Magdalena Kraler

Yoga Breath

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Magdalena Kraler

Yoga Breath

Prāṇa and Prāṇāyāma in Early Modern Yoga

With 19 figures

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To everyone who inspires me
And to the god of flutes

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Lächeln, Atem und Schritt
sind mehr als des Lichtes, des Windes, der Sterne Bahn.
Die Welt fängt im Menschen an.
Franz Werfel (c. 1913)

To those who see the All, there is no difference except formal when Life is materialised, or when Matter is vitalised, or when Spirit is materialised, or again when everything is spiritualised.
Pramathanatha Mukhyopadhyaya (1922)

Obviously, breath has everything to do with nothing.
Maria Engberg (2019)

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Graz, in January 2025

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Note on Transliteration

In this book, transliterations from Sanskrit follow the standard International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliterations (IAST). Exceptions, in which diacritical marks are not used, are place names as well as names and authors of the modern period. In all text titles and quotations, the original English rendering of Sanskrit terms is retained. In original quotations, the reader will therefore encounter a variety of spellings of Sanskrit words.

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1 Introduction

The years 2020 and 2021, during which substantial parts of this book were written, brought breathing to our attention in more urgent ways than would normally be the case. While the COVID-19 pandemic has impinged upon what we call "normal" with regard to several aspects of our lives, it also brought to the fore the life-sustaining function of breath. In the years since, issues relating to the pandemic have become less prominent in our lives, but we can ponder the fact that a similar issue also affecting breathing had to be dealt with 150 years ago: the rise of pulmonary tuberculosis, which was still experienced by generations around the fin de siècle. It was a health crisis that spread in Euro-American countries, but also caused troubles in India, and was said to be linked to the increasing pollution of the air that humans breathed, which weakened their lungs. Many were prone to this infectious respiratory disease. Nineteenth-century yogis and health experts responded to this crisis with a yogic technique that had been known for ages in India – *prāṇāyāma* or "breath control" – to invigorate the state of one's health and overall mindset. In addition, techniques of deep breathing were promoted as a remedy against tuberculosis, along with other nature-cure methods, by yogis and Euro-American health experts alike. We might even speculate that turn-of-the-century yogis, who are the main protagonists in this work, would probably also respond to the recent health crisis with one piece of advice: "For peace of mind and health, practise *prāṇāyāma*".[1]

1 Indeed, there are voices in contemporary yoga and yoga therapy that promote *prāṇāyāma* as effective for preventing or curing COVID-19. See, for example, Taneja (2020) who advocates for the health benefits gained from producing nitric oxide during *bhrāmarī prāṇāyāma* (in which exhalation is prolonged by a soft hum). Generating nitric oxide by means of this breathing exercise leads to "reversed pulmonary hypertension, improved severe hypoxia and shortened the stay in ICU and ventilatory support" (Taneja 2020: 395). This was found in clinical trials during the SARS-COV pandemic in 2004, as Taneja makes clear. His hypothesis, then, is that the same effect can be expected in the case of COVID-19 infection. Likewise, to fight the disease and reduce "stress and tension", Hansaji Yogendra from the Yoga Institute in Bombay also recommends *bhrāmarī* in a YouTube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7z1B4yxD3RA (accessed Sep 1, 2024).

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Beyond the context of the pandemic, however, there is a growing interest in breath practices. A brief glance at contemporary self-help culture reveals a broad interest in various forms of breath cultivation. What is often subsumed under "breath work" includes Stanislav Grof-inflected techniques ("holotropic breathwork"), "Rebirthing", the "Wim Hof Method", and apnea diving. Best-sellers like Patrick McKeown's *The Oxygen Advantage* (2015) to promote the "Buteyko-Method" and James Nestor's recent *Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art* (2020) have additionally magnified the topic's popularity within Euro-American contexts. Likewise, I hold that, within the international yoga scene, *prāṇāyāma* is also on the rise. There is a sense that one's own (teaching) practice can be deepened by including *prāṇāyāma.* Some practitioners even feel that once they turn to *prāṇāyāma* – apart from integrating breathing techniques into *āsana* ("posture") practice – they get to the "real thing", and everything up to that point was preparatory.[2] Such a view is frequently justified by pointing out that *prāṇāyāma* indeed played a highly prominent role in premodern yoga. Hence, the wish to engage into *prāṇāyāma* may be motivated by a quest to discover yoga's "essence", "authenticity" or "true purpose" that highlights the potentiality of *prāṇāyāma* as it is transmitted by premodern texts to which practitioners may have access. This traditionalist inclination towards the practice is, as I would argue, a driving factor encouraging people to engage with *prāṇāyāma* today.

Despite a growing interest in *prāṇāyāma*, it could be also argued that it is still a niche or elitist endeavour within the modern yoga industry, which otherwise attracts millions of adherents. Indeed, a recent publication entitled *Yoga Rising: 30 Empowering Stories from Yoga Renegades for Every Body* (2018) compiled by Melanie C. Klein, which reflects upon insider perspectives on yoga, shows that the term *āsana* was mentioned 95 times, while the term *prāṇāyāma* was used only thrice in the entire book. Given its waning significance compared to premodern practice, some scholars hold that *prāṇāyāma* has become increasingly "superficial" (Sjoman 1999 [1996]: 39) and in light of modern yoga's genealogy could be classified as "yet another technique of relaxation" (Singleton 2005: 294). As traditionalist, elitist, superficial, or marginal as *prāṇāyāma* may be, nevertheless, "along with stretching and relaxing, breathing might be said to form the third element of yoga in the popular imagination" (*ibid.*). It almost goes without saying that *prāṇāyāma* is no longer the practice given by yogis to individual

2 For example, Paul Dallaghan, one of the prominent teachers of *prāṇāyāma* in the contemporary modern yoga scene, stated that *āsana* is like "moving in a car to arrive at the airport". Once you enter the "plane", which is *prāṇāyāma*, you move on a much faster pace (i. e., you develop faster on the spiritual plane) (own field data collected in the CCY Research Special at Kaivalyadhama Yoga Institute from Feb 14 to April 1, 2019, which was conducted as part of Dallaghan's PhD project "Breath, Stress, and Health: A Biocultural Study of Psycho-Physical Hatha(-Rāja)Yoga" at Emory University (2022).

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disciples who prove themselves worthy. Rather, the techniques and their cultural settings have changed significantly. In many cases, *prāṇāyāma* courses are a profitable branch of the yoga industry, especially because the experts on the theme appear to be somewhat rare.

