus describes the arising of sound in the yogic body as

⁷⁷ In chapter one the *Amanaska* does not describe *kuṇḍalinī* with an eightfold nature but does enumerate the progressive lengths of time in absorption, *laya*, that lead to attainment of the *tattvas* or elements with *śakti* as the highest element. Thus after absorption for 24 years the *yogī* attains the attainment, *siddhi*, of the *śakti*-element and consists entirely of the *śakti* element: etext and 2006 edition agree on verse number, AM 1.82: *caturviṃśatibhir varṣair layasthasya nirantaram | śaktitattvasya siddhiḥ syāc chaktitattvamayo bhavet ||*

⁷⁸ AS 2.4 *eṣā devī mahāvidyā devānāmapi durlabhā | sarveṣāṃ janānī proktā ajñānasya kṣayaṃkarī ||*

⁷⁹ VM 56: *binduḥ śivo rajaḥ śaktirbindurindū rajo raviḥ | ubhayoḥ saṅgamādeva prāpyate paramaṃ padam ||*

⁸⁰ VM 31: *kuṇḍalinyāḥ samadbhūtā gāyatrī prāṇadhārinī | prāṇavādyās tathā vidyā yas tāṃ vetti sa yogavit ||*

⁸¹ VM 32: *kuṇḍordhvaṃ kuṇḍalī śaktiraṣṭadhā kuṭlikṛtā | brahmadvāramukhaṃ nityaṃ sukhenāvṛtya tiṣṭati ||*

contingent upon stages of the practices, such as the series of sounds arising as *kuṇḍalinī* rises in KhV 2.92ff. Chapter two concludes with a section on embryology. The constituents of the foetus as it develops in the womb are enumerated. *Kuṇḍalinī* is the first of five innate constituents, *sahajā*, KhV 2.120ff. *Kuṇḍalinī* is described as *ādyā kuṇḍalinīśakti*. The second constituent is *suṣumṇā*, third the tongue, *jihvā*, fourth the palate, *tālu*, and fifth the place of *brahma*, KhV 2.121-122. The *yogī* should raise the first and place it in the second, then insert the third upwards into the fourth. After piercing the fourth, the third should enter the fifth, KhV 2.123-124. Thus *kuṇḍalinī* is incorporated in an embryological explanation of *khecarīmudrā*, where the tongue is inserted into the nasal cavity. This section is intriguing for its connections with an involution through constituents, similar to Sāṃkhya, and for providing a medical analysis which appears to explain the *śakticālana* of the *Gorakṣaśataka*.

In the *Haṭhapradīpikā* gives *kuṇḍalinī*'s synonyms as *kuṭilāṅgī*, *bhujāṅgī*, *śakti*, *īśvarī*, *kuṇḍalī*, and *arundhatī*.⁸² *Kuṇḍalinī* in her associations with *śakti*, the eightfold coils redolent of Sāṃkhya, cosmogonic *praṇava* and alphabetic sound, radiance and embryology underscore the materiality of *kuṇḍalinī*. She is not a concept to be visualised. She is the stuff of the universe and constituent of the yogic body.

***Kuṇḍalinī*: internalisation of sex**

Haṭhayoga interiorises sex as it interiorises the cosmos. The *Amṛtasiddhi* interiorises the cosmos and sex, AS 7.35, albeit without *kuṇḍalinī*. The *Gorakṣaśataka* interiorises sex, GŚ 101. The *Haṭhapradīpikā* correlates the cosmic serpent and the interior *kuṇḍalinī*, HP 3.1. Eliade discusses 'ritual interiorization' tracing *tapas* in Vedic cosmogony and 'inner sacrifice' in which physiological functions replace libations and ritual objects (1954:111–14). Heesterman too has analysed the internalisation of the Vedic sacrifice (1985:26–44).

