

# Yoga Philosophy: History and Culture

## Mantra, Laya, Haṭha, Rāja: The Four Medieval Yogas

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Week 2, Unit 1

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The Practice of Yoga  
ELS2008.2.80.jpg  
Mehrangarh Museum Trust

# Vivekananda and the Bhagavad Gītā

He claims that the Bhagavad Gita harmonises

---Karma-yoga (5)

---Jñāna-yoga (1) et

---Bhakti-yoga (1)

---[He adds Rāja-yoga to the list, identifying it with Patañjali]

Other yogas referred to in the Gītā: buddhi-yoga, abhyāsa-yoga, ātma-yoga, ātmasamyama-yoga, dhyāna-yoga, samnyāsa-yoga




# *Dattātreya-yoga-śāstra,* 12-13 C

“Yoga has many forms, oh Brahmin. I will explain them to you:

1. The Yoga of Mantras (*mantrayoga*),
2. The Yoga of Dissolution (*layayoga*),
3. The Yoga of Force (*haṭhayoga*).
4. *Rājayoga* is the fourth and the best of [these yogas]” (9)

(Associated with the four spiritual stages?)

# *Amaraughaprabodha* (C13?)

1. Mantra is for the weak student (*mṛdu*)
2. Laya is for the middling student (*madhya*)  

3. Haṭha is for the competent student (*adhimātra*)
4. Rāja is for the student who is more than competent (*adhimātratara*).



# Śiva Saṃhitā

## (15-16<sup>th</sup> century)

1. Mantra Yoga (weak student: 12 years)
2. Haṭha Yoga (middling student: 8 years)



3. Laya Yoga (competent student: 6 years)
4. Rāja Yoga (more than competent: 3 years.  
Qualified to practice all the other yogas)

Such a person is the best, and can leap across the  
ocean of existence (5.12-28)

# Yogaśikhā Upaniṣad

## C14-15

“MAHAYOGA”:

1. The Yoga of Mantras(*mantrayoga*),
2. The Yoga of Dissolution (*layayoga*),
3. The Yoga of Force (*haṭhayoga*).
4. *Rājayoga*

# Mantra (see Roots of Yoga, chapter 7)

????

**Prayer, mystical formula, name of God, praise,  
charm, incantation, promise, curse, rite,  
adoration, confession of sins, confession of  
faith, expression of desire**

????

**...which functions to invoke, to evoke, to  
exorcise, to preserve, to attack, to defend  
etc.**



# Mantra:

“The very diversity of translations in dictionaries and books touching upon the ‘sacred word’ in India shows us that the term is, in point of fact, untranslatable”

J. Gonda, 1963.

# Etymologies

1. *man* (to think, meditate) + *tra* (indicates instrumentality)= **a vehicle of meditation**
  2. *man* (to think, meditate) + *tra* (to save, to protect) = **that which saves the one who meditates on it.**
  3. *man* (to evoke, to invoke) + *tra* (indicates instrumentality) (Renou)= **used to invoke the deity**
- (Also linked to the Greek *mantis*, and the English « *mantic* » meaning having the power to tell the future to see beyond worldly reality)

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- Bhagavad Gītā: recitation of *oṃ* + yoga + bhakti brings one to ultimate destination (8.12-13)



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- Reflects tension between ascetic and non-ascetic practices.