Prāṇāyāma is indeed a technique that has ancient roots in South Asian religious traditions. In other words, from today's point of view, it is fascinatingly old, yet due to the at times overwhelming presence of *āsana*, its resurgence is quite a new phenomenon. From the perspective of today's practitioners, there are probably many blank spaces in one's inner landscape that could be filled through the exploration of the breath. It seems that many *prāṇāyāma* teaching curricula could be improved. But the most pressing concern here is that the historical research into *prāṇāyāma* has not been advanced within modern yoga studies up to the present, despite its importance within most yogic frameworks. Not only was *prāṇāyāma* crucial or even the most important practice of some Haṭhayogic textual traditions, but up to the 1930s yoga was, even in Euro-American contexts, still associated mainly with *prāṇāyāma*, not with *āsana* (Singleton 2010: 155–156).

Against this backdrop of popular interest and pending research, dealing with *prāṇāyāma* or "yogic breath cultivation"[3] fits with today's *zeitgeist* as well as that of early modern yoga.[4] The art historian Richard Shiff has pondered modern art theories in relation to individual autonomy and perception in light of modernity and attested that breath can be seen as a "figure of modernism" (Shiff 1997: 187). Indeed, "breath" and related notions seem to underpin the modernist musings on organic life in theories of art and expression (e. g., Veder 2009; Benjamin 1977 [1931]; Burchert & Rešetar 2021) as well as the vitalistic implications of the Euro-American hygienic culture with its strong emphasis on breathing exercises. In other words, these developments have shed new light on a phenomenon that is intrinsic to life – but what is probably truly new is not the reinvention of an old idea but that it, along with the cultural flows of modernity, opened doorways to an entangled history of breath cultivation.

This study aims to uncover crucial strands of such an entangled history and to fill parts of a considerable lacuna. The field of modern yoga research has certainly addressed highly relevant areas of modern yoga like the history of *āsana* practice or "modern postural yoga" and its crucial intersection with physical culture

3 I use this term to denote the extended meanings with which the term *prāṇāyāma* has been associated in the modern era, i. e., *prāṇāyāma as well as* imported techniques that were not part of the premodern *prāṇāyāma* set (e. g., "deep breathing" or "clavicular breathing"). The employment of this terminology will be more thoroughly explained in chapter 2.1.

4 This work is concerned with the study of yogic breath cultivation in early modern yoga, a time frame that spans between c. 1850 and 1945 in my periodisation of yoga. For details, see chapter 2.1.

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(Singleton 2010; Goldberg 2016), has uncovered the lives and teachings of individual modern yoga pioneers and the institution of the "guru" (Singleton & Goldberg 2013), and examined modern yoga's adoption of esotericism (De Michelis 2004) and occultism (Bogdan 2014; Cantú 2023), to name a few areas. In short, while the study of *prāṇāyāma* itself is still pending, the field has provided a basis for such an investigation, which is outlined in the following section.

Current State of Research

Sketching the current state of research in two main threads, I firstly address the works of innovative scholars that established major coordinates for the field of modern yoga studies (mainly Sjoman 1996; De Michelis 2004; Alter 2004; Singleton 2010). They describe modern yoga as a global transnational phenomenon, and hence these studies are different from earlier ones that described yoga in a comparative religionist and phenomenological mode (Eliade 1958 [1954]; Morley 2001) or that were primarily concerned with the history of yoga's reception in Europe (Fuchs 1990; Baier 1999).[5] Their approach can also be demarcated against the attempts to show the efficacy of yoga in medical terms that started to flourish in the 1930s, but which had even older roots in the late nineteenth century (Singleton 2010: 50–53). Secondly, I will address the works of scholars that have analysed certain aspects of *prāṇāyāma*, *prāṇa* ("breath", "vitality")[6] or breath-related themes within a somewhat wider framework consisting of modern yoga studies, anthropology, or religious studies. The broader categories of modern yoga studies as well as the narrower focus of some studies that have engaged in breath-related themes are equally seminal to this research project.

As to the first concern of this survey, the term "modern yoga" first appeared in an explicit scholarly context in Norman Sjoman's *The Yoga Tradition of the Mysore Palace* (1996). Sjoman had viewed Krishnamacharya's *āsana* teachings at the Mysore Palace as part of a modern endeavour that highlighted the themes of posture and postural flows as the most important aspect of modern yoga at the expense of other yoga practices like *prāṇāyāma* (Sjoman 1999 [1996]: 43, 50–56). However, the first publication to locate modern yoga discourses in a broader historical discussion is Elizabeth de Michelis's *A History of Modern Yoga: Pa-*

5 Eliade's definition of *prāṇāyāma* as a practice to induce a "paradoxical state" is certainly relevant and captures some of the core features of *prāṇāyāma* (Eliade 1958 [1954]: 98). For him, the "paradox" lies in the fact that everybody appears to be dependent on the partly involuntary function of breath, yet the yogi aims to control, temporarily restrain, and master it (*ibid.:* 58, 98). Yet his "Excursus" (*ibid.:* 59–65), which compares Chinese, Sufi, Hindu, and Christian breath practices, resembles the universalist endeavour of some theosophists that likewise found their theories reflected in the breath practices of various religious cultures from the Middle East to the Far East. For details on these theosophical texts, see chapter 4.3.1.

6 For a detailed discussion of the notion's premodern understanding, see chapter 3; further usages of *prāṇa* will be explained in various parts of this study.

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tañjali and Western Esotericism (2004). The main contribution of her work lies in uncovering the syntheses between yoga and esotericism that emerged in the cultic milieu of the Hindu reform movements like the Brahmo Samaj of the nineteenth-century (De Michelis 2004: 51–90). This set the stage for her analysis of key figures of nineteenth-century modern yoga like Vivekananda (*ibid.:* 91–126) and also of the role of later figures like B. K. S. Iyengar in integrating a kind of personal mysticism into what De Michelis terms "Neo-Haṭha Yoga" (*ibid.:* 225). Her discussion of Vivekananda's usage of *prāṇa* as a "vitalistic element" and a "healing agent" as applied in (mesmeric-styled) "healing techniques" is one of the few outlines that treat *prāṇa* as a key element to underpin modern yoga practices (*ibid.:* 159–168). Besides offering such historical landmarks, De Michelis should also be credited for establishing a typology of modern yoga that highlights modern postural yoga as the most successful among other siblings (chapter 2.1).

Joseph Alter's equally seminal *Yoga in Modern India: The Body between Science and Philosophy* (2004) reads modern yoga mainly through the lens of medical anthropology. It highlights, as the subtitle suggests, the categories yoga-as-science and yoga-as-philosophy, which are combined in the works of several yogis and authors of modern yoga up to the 1990s. Not strictly historical in nature, Alter's study nevertheless yields valuable thoughts on the possible historisation of yoga as well as the complex metaphysics of premodern yoga that still inform modern practices (including some thoughts on *prāṇa*) but that are also increasingly paired with concepts of "science". On this basis, the study offers crucial insights into the trend of medicalised yoga in the 1930s by also investigating the prominent example of Swami Kuvalayananda and his experiments with *prāṇāyāma* (Alter 2004: 73–108). Moreover, it is the first monographic in-depth study to analyse overlaps between modern yoga, twentieth-century Ayurveda, and nature-cure practices (*ibid.:* 209–210).