The narrative chronology of the texts appears to make a causal association between conventional sex and *kuṇḍalinī*. For example, the *Amṛtasiddhi* makes a misogynistic statement two verses before making *prāṇa* face the opening of *madhyamā*: 'A woman of virtue and beauty is useless without a man; the great seal and great lock are useless without the piercing.'⁸³ In *Amanaska* chapter two the discussion of *kuṇḍalinī* occurs five verses after a misogynistic statement: 'The Vedas, [all religious, philosophical, legal, etc.] treatises and the Purāṇas are

⁸² HP 3.100: *kuṭilāṅgī kuṇḍalinī bhujāṅgī śaktir īśvarī | kuṇḍaly arundhatī caite śabdāḥ paryāyavācakāḥ ||*

⁸³ AS 13.3ab: *guṇarūpavati nārī niṣphalā puruṣaṃ vinā | mahāmudrāmahābandho vinā vedhena niṣphalāḥ ||*

like common whores. Only Śāmbhavī Mudrā is kept private like the wife of a good family’ (Birch 2013:286).⁸⁴ In the intervening verses Umā is named as the personified primal *śakti* who first received this *mudrā* which is now being taught to the student.⁸⁵ Against this ordering of references to women preceding statements on *kuṇḍalinī*, the *Amarauḡha* refers to women after the discussion of *kuṇḍalinī*: ‘Just as a beautiful and graceful woman without a man, so the great seal and lock are barren without the great piercing’ (Birch 2019:91).⁸⁶ The *Amarauḡha* also says the *yogī* should avoid women, fires and roads while practising the three *mudrās*, Am 33. The association is clearly made in the conclusion to the *Goraḡśasataka* 101, included in the abstract above: ‘We don’t embrace, *ālīṅgāmaḡ na*, the body, *tanuḡ*, of a beloved, *kāntā*, curved, *kuṡila*, like a sprout *aṅkura*, [instead we embrace] the *suḡumnā* channel, *nāḡdikāḡ*.’

From the placement of the verses referring to sex in the conventional world and the passages on *kuṇḍalinī*, an association appear to be at work in the minds of the redactors. There is a glaring misogyny in the statements that is not necessarily specific to the *haṡṡa* corpus. The son of a barren woman, *vandhyā putra*, is a widespread metaphor to discuss the non-existent in Indian philosophy (Mcdermott 1970; Siderits 1991:111–85).⁸⁷ There does seem to be an association of violence towards women in conventional terms and violence as a technique to awaken *kuṇḍalinī*, discussed below. There is also an assumed a heterosexual paradigm: the gender of the cosmic serpent switches to female when interiorised in the (male) yogic body.

***Kuṇḍalinī*’s venom?**

Kuṇḍalinī does not appear to be associated with emitting poison in the *haṡṡa* sources but the texts do use poison is a metaphor for being stuck in conditioned existence, *saḡsāra*. Rather than the emission of poison *kuṇḍalinī* is associated with the consumption of, inter alia, *prāṅa*, nectar, and *jīva*. In the early *Tantrasadbhāva* (TS) *śakti* is in the heart and composed as a sleeping snake,⁸⁸ ‘as if made senseless by poison’ (Padoux 1990:128).⁸⁹ Here she does not emit poison and the Śaiva sources warrant further research on the emission of poison and nectar.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ AM 2.9: *vedaśāstrapurāṅāni sāmānyagaṅikā iva | ekaiva śāmbhavī mudrā guptā kulavadhūr iva ||*

⁸⁵ AM 2.11ab: *ādiśaktir umā caiṡā matto labdhavatī purā |*

⁸⁶ Am 26: *rūpalāvanyasampannā yathā strī puruṡaḡ vinā | mahāmudrāmahābandhau niṡphalau vedhavarjītau ||*

⁸⁷ Thanks to Lidia Wojtczak for these references, email 12th May 2021.

⁸⁸ TS 1.216: *hr̥binduḡ veṡṡayitvā tu prasuptabhujagākṡṡiḡ | tatra suptā mahābhāḡe na kiṅcinmanyate ume ||*

⁸⁹ TS 1.217: *candrāḡniravinakṡatrair bhuvanāni caturdaśa | udare kṡīpya sā devī viṡamūccheva yā gatā ||* This description continues with *kuṇḍalinī* churning and being churned, associated with elixir, and enumerated in progressive numerical forms.

⁹⁰ Silburn notes the double meaning of *viṡa*: “poison” bringing about death and also “all-pervasiveness,” that of the nectar of immortality (*amṡta*)’ (Silburn 1988:15). This discussion may be based on the *Tantrasadbhāva*’s description (or the version of it included in Kṡemarāja’s *Śivasūtravimarṡinī* 2.3) and *Tantrāloka* 3.170. Thanks to Shaman Hatley for helping me with these references, email 13th May 2021.