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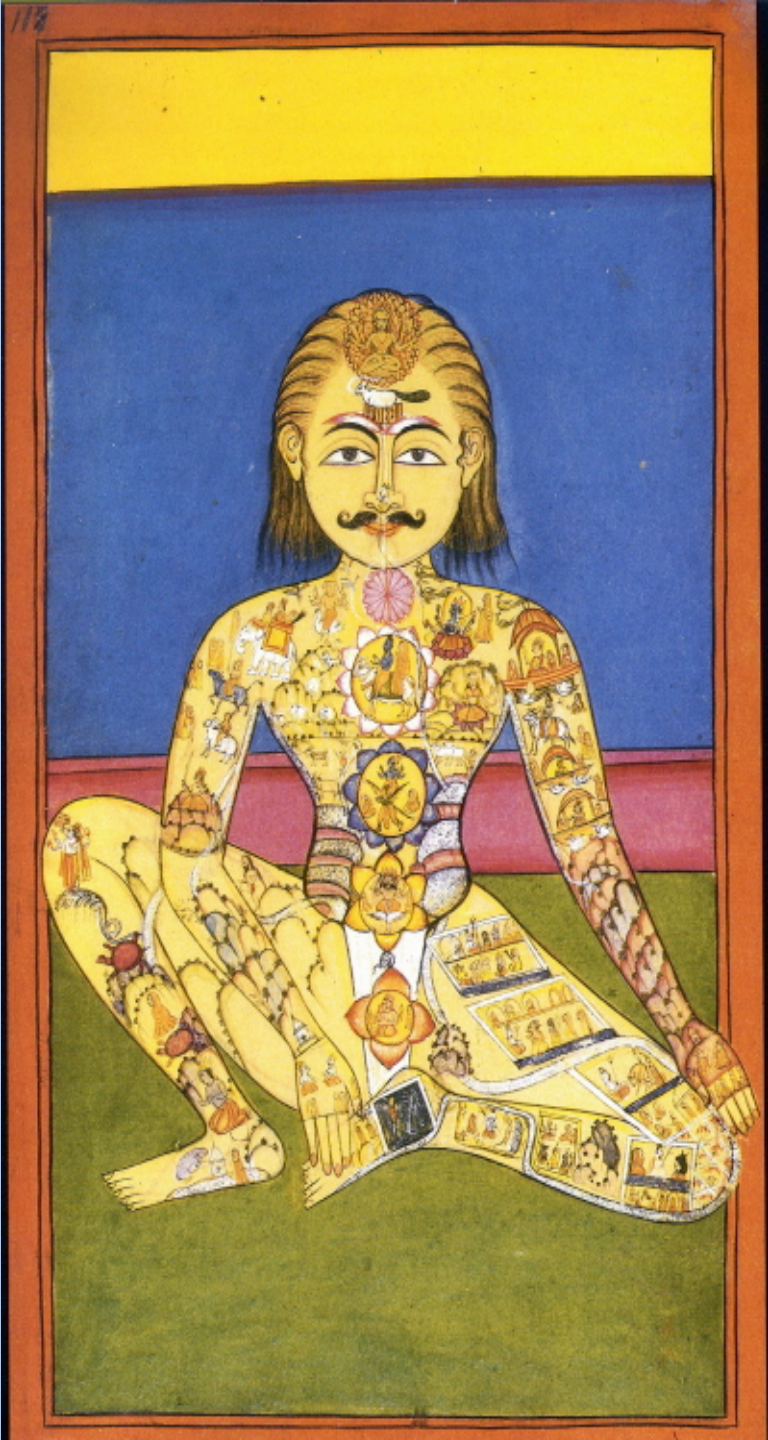
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- In combination with 'element *dhāraṇā*' in the body;
- Mantras placed in the central lotuses (cakra, padma) of the body in ritual practices like *nyāsa*



# Mantra in the Haṭha Yoga of the Śiva Saṃhitā

When this mantra is known, success in yoga is  
born, which gives absolute power and pleasure.  
5.232

These bija syllables bring the double reward of  
worldly pleasure and liberations 5.236

# Śiva Saṃhitā

1 Lakh (100,000)=Women tremble and become sick with love

2 Lakhs=Devotees arrive en masse

3 Lakhs=Governors are subjugated

6 Lakhs=The king is subjugated

15 Lakhs=Non-human beings are subjugated

18 Lakhs=Acquires a divine body

30 Lakhs= Become equal to Brahma and Vishnu

80 Lakhs= Becomes Shakti

1 Crore= Absorbed into the absolute



# Yogaśikhā Upaniṣad (1.136-138)

- “Haṁsa haṁsa”, the involuntary sound in the breath of all yogis. This is the mantra.
  - When the breath enters the central channel (suṣumnā) the japa gets reversed
- “When it becomes ‘so’ham, so’ham’, we call that mantrayoga”

# Laya Yoga

## “The Yoga of Dissolution”

**Paścimāmnāya**, “Western Transmission”

- One of the four “transmissions” of Tantric Shaivism known as “Kaula”
- Associated with the god Bhairava, and with the Goddess and the Yoginis
- Centred on the yogic body



Bhairava  
BM1962.1231.0.13.70.jpg  
British Museum



Bhairava  
IMG\_1107.jpg  
Victoria & Albert



Yogini on Owl  
Yoga002.jpg  
San Antonio



# Layayoga practices

*“Layayoga arises because of the dissolution of the mind by esoteric techniques (saṃketas). Ādinātha [Śiva] taught 80 million of these techniques”*

*Dattātreyaśāstra 15*

# Dattātreyaśāstra: Saṃketas

- Meditate on the void
- Fix the eyes on the tip of the nose / between the eyebrows / on the big toes
- Meditate on the back of the head
- Lie on the floor like a corpse (śava)



Three Aspects of the Absolute  
ELS2008.20.84.jpg  
Mehrangarh Museum Trust



# Examples of Layayoga techniques in the *Haṭhapradīpikā*

- Dhāraṇā
- Nādānusaṃdhāna
- Śavāsana
- Śambhavamudra (Amanaska)
- Kuṇḍalinī

# Kuṇḍalinī in Layayoga

Force the goddess Kuṇḍalinī (in the form of a snake) to rise up from the base of the spine, through a certain number of *cakras*, until she attains union with Śiva in the head.