Another landmark publication is *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (2010) by Mark Singleton, which elaborates on "transnational anglophone yoga" in light of *āsana* practice. Inquiring into the networks that became instrumental in producing modern posture practice from about the 1880s onwards, this work highlights the intertwined paths of physical culture, "harmonial gymnastics" (a term to designate systems of holistic movement that evolved mainly in North American contexts), and *āsana.* De Michelis had already employed the adjective "harmonial" (in the context of religion and to describe bodily practices) to denote a "[m]etaphysical and mesmeric" component of bodily practices (De Michelis 2004: 151, 160, 208). In referring to religious historian Sydney Ahlstrom, Singleton applied the term more narrowly to denote an influence of unchurched religiosity as found in the American New Thought movement, and more specifically in the works of the Delsartist Genevieve

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Stebbins and the self-taught yogini Cajzoran Ali (Singleton 2010: 143). With regard to the former, Singleton briefly touches on the pivotal notion of "rhythmic breathing" popularised by Stebbins that would soon inform several subsequent *prāṇāyāma* instructions including Vivekananda's (*ibid.:* 146–147). Singleton's aim, then, is to unravel the significance that New Thought, suggestive therapeutics, the broader physical culture movement including YMCA, harmonial gymnastics, and bodybuilding had in India and on a transnational scale. In brief, physical culture, an antiquated term but also useful to denote a field of practices for this study, is the thread that connects several strands of Singleton's convincing narrative.

While these studies serve as a base for my discussion, there are several later ones that elaborate on modern yoga themes and yield further insights. Among these, Elliott Goldberg's *The Path of Modern Yoga: The History of an Embodied Spiritual Practice* (2016) adds numerous details to the account of the evolution of modern postural yoga (at times hinting at the role of breath therein) by contextualising these with in-depth biographical studies of several yoga pioneers. Anya P. Foxen's *Biography of a Yogi: Paramahansa Yogananda and the Origins of Modern Yoga* (2017) is another valuable study that mainly addresses the life of Paramahamsa Yogananda and his Yogoda system as popularised in North American contexts. Her work, however, is not just a case study of Yogananda's transnational organisation, but also discusses the role of cosmological agents like *prāṇa*, and particularly *ākāśa* ("space", "ether") (Foxen 2017a: 59–62). In a different mould, to address the wider field of yoga and meditation practices that are prevalent in today's landscape, the *Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies* (2020) edited by Suzanne Newcombe and Karen O'Brien-Kop, is a rich survey of practices and their socio-cultural contexts. Although there is no full article (historical or otherwise) elaborating on *prāṇāyāma* in this handbook, its role is mentioned in various contextual frameworks, for instance, in the sociological study "Yoga and Meditation as Health Interventions" (Newcombe 2021), as part of a historical analysis in "Yoga and Meditation in Modern Esoteric Traditions" (Strube 2021c), and within a phenomenological approach in "Yoga: Between Meditation and Movement" (Ciołkosz 2021). Another recent landmark publication is Victoria Addinall's study of Eustace Miles (1868–1948), a counterculture figure of fin-de-siècle Britain who greatly contributed to the dissemination of yogic and physical-culturist breath practices in Great Britain (Addinall 2024). A chapter in Christopher Miller's monograph, includes a field study of *prāṇāyāma* in context of air pollution in modern India, featuring field notes and analyses made in contemporary Kaivalyadhama Yoga Institute (Miller 2024: 118–151).

As to the second concern of this survey, within the broader field of East and South Asian studies, I draw on two pertinent studies with a comparative and

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context-dependent focus. First, Peter van de Veer's "Global Breathing: Religious Utopias in India and China" (2007) has inquired into breath practices within yoga and Qigong as "historical and political phenomena", including the transformation that these disciplines underwent in the modern era (van de Veer 2007: 316). Linking these breath practices to the construction of modernity and national identities, the study's value lies in its contextualisation, as opposed to an isolated investigation, of the instructions and effects of these breathing techniques. Second, Nile Green's "Breathing in India, c. 1890" (2008) contextualises yogic and Sufi breath practices including *prāṇāyāma* and meditation techniques of the high colonial period as part of vernacular as well as English-speaking cultures. Like van de Veer, Green also throws light on the practices being moulded through colonialism, nationalism, and the emergence of print media. Remarkable in its scope and detail, the article uncovers the overlaps and demarcations between Sufi (Urdu) and yogic (Hindi and Bengali) vernacular interpretations of breath practices, the latter echoing Vivekananda's notion of *prāṇa*. However, it only marginally touches upon the influence of occultism and hygienic culture, and does not address the works of various protagonists as part of a history of transnational modern yoga.

Furthermore, Karl Baier's encompassing *Meditation und Moderne* (2009) addresses breath practices in the light of four main protagonists that are relevant for this study. Within the context of Hindu reform movements, Baier has brought Dayananda Sarasvati's role in the nineteenth-century yoga revival to the fore (Baier 2009: 311–315). He has further discussed yogic practices including breath cultivation and *kuṇḍalinī* arousal as understood by Vivekananda and contextualised them with spiritualism, mesmerism, and New Thought (*ibid.:* 467–485). As protagonists of North American fin-de-siècle occultism and physical culture, the breath practices of Genevieve Stebbins and William Walker Atkinson, the latter publishing under the pseudonym Yogi Ramacharaka, are addressed (*ibid.:* 454–464, 485–497). Baier shows how breath cultivation termed "yogi breathing" in these milieus was informed by occult practices that, moreover, were blended with strands of physical culture and voice culture. The recognition of these amalgamations to inform yoga in the context of *prāṇāyāma*, relaxation, and meditation is a crucial starting point for this study.

As one of the most pertinent texts to treat breathing practices as part of "Western"[7] esoteric strands to inform yoga and physical culture, Anya P. Foxen's *Inhaling Spirit: Harmonialism, Orientalism, and the Western Roots of Modern*

7 It has become apparent in various scholarly discourses that the terms "Western" and the "West" are problematic due to their vagueness and ideological connotations. In this study, this broad category is mostly circumscribed by the descriptive adjective "Euro-American". However, the adjective "Western" is nevertheless sometimes used here, when other authors utilise it to demarcate ideas and practices from South Asian ones.