In the *Amṛtasiddhi* the guru destroys the sleep induced by the poison of ignorance with a stream of nectar.⁹¹ In the *Amarauḡha* there is a lengthy description which, whilst not mentioning *kuṇḡalinī*, describes a heating and raining of bliss similar to later descriptions of *kuṇḡalinī*. The result is the union of *śiva* and *śakti*.⁹² This is the flood or teaching, *auḡha*, of nectar, *amara*, also known as *rājayoga*,⁹³ one possible inspiration for the text's name. In the *Vasiṣṡhasaṃhitā* 5.23 one channel carries poisonous *vāyu* and another nectar.⁹⁴ In the *Vivekamārtaṇḡa* '[p]oison does not trouble the yogi's body if it is constantly filled with the [nectar from the] digits of the moon, even when he is bitten by a snake' (Mallinson and Singleton 2017:222).⁹⁵

The *Goraḡśasataka*'s description of *kuṇḡalinī* consuming fluids resonates with the *Khecarīvidyā*'s account of *kuṇḡalinī* consuming the *jīva*. The *Khecarīvidyā* is replete with descriptions of elixirs flooding the body and being consumed. As she returns to her home in the base she sprinkles the *yogī* with 'dewy, unctuous, cool nectar', KhV 3.14 (Mallinson 2007) (Mallinson). In the *Yogatārāvalī kuṇḡalinī*'s consuming of *prāṇa* brings about *kevalakumbhaka* before *rājayoga* or *samādhī*. The opening verse also references the poison, *hālāhala*, of conditioned existence.⁹⁶ Birch describes the guru's lotus-feet as toxicologists which remove the poison of transmigration. Birch argues that *hālāhala* is 'either the mythological poison produced at the churning of the ocean and swallowed by Śiva (thereby causing the blueness of his neck) or some plant-based poison' and the *guru* is likened to a *jāṅgalika*, 'a doctor who specializes in the general treatment of poisons (i.e., a toxicologist) rather than a snake doctor or charmer' based on the commentary *Yogabhāvaḡprakāśikā* and the *Amarakośa* (1.8.510) (Birch 2015:4n2). *Kuṇḡalinī* is thus not explicitly connected with the emission of poison which induces her own slumber of the 'sleep' of the practitioner in *saṃsāra*.

***Kuṇḡalinī*'s role in haṡṡayoga's soteriology**

The third research question that I posed in this question is a consideration of the function or effect of *kuṇḡalinī* in *haṡṡa*'s soteriological worldview. I find that awakening *kuṇḡalinī*

⁹¹ AS 1.2: *ajñānaṃ viṣanidrāṇaṃ me jñānapīyūśadhārayā | nihatā yena vaidyena tasmai śrīgurave namaḡ ||*

⁹² Am 13: *nirvāte cittarāje viṣati khararucāu merudurge samantād udrikte vahnibhāve dravatī śāśadhare pūrayatyāśu kāye | udyatyānandavṛnde tyajati tavamametyādīmohāndhakāre prodbhinne bhrahmarandhre jayati śivaśivāsaṅgamaḡ ko 'pyapūrah ||* 'When the lord of thoughts (*cittarāja*) is still and the sun (*khararuci*) enters completely into the [place] made inaccessible by *meru* (i.e., the central channel); when its fiery state has increased (*udrikta*), the moon melts and the body is quickly made full [of nectar]; when an abundance of bliss (*ānandavṛnda*) rises up, and the darkness of delusion, such as [thoughts of] 'yours' and 'mine', departs, and when the aperture of the skull bursts open, the extraordinary and unprecedented union of Śiva and Śakti prevails' (Birch forthcoming).

⁹³ Am 14: *eka evāmarauḡho 'yaṃ rājayogābhīdhānakah |*

⁹⁴ VS 5.23: *viṣaṃ bhāskarabhāge syāt somabhāge 'mṛtaṃ tathā | tayoh kālavaśān nityaṃ carataś candrabhāskarau |*

⁹⁵ VM 130: *nityaṃ somakalāpūrṇaṃ śarīraṃ yasya yoginaḡ | takṣakenāpī daṡṡasya viṣaṃ tasya na pīḡayet ||* *Gheraṇḡdasamhitā* 3.25 is a paraphrase of *Bhagavadgītā* 2.23 plus snake cannot bite it. Speculatively, there could be a transmutation of *kuṇḡalinī*'s poison into an elixir such that the *yogī* is immune to mundane snakebite. See (Lovejoy 2021).