# Cakras and Layayoga

The cakras proceed from gross elements (lower) to subtle elements (higher):

1.Mūlādhāra ---- Earth

2.Svadhīsthāna --- Water

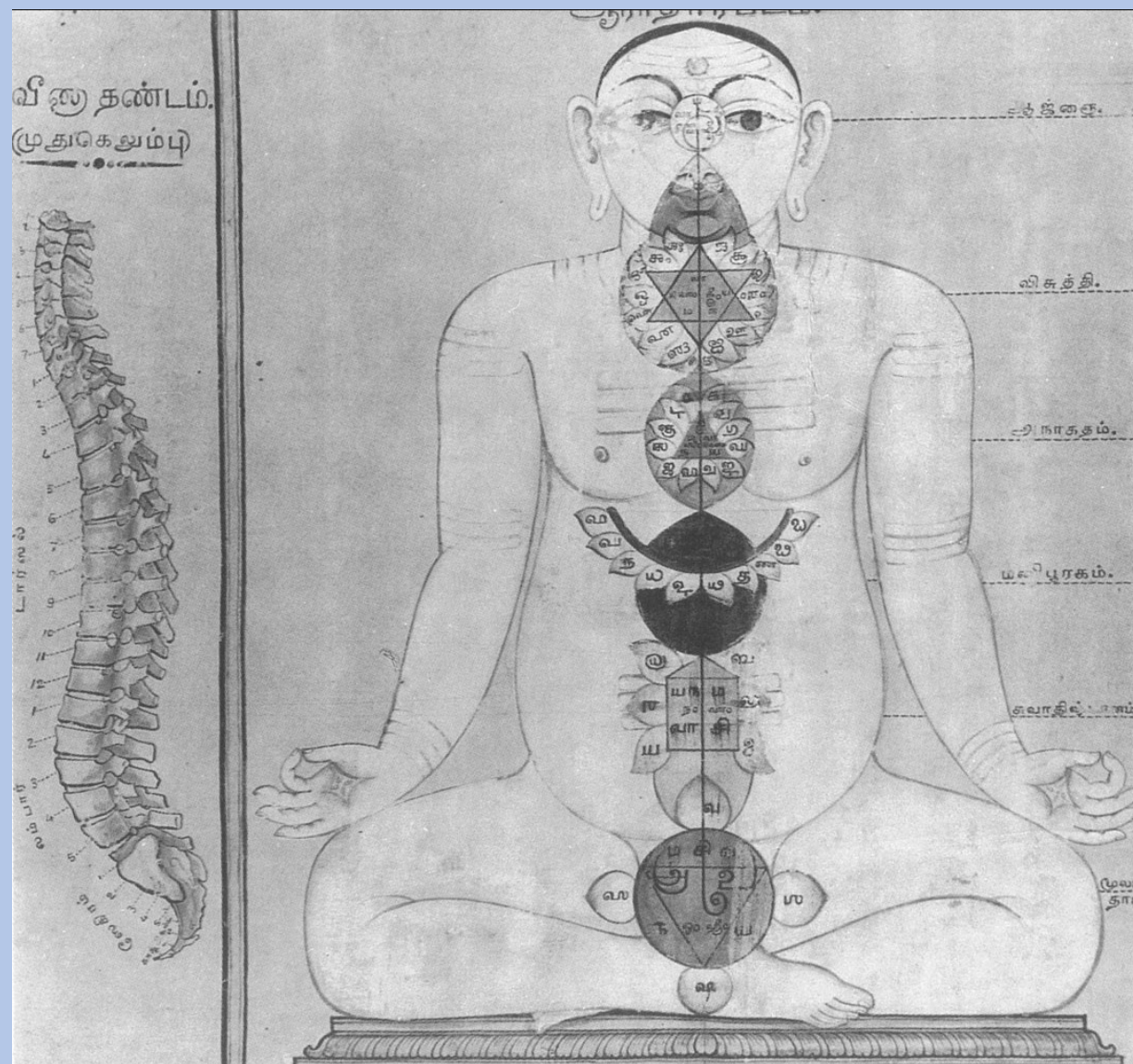
3.Manipūra --- Fire

4.Anāhata --- Wind

5.Viśuddhi --- Ether

6.Ājñā --- Mind

The upward movement of Kuṇḍalinī represents an



Subtle Body with Spine  
tanjoresubtlebody-nat#902BD.jpg  
National Museum of India

End of unit 2.1