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Yoga (2020) is briefly introduced here. In partly following De Michelis (2004) and Singleton (2010), it offers a kind of grand narrative of "harmonialist" breath cultivation. However, Foxen adopts this term for a "much broader application" (Foxen 2020: 20). In her monograph, "harmonialism" does not only imply techniques informed by spiritism, Swedenborgianism, Euro-American physical culture, and American Delsartism, but she links them to an underlying pervasive network of harmonialism that is traced, for example, to Greek Antiquity, Plato, and the theurgy of Iamblichus. In mainly addressing "Western" esotericism and physical culture, however, Foxen, barely touches upon the notion of *prāṇāyāma* as it can be demarcated from these spiritualised breathing practices. Accordingly, her interest in discussing figures like Sri Yogendra and Paramahamsa Yogananda, who became popular during the 1920s and 1930s, lies in how they appropriated harmonialism (*ibid.:* 223–255), but Foxen does not highlight them as figures that reinvented *prāṇāyāma* at least partly on the Sanskritic/vernacular base of yoga. The study's strength therefore lies in uncovering breath-movement practices in relation to the arts and to the crucial influence of fin-de-siècle American women's culture that can only marginally be addressed here.

As this survey has shown, although there are some analyses of a modern understanding of *prāṇa* (De Michelis 2004; Alter 2004; Zoehrer 2021) and some case studies of *prāṇāyāma* in the context of meditation, breath practices, and relaxation (Singleton 2005; van de Veer 2007; Green 2008; Baier 2009; Foxen 2020; Addinall 2024; Miller 2024) that laid foundations for further research, there is no systematic monographic study that places *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* centre stage. We do not yet have answers to crucial questions as to the various ways that key notions like *prāṇa* and the "breath of life" were understood in modern yoga, or how they relate to questions of cosmology, vitalism, and self-cultivation. Neither is there a detailed analysis as to the relationship between premodern forms of *prāṇāyāma* and modern ones, between inherent yogic techniques and imported ones that started to complement or even substitute *prāṇāyāma* such as "deep breathing", "rhythmic breathing", or "clavicular breathing". What is further at stake is an investigation of the practices within their socio-cultural contexts including their political implications and the analysis of yogic breath cultivation as part of a "history of practices" within religious studies and as part of a "history of the body" as relevant in cultural and anthropological studies. In brief, despite the centrality of *prāṇāyāma*, which has "remained a key element of yoga practice since the earliest description of yoga practices" (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 134), the topic has received only scant attention.

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Outline and Research Questions

It has already been hinted at why the study of yogic breath cultivation is relevant. From the vantage point of a historical approach within modern yoga studies, there are additional factors to point at its importance. Outstanding protagonists of modern yoga like Swami Vivekananda, Swami Kuvalayananda, Sri Yogendra, and Swami Sivananda have either explicitly published *prāṇāyāma* manuals or have dedicated several chapters to the theme, as is the case in Vivekananda's famous *Râja Yoga: Or Conquering the Internal Nature* of 1896. All of these seminal texts have been published in English, and this study is therefore mostly concerned with yoga as an emerging anglophone transnational culture. Since a modern understanding of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* cannot be solely set forth in light of yoga's premodern roots,[8] several additional cultural and religious influences must be considered to properly investigate the role and meaning that *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* adopted. Of these, the most salient are the impact of hygienic culture, biomedicine, and nature-cure practices, alternative religious strands like nineteenth-century occultism, and, not least, science discourses. All these diverse strands of socio-cultural life were present in nineteenth-century colonial India and led, through being intermingled with yoga as an oral, praxeological, and textual tradition, to the amalgamation that we today know as modern yoga. As such, the study of yogic breath cultivation exemplifies how the history of modern yoga evolves along the lines of transnational exchange of body technologies to engender health and well-being. Such a history further needs to consider the forging forces of imperialism and colonialism that pushed the modern reinvention of yoga as an ancient "science". These ideas continue to underpin the orientalist orientation of many yoga practitioners today as well as the religiopolitical discourse within India that tries to negotiate (and dominate) the role of yoga worldwide.

To carve out the most important developments that shaped yogic breath cultivation, this investigation starts to consider some crucial publications from c. 1850 onwards. It aims to establish trajectories of development from their re-

8 There are several crucial works on premodern yoga without which research into modern yogic breath cultivation would be impossible. This holds particularly true for the emerging study of Haṭhayoga (the definitions of which are currently evolving) in the medieval period of South Asia which has started to thrive through the efforts of scholars like Jason Birch, James Mallinson, Mark Singleton, and many others. For the present context most relevant are Peter Connolly's *Vitalistic Thought in India* (1992), Jason Birch's articles on Haṭhayoga, Rājayoga, and Ayurveda that include developments up to the early modern period (Birch 2011; 2013; 2018; 2020a; 2020b), James Mallinson's studies on the early roots of Haṭhayoga including surveys of the field (Mallinson 2007a; 2011; 2020; 2024), James Mallinson's and Mark Singleton's incredibly helpful *Roots of Yoga* (2017) as well as the equally comprehensive anthologies *Yoga in Practice* (2012) by David Gordon White and *Yoga Powers* (2012) by Knuth A. Jacobson.

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spective origins and salient interpretations of *prāṇāyāma* practice, and as such in many ways it explores new shores. Due to the influence of various cultural strands the notions of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* were subject to considerable change during the nineteenth century. For example, in light of the theosophical practice of synonymisation (Hammer 2004: 164–166; Asprem 2011: 142), *prāṇa* adopts meanings that are less related to breath than to the notion of a kind of subtle force-substance that produced phenomena like electricity and magnetism, to name but two (Zoehrer 2020: 159; White 2014: 107, 129–130). Correspondingly, *prāṇāyāma* becomes a rather large container for a variety of practices including Haṭhayogic forms of breathing and purificatory techniques, ritualistic forms of *prāṇāyāma* as outlined in various prayer books for Hindus, and breathing techniques described by Euro-American gymnasts and physical culturists.

For the investigation of this complex interplay of forces with regard to breath cultivation in early modern yoga, the book is structured in two main parts. The aim of Part I, "Contexts and Concepts", is to introduce some salient premodern ideas on *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* (chapter 3) as well as influential strands that pervade the discourses on yogic breath cultivation in the "formation phase" of early modern yoga (i. e., c. 1850 to 1896 with Vivekananda's *Râja Yoga* as the tipping point) (chapter 4; chapter 5). Part II, "Pioneers and Practices", then starts off to further contextualise the practices in regard to their socio-cultural and corporeal implications (chapter 6; chapter 7). This lays foundations for the core analysis of this study, in which I engage ten leading figures and their individual approaches to influencing, contextualising, and applying yogic breath cultivation (chapter 8; chapter 9). Hence, Part II mainly addresses the "main phase" of early modern yoga as reflected in the developments of yogic breath cultivation (i. e., 1896 to 1945).[9]

To address dominant strands that created the discursive net of yogic breath cultivation, various research questions linked to topical threads run through this work. They will be briefly introduced here as part of a preliminary outline of each chapter. The theoretical and methodological approach of this study as discussed in chapter 2 revolves around the questions as to what place can be ascribed to (body-centred) practices in historiographies, and how such practices are analysed within the main methodological approach of a historical discourse analysis. Major theoretical lenses are Michel Foucault's notion of "technologies" and "care" of the "self", and its extension by Philipp Sarasin's study of hygiene and

9 For details of the periodisation applied in this study, see chapter 2.1; figure 1. If a few post-Second-World-War publications of authors like Kuvalayananda, Sivananda, and Krishnamacharya are treated, it is only to elucidate their point and to give a rounded argument. There will be no in-depth discussion of the historical material and the emerging discourses post-1945 other than a few exceptional works and the tip-of-the-iceberg-discussion in the Outlook (chapter 9.3).