⁹⁶ YT 1: *vandegurīṇaṃ caraṇāravindesandarśitasvāmasukhāvabodhe | janasyayejāṅgalikāyamānesaṃsārahālāhalamohasāntyai ||*

facilitates the union of *śakti* and *śiva*. *Kuṇḍalinī* as *śakti* unites with *śiva* which is the definition of yoga: the fusion of *kuṇḍalinī* with *śiva* is yoga.

For the *Amaraugha mahāmudrā* makes *kuṇḍalinī* straight, Am 23, the objective of the work is the union of *śiva* and *śakti*, Am 13. The *Gorakṣasataka* concludes its description of *śakticālana* observing that in this way *rajas* from below and *śukla* from above come together in *śiva*, following which *prāṇa* and *apana* also come together, GŚ 65. In the *Yogabīja kuṇḍalinī*, having pierced *rudragranthi* goes to the place consisting of *śiva*; there, yoga arises when the moon and the sun are made the same.⁹⁷ Finally, the *yogī* goes beyond the three *guṇas* due to splitting the three *granthis*: from the union of *śiva* and *śakti* the highest state arises.⁹⁸

The consequence of the rising of *kuṇḍalinī* is variously accomplishment, *siddhi*, *utkrānti*, the casting off of the body. In the *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā* the practice of *kuṇḍalinī* culminates in the option to cast off the body, VS 3.56. For the *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* 40, *kuṇḍalinī* grants liberation to yogis and is the key of force that pierces the door of liberation, VM 35. In the *Khecarīvidyā kuṇḍalinī* also has a role in avoiding death and yogic suicide. If the yogi wishes to cheat death he should imagine *kuṇḍalinī* devouring the *jīva*, KhV 3.38-40, raise *kuṇḍalinī* above the bolt of *brahmā* until the time of death has passed and then lead her back to the base centre, KhV 3.44-48. The process of yogic suicide is initiated by the unification of *kuṇḍalinī* and the goddess, KhV 3.48-55. In the early *haṭha* corpus the uncoiling of *kuṇḍalinī* is not only the central metaphor for the practice of *haṭhayoga*: the transmutation of this divine matter from sleep to wakefulness and liberation with *śiva* is yoga.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to bring together passages on *kuṇḍalinī* in the early *haṭha* corpus to explore how is *kuṇḍalinī* characterised, what techniques are recommended for awakening *kuṇḍalinī* and what the functional role of *kuṇḍalinī* in the yogic body is—and her status in *haṭhayoga*'s soteriological scheme. *Saṃsāra* is defined by the sleeping snake, and the implication is the insentience and bondage of the practitioner. Yoga praxis is the brilliant snake rearing upwards and voraciously consuming all: *prāṇa*, *jīva*, *śiva*. The techniques are violent yet the metaphor expresses the agentive gap at its heart: *as if* hit with a stick she would rise, pierce the knots and unite with *śiva*. But she cannot be hit: the *yogī* must make all effort in

⁹⁷ YB 89: *rudragranthim tato bhittvā padaṃ yāti śivātmakam | candrasūryau samau kṛtvā tatra yogaḥ pravartate ||*

⁹⁸ YB 90: *guṇatrayādatīto 'sau granthitrayavibhedanāt | śivaśaktisamāyogājāyate paramā sthitiḥ ||*

mudrā and *bandha* to awaken her, or indeed to devotionally solicit her. Once awakened she will cause *samādhi*.

In earlier sources *kuṇḍalinī* is expressed as a blockage that must be removed for *prāṇa* to enter the central channel. Latterly she herself is raised up. Her explanatory power increases to encompass the paradigm of *haṭhayoga*. Mallinson argues *kuṇḍalinī* reframes the non-*kuṇḍalinī* physical traditions of the *Amṛtasiddhi* as a Śaiva practice,⁹⁹ and Mallinson and Singleton describe the *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* as a ‘crude refashioning of the haṭhayogic *mudrās* to fit a Kaula paradigm’ which is ‘more deftly effected’ in the *Khecarīvidyā* and *Śivasamhitā* (Mallinson and Singleton 2017:231).

Kuṇḍalinī is the *prōcreātrix* whose torpor is mundane life. Her awakening and unification express the awakening of the practitioner. Sex, death and violence come together as a nexus in the concept. *Kuṇḍalinī* is a personification or *saguṇa* form of *śakti*, a synecdoche for *śakti*. She functions as the individuated beloved who is the foci of the *yogī*. *Kuṇḍalinī* is to *śakti* as Rādhā is to the *gopīs*.

⁹⁹ James Mallinson, email 14th May 2021.

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