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self-cultivation within nineteenth-century hygienic cultures. This chapter also builds on theoretical agreements within modern yoga studies and highlights the notion of soteriology as part of a theoretical framework in which modern yoga can be placed. These methodologies aim to unlock the potential of a historical investigation of these practices. This includes examining the practices themselves, but also recognising the value that these practices have for historical research, i. e., whether they can – to a certain degree – rewrite the history of modern yoga.

Chapter 3 then discusses the most salient features of premodern *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma*. As such, it aims to clarify basic religious, philosophical, and praxeological strands of premodern yoga traditions that are relevant for yogic breath cultivation. Indeed, up to the modern period, the influence of Patañjali's *Yogasūtra*, in which *prāṇāyāma* is the fourth limb, and the role of Haṭhayogic forms of *prāṇāyāma* cannot be overstated. These traditions and some meanings of *prāṇa* set forth as early as in the Vedas built a cultural and religious capital on which modern yoga pioneers clearly drew. As should be noted, the history of premodern *prāṇāyāma* has wide ramifications, and practices found in Pātañjalayoga and Haṭhayoga were also integrated into Advaita Vedānta and vernacular Advaita-related movements (e. g., through the impact of the highly influential *Yogavāsiṣṭha*).

The main contexts in the formation phase of early modern yoga are the influence of various socio-cultural and religious movements before 1900 (chapter 4). These are the nineteenth-century Hindu reform movements like the Arya and Brahmo Samaj, nineteenth-century occultism with emphasis on the Theosophical Society that was based in India since 1878, and the ideas and practices derived from transnational hygienic and physical cultures including American Delsartism and gymnastics. The purpose here is to uncover the formulation of guiding ideas in these networks and to describe the practices that proliferated in the works of later yoga pioneers. This includes such disparate topics like the propagation of *prāṇāyāma* as part of the *sandhyā* rite practised by Hindus at dusk and dawn, the employment of breath cultivation in sexual magic that influenced the notion of "rhythmic breathing", and the emergence of concepts like "psycho-physical culture". Chapter 4 also investigates the extent to which these contexts prefigured the amalgamation of practices and ideas in modern yoga. Key concepts such as transnationalism, anti-colonial nationalism, science discourses, and media culture also emerge in these contexts.

The main concern of chapter 5 is then to describe various worldviews that underpin yogic breath cultivation. These are cosmological and anthropological theories that built a backbone to explain how practices work from the viewpoint of authoritative voices in the field. The main protagonists to forge these perspectives are Genevieve Stebbins, Rama Prasad, and Swami Vivekananda. They

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bring modern yoga's main cosmological agents to the fore, which are "*prāṇa*", "*svara*" ("breath", "sound"), the "breath of life", "*ākāśa*" ("space", "ether"), and "ether". These principles interact on "subtle" and "gross" levels of the cosmos to form and constantly reshape the macrocosm and human realities. All these "ideas in practice" have not been substantially treated in modern yoga studies until today. The scrutiny of the contexts and concepts in Part I as to their productivity for *prāṇāyāma* yields new results that do not appear on the radar of an analysis of yoga-as-*āsana*, or do so only marginally, and actually rewrites parts of modern yoga's history.

As an overture to Part II, chapter 6 investigates crucial cultural settings in which discourses of yogic breath cultivation were negotiated. In establishing an analytical tool that I have termed the "*prāṇāyāma* grid", it uncovers a complex net of multilateral relations (religion, hygienic culture, the appeal to tradition and innovation) that considers statements of various yoga pioneers as well as external forces (nationalism, scientific discourse, and media culture). The latter appear to additionally filter, accelerate, and disseminate modern yoga discourses. This chapter focuses on how yogic breath cultivation was determined and shaped by several prevailing cultural factors and trends. Practices were both *utilised* to propagate *prāṇa*-as-power and yoga-as-science, and consequently *shaped* by these labels. It thereby shows how phrases like the "science of breath" were persuasive precisely because they rode the wave of the time. The contextualisation in chapter 6 is complemented by a zooming in on the practices themselves and their corporeal level in chapter 7, which asks how the practices can be structured within a typology that foregrounds some underlying physiological principles.

Chapter 8 applies several research questions in discussing the individual approaches of ten yoga pioneers to formulate and influence yogic breath cultivation. Most of the pioneers draw on several contexts or conceptions that have been explored up to this point. As to the cultural settings into which the practice is placed, they mostly understand yogic breath cultivation in light of nationalism and even as a tool to pronounce India's superiority over Euro-American cultures. I further investigate how they draw on premodern yoga traditions, and how both premodern practices and those emerging from hygienic culture are incorporated into their curricula. Various practices claim to lead to the acquisition of occult or magical powers (*siddhi*s) like clairvoyance and distant healing. One of the main aims of this chapter is to highlight the discursive nature of the field in which protagonists often copy and plagiarise each other, which sets the interpreter the task of unravelling the sources (both pre-modern and modern) drawn upon for modern forms of yogic breath cultivation. It is further asked how yoga pioneers harness *prāṇa* or related vital principles for their respective forms of breath cultivation and how they conceive of the potency of the practices for hygienic-

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therapeutic and soteriological purposes. The pool of both premodern and modern practices as well as the contexts in which they are placed is so rich that only a few practices and their outlines in yoga or *prāṇāyāma* manuals can be discussed in detail.

As the foregoing discussion has shown, in modern yoga the category "yoga" has never stood alone. One of its sister genres being occultism, the overlaps between yoga and occultism is a theme laced through in this study. As a final move, chapter 9 deepens the inquiry into these overlaps by presenting two case studies that link these genres as part of the promotion of yogic breath cultivation. Here, the contribution of T. R. Sanjivi are brough to the fore (9.1), providing one of the most harshly formulated critiques against spokespersons of modern yoga, especially Rama Prasad, Vivekananda, and Kuvalayananda.

To sum up, a multifaceted analytical raster is designed to interpret *prāṇāyāma* practices. Moreover, a constant zooming in and out between the exploration of individual contributions and the larger networks is required. To recapitulate the most important research questions and topical threads, these are the investigation of:

1) the role and adoption of premodern practices as mediated through translated Sanskrit texts and how these practices are reinterpreted through, paired with, or even substituted by practices that were alien to earlier yoga traditions;
2) the entanglement of modern yoga, hygienic culture, and occult ideas and practices as exemplified by yogic breath cultivation on a transnational scale;
3) how *prāṇa* and related notions are conceived within cosmological outlines of modern yoga and the extent to which they are crucial to inform *prāṇāyāma* practice;
4) how modern yoga pioneers harness *prāṇa* (i. e., the details of practices) and to what ends ("self-cultivation" to include soteriological and mundane benefits);
5) how they draw on multifaceted networks (including plagiarising from others) to gain the upper hand in a discursive battle, and how they nevertheless carve out their individual outstanding contributions to yogic breath cultivation.

I should further briefly mention what is not part of the study and which research questions can therefore *not* be addressed. Firstly, I do not intend, for the most part, to analyse breath practices in relation to *āsana* practice, but focus on breath cultivation as practised in *stationary* seated, lying, or standing positions. An analysis of the connection between *āsana* and breath practices is well beyond the scope of this study, but these connections are considered (though not to their fullest) by various other scholars (Singleton 2010; Goldberg 2016; Foxen 2020). In most cases, I do not discuss the large number of preliminaries that are frequently listed before one should consider practising *prāṇāyāma* – for example, appro-

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priate diet, housing, clothing, and timing. An exception is my treatment of Kuvalayananda's binary prescription of preliminaries for the "physical" and "spiritual culturist", respectively. Although *bandha*s ("locks") are an important *prāṇāyāma*-related technique (chapter 3.3.3), they are, to limit the material under scrutiny, by and large not considered in this study, though their application is at times mentioned as a side note.

The notion of *prāṇa* and the contexts of *prāṇāyāma* practice are manifold and multilayered, as will become apparent. In applying various lenses, this study will cut through the layers of the soteriological, the vitalistic, the energetic, the physical, the cultural, and the political, and aims to relate yogic breath cultivation to a longitudinal section of these layers. Uncovering several aspects that constitute yogic breath cultivation as we know it today, we will delve into multiple historical contexts. Studying breath and breath cultivation at the interface of yoga, occultism, physical culture, and hygiene is, as I would put it at the termination of this research project, a challenging, but promising endeavour.

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Part I:
Contexts and Concepts

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2 Theory and Methodology

This chapter discusses theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches to explore the history of modern *prāṇāyāma.* It will first introduce and discuss basic terminology and some theoretical grounds of modern yoga studies (Singleton, De Michelis). Then, it will proceed to shed light on the notion of soteriology (Smart, Flood, Moise) and mark out key aspects of theories of self-cultivation (Foucault, Sarasin). As a final step, these various theoretical considerations are tied together in a discourse-theoretical approach (Foucault, Landwehr, Sarasin).

To clarify a basic methodological tool, I briefly touch on how to differentiate between the terminological phrase "modern yogic breath cultivation" and "*prāṇāyāma*". As has been briefly mentioned in the Introduction, modern yoga incorporated a variety of breath practices that were not part of the premodern *prāṇāyāma* set. This results in a semantic shift of the term *prāṇāyāma*, and some practices subsumed under this term were formerly unknown to Haṭhayoga or Pātañjalayoga.[10] In other words, these "new" practices were discussed in the context of yoga and *prāṇāyāma*, and they were either contrasted to *prāṇāyāma* or integrated into an understanding of the same. This is, for example, the case with the notion of "deep breathing", or "clavicular breathing" as opposed to "abdominal breathing". Whatever the interpretation of various modern yogis regarding non-yogic practices – and imported breath-related medical terminology – these adjunct practices and terms became an important part of modern yoga's reasoning about *prāṇāyāma.* They often shaped the practices and sharpened their description. To use a clear-cut terminology, I subsume all these practices under the terminological phrase "modern yogic breath cultivation", or simply "yogic breath cultivation". I use it as an umbrella term that includes *prāṇāyāma* and all associated breath-related practices in modern yoga. In contrast, I employ the term "*prāṇāyāma*" only when it is used by the respective

10 For a discussion of *prāṇāyāma* in light of premodern Haṭhayoga and Pātañjalayoga, see chapter 3.2; chapter 3.3.

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author (notwithstanding that what is termed *prāṇāyāma* by a certain yoga pioneer may not have been classified as such in premodern yoga).[11]

2.1 The Framework of Modern Yoga Studies

Some theoretical agreements within the field of modern yoga research and conceptual considerations that frame this study are introduced here. Scholars in the field agree that there was a shift in theorems and practices of yoga that started to manifest roughly from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, but at the latest in 1896, which is when Vivekananda's pivotal *Râja Yoga* appears (De Michelis 2004: 2–3). This historical shift marks, roughly speaking, a transition from premodern forms of yoga to "modern yoga". However, I would like to posit that it is helpful to speak of "early modern yoga" for the developments from c. 1850 onwards. It was then that evolutionary theories, early psychology, scientific materialism, medical discourse, and hygienic culture as well as strands of esotericism and occultism started to trickle in.

Additionally, I suggest that early modern yoga – which in my periodisation ends as late as 1945 – can be divided into two main phases (figure 1): the "formation phase" (c. 1850–1896), in which the influential voices of theosophists, theosophical translators, and Hindu reformers emerged and started to shape modern yoga as well as yogic breath cultivation, and the "main phase" (1896–1945) of early modern yoga, which consists of contributions from a "first generation" and a "second generation". First-generation modern yogis of key importance are Vivekananda, Abhedananda, and William Walker Atkinson (alias Yogi Ramacharaka) who start to integrate occultism into modern yoga, and in this first generation we already see a fully developed modern yogic (and occult) *prāṇa* theory. The impact of the first generation ended in c. 1910 when the last alias-Ramacharaka publication appeared. The second generation of yogis emerged around 1920 when Yogananda and Yogendra sailed to America, Sivananda wandered off to Rishikesh at the foot of the Himalayas, and Kuvalayananda established the Kaivalyadhama Yoga Institute in Maharashtra. All these second-generation yogis, including Krishnamacharya and Sundaram, added crucial ingredients to yogic breath cultivation and its conceptualisation. These

11 A good example of the semantic shift of the term *prāṇāyāma* is Sri Yogendra's integration of "breathing methods" into his system of *prāṇāyāma* techniques. He first integrated "clavicular breathing" or upper-chest breathing (a jargon/practice developed in the context of nineteenth-century medical discourse and physical culture) into his "breathing methods" (Yogendra 1932: 51–53). But nevertheless, all techniques described in his *Breathing Methods* (1932) were later termed "Yogendra Prāṇāyāma" (Yogendra 1940: 9), which accounts for the fluidity within the wider delta of breath practices that became "*prāṇāyāma*".

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are medicalised experiments on *prāṇāyāma*, the employment of detailed physiological-anatomical description of the practices, illustrated manuals of yogic breath cultivation, the thorough reception of premodern yoga texts, and the linking of breath cultivation to *āsana.* My study terminates with the end of the Second World War, which brought major disruptions within fields that were grounded on transnational exchange. It is therefore reasonable to have the study naturally pause at this point (as after a long and deep exhalation).

Modern yoga as a transnational movement did not recover from this before the late 1950s, and roughly from the 1960s onwards, the second wave of *āsana*-based modern yoga practices hit American and European shores. At this time, the term yoga ceased to be primarily associated with *prāṇāyāma*, as was still the case in the 1930s (Singleton 2010: 155–156). When *āsana* became the dominant practice in the popular imagination, this marks, in my periodisation, "modern yoga" in its fullest expression. It was not until what I term "contemporary yoga" – which may be characterised with a further merging of lineages and schools by the 1990s, leading to a hybridisation of practices and new forms to teach and learn, including online classes – that *prāṇāyāma* again gained new inspirational strength and impact in the yoga community.

As to further terminological clarifications, in following Singleton (2010), I employ the phrase "modern yoga pioneers" for figures who were actively engaged in theorising as well as teaching of yoga techniques through personal instruction, talks, yoga manuals, pamphlets, articles, and treatises. Modern yoga being generally an English-speaking endeavour, most pioneers considered here have read, published, and taught in English. They may have done so rudimentary (as in the case of Krishnamacharya) or extensively (as in the case of all other pioneers). The ultimately deciding factor for being termed "yoga pioneers" is their engagement in both the theory and practice of yoga, thereby propelling its development further, and it is evident that the early phase of modern yoga was crucially shaped by their pioneering acts. Not all figures analysed in this study are to be considered as pioneers of modern yoga.[12] In turn, though many influential modern yoga pioneers came from India to teach in the West, not all pioneers were Indian, and they were not necessarily yogis. For example, William Walker Atkinson contributed with significant theoretical and practical elements to shape yogic breath cultivation.

Apart from coining terminology, useful steps have been taken towards classifying modern yoga. De Michelis (2004: 187–189) has categorised the practice as "modern psychosomatic yoga", "modern denominational yoga", "modern pos-

12 For example, I would not call N. C. Paul, H. P. Blavatsky, Rama Prasad, or J. P. Müller "pioneers of modern yoga", although they contributed to certain discourses and shaped some key aspects of the field.

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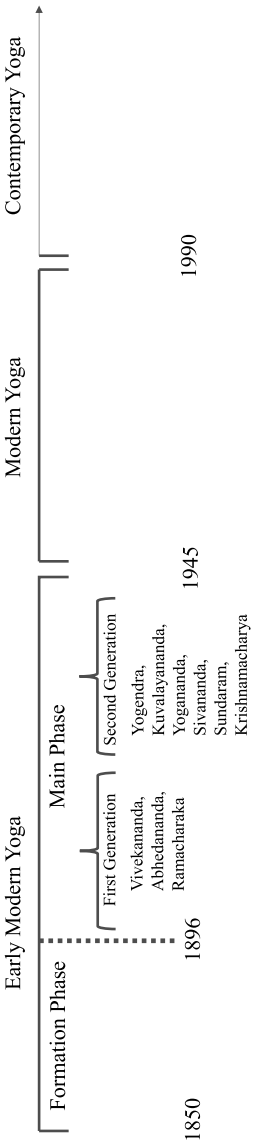

Figure 1: Periodisation of Early Modern Yoga, Modern Yoga, Contemporary Yoga (Author's Illustration).

tural yoga", and "modern meditational yoga". This shows that several shades of modern yoga were not only focused on a physical mode of practice, but rather a variety of forms were established. Locating, as De Michelis has suggested, *prāṇāyāma* mainly within the category of modern postural yoga (*ibid.:* 187) is up for

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debate. I argue that yogic breath cultivation is practised within all these categories, since it is often applied in meditational and/or devotional settings, and the "psychosomatic" as well as physical aspect of *prāṇāyāma* which can be experienced before, after, during, or instead of *āsana* practice is equally apt. As far as such a classification of modern yoga practices concerns the further analysis of *prāṇāyāma*, it will be addressed in the respective analysis. For example, I will treat the notion of "psycho-physiology" (which is a precedent of "psychosomatics") and its usage by various yoga pioneers (chapter 4.4.3; chapter 5.2.3; chapter 8.3).

De Michelis has also shed light on various factors of modernisation that forged modern yoga practices. An important factor here is the increasing individualisation. Individualised practice forms an important nexus for a person's physical, mental, and spiritual development (De Michelis 2004: 34–35). The question of the individual's spiritual or religious growth[13] also entails mapping the benefits and goals of the practices. Various modern yogis have suggested different trajectories along which yogic breath cultivation can develop. Next to mundane benefits that yoga practitioners derive from practice, the soteriological component is crucial in both premodern and modern yoga. Due to the centrality of this theme, the concept of soteriology is elucidated in the following.

2.2 Soteriology: A Crucial Notion in this Study

Though originating in Christian theology, the term soteriology (from Greek *sōtēria*, "salvation" and *logos,* "doctrine") can also be conceived more broadly to flag a central theme in religious contexts regardless their denomination.[14] Comparative religion adopted the term to denote doctrines of salvation within different cultures and religions. A basic soteriological model that is arguably found in many religions is based on the diagnosis that human existence is somehow unfortunate and defective i. e., linked to suffering, old age and death, misconduct and ignorance (Smart 2005; Flood 2018). In responding to this di-

13 Although yogic breath cultivation could be equally framed as "spiritual" as opposed to "religious" practice, I will henceforth apply the broader term "religion" and various derivatives for etic purposes. While most practitioners of modern yoga will tend to view their own practice as "spiritual" rather than "religious", "religion" implies here any form of spiritual practice in which yoga pioneers and practitioners of modern yoga are engaged. The main reason *not* to speak of spirituality as a generic etic term is that it was co-shaped by the field of investigation. It can be safely said that Vivekananda is one of the main architects of the prevalence of "spirituality" in modern yoga and even in New Age contexts. The term spirituality is therefore used in this study to denote emic religious perspectives and concepts.

14 A good overview of the concept in Judeo-Christian contexts as well as in Hinduism is provided by Flood (2018).

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agnosis, religions promise a release from the basic deficiency through a *summum bonum* that allows for an "ultimately good state" (Smart 2005: 8526).[15] Various religions mark out a final goal or conception of connecting with the *summum bonum* which could be, for example, communion with God (expressed either through unison or a sense of intimacy and love) or merging the self into an ultimate reality beyond death and suffering (e. g., *nirvāṇa*) (*ibid.:* 8527). To achieve the promised state, religions offer different "means of salvation" that include ethical dimensions, moral virtues, contemplative practices, study of scriptures, ritual practices, and devotion (*ibid.:* 8527–8529). Further specifics are outlined about who can achieve these goals (a widely accessible soteriological goal versus achievable by the few) and in which dimensions of time and space these goals are placed (in relation to the here-and-now, in the afterlife, attained in one life or several lives, or the *summum bonum* as a specific locus, e. g., "heaven") (*ibid.:* 8529–8530).

Within South Asian religions – the main religious background against which yogic breath cultivation can be read – a doctrine of salvation is often conceived as "separation" or "liberation" (*kaivalya*, *mokṣa*, *mukti*) from worldly suffering through a self (*ātman*, *jīva*) that recognises its essential detachment. Worldly suffering is, broadly speaking, created by the self being enmeshed with the world through its actions (*karman*) which leads to an unbroken cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*) (Moise 2020: 15, 20). Final liberation is conceived as recognising the self's ultimate distinctness from the transient world, thus South Asian soteriologies often bear an ontological notion as to the nature of the self, and a gnoseological one as to the recognition of the same. In emphasising the ontological dimension within these soteriologies, the Indologist Wilhelm Halbfass has termed them "soteriontology" (*ibid.:* 13). To briefly exemplify various approaches to liberation, in Vaiśeṣika[16] such a liberated state is one of non-action or renunciation (*nivṛtti*) leading to the annihilation of any attachment (*ibid.:* 48, 71), and *mokṣa* is a "radical disembodied form of liberation" (*ibid.:* 4). In contrast, highly influential texts like the *Bhagavadgītā* (transmitted as part of the *Mahābhārata*, which was composed between the 400 BCE and 300 CE)[17] and the Kashmiri *Mokṣopāya*, better known as its pan-Indian version *Yogavāsiṣṭha*

15 Martin Riesebrodt (2010 [2007]) has argued that the *promise* of salvation is a crucial element of religions in response to the precarity and vulnerability of human life (cf. Flood 2018: 629). According to Riesebrodt, calamity (*Unheil*) or salvation (*Heil*) is experienced within three domains, i. e., "nature, the body, and social relationships" (Stausberg 2009: 273). However, *Heil* may be promised to be attained in the afterlife, hence the *promise* of salvation appears to be more central to religions and constitutes their "rather pragmatic core" (*ibid.:* 272–273).

16 Vaiśeṣika is one of the orthodox schools of Indian philosophy with emphasis on a philosophical naturalism, one of its seminal texts (Candrānanda's *Vṛtti*) being composed between 700 and 1000 CE (Moise 2020: 37).

17 Dating according to Flood (1996: 96).

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(eleventh to fourteenth century CE),[18] try to reconcile the "path of activity" (*pravṛtti*) and the "path of inactivity" (*nivṛtti*) (Moise 2020: 38, 172; cf. van Buitenen 1994 [1981]: 21, 87, 140–141, 164).[19] Consequently, these texts emphasise the technologies of yoga which imply some form of action as opposed to an approach that is primarily gnostic (Moise 2020: 174).[20] Moreover, the *Mokṣopāya/ Yogavāsiṣṭha* opens up the possibilities of liberation for householders, and this text was influential for the concept of liberation-in–life (*jīvanmukti*) (*ibid.:* 38).[21] The concept of *jīvanmukti* allowed for a dynamic form of liberation as opposed to a fixed irreversible state (*ibid.:* 40), in which the self could still act and be involved in the world – for teaching others, but even for the sake of pleasure (Birch 2020b: 214, 223).

Liberation-in-life became the prevalent model within Haṭhayoga and was also influential for some texts of Advaita Vedānta (Birch 2020b: 200; Madaio 2018).[22] According to Jason Birch (2020b: 229–230, n. 108), there are allusions to the concept of *jīvanmukti* (though not termed as such) even in Pātañjalayoga. In Haṭhayoga, liberation-in-life could be accomplished in one lifetime as a result of attaining *samādhi* (a supreme state of absorption, often conceived as the highest aim in yoga).[23] Generally speaking, much of the practicability of Haṭhayoga lay in achieving mundane benefits like gaining health and magical powers,[24] but the final emphasis in most Haṭha texts was still laid on liberation (*ibid.:* 225, 234).

However, the characteristics of such a liberated state, be it *mokṣa* or *jīvanmukti*, are elusive and statements about its attainment remain somewhat speculative. Along these lines, Moise has noted that, in the context of the *Mokṣopāya*, *jīvanmukti* is "an interiorisation of liberation whose marks are known only to the person involved", and the nature of detachment is "spiritual, not

18 Dating according to Moise (2020: 38).

19 The *Bhagavadgītā* also distinguished between the terms *karman* ("action") and *akarman* ("non-action") (Malinar 2007: 103).

20 However, yoga was nonetheless also seen to synthesise *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* paths in South Asian traditions that otherwise highlighted liberation through non-action (e. g., Vaiśeṣika, and to some extent Sāṃkhya), yet it was conceived as an indirect path to liberation (Moise 2020: 42, 87, 172, 174).

21 The *Bhagavadgītā* also reconciles renunciation (crucial for getting rid of *karman*) and one's action in the world (the latter being crucial for the concept of *karman* as ritual action, and thus, *dharma*) by erasing personal attachment to the fruits or merits of actions (Malinar 2007: 73).

22 Advaita Vedānta has adopted much of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha's* musings into its textual explications, e. g., in Vidyāraṇya's fourteenth-century *Jīvanmuktiviveka* (Madaio 2018).

23 In a survey of various Haṭha- and Rājayoga texts between the eleventh and the fifteenth century, Birch (2020b) has found that the main technique to attain *samādhi* and therefore liberation is Rājayoga ("king-yoga"). For further discussions on *samādhi* and premodern forms of Haṭhayoga and Rājayoga, see chapter 3.3.5; chapter 8.1.1.

24 For further examples, see below.

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external" (Moise 2020: 38). It is probably this elusiveness that led to the fact that several schools highlight the more traceable concept of a *path* to liberation to mark out specific steps and tools, captured in the Sanskrit term *mārga* ("path", or Pāli: *magga*). While the term *mārga* is not ubiquitous in Haṭha texts that start to emerge from roughly the tenth century onwards, it is found in Buddhist texts of the common era (Gethin 2001 [1992]: 336–337), and in tantric ones that often highlight the *mantramārga* ("the path of mantra") (Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 260). However, there is one Haṭha text from the eve of the colonial era that even employs *mārga* in its title, i. e., the *Yogamārgaprakāśikā* of the seventeenth century (*ibid.:* 182). Within modern yoga, Sivananda's *The Path of Renunciation (Nivritti Marga)* (1937) evidences that the concept of *mārga* as a path to liberation through non-action still exists or is at least used as an umbrella for modern yoga practices.

In dissecting the Eurocentric connotations that many terms like "religion" and "soteriology" have, several scholars of religion suggested that the notion of *mārga* could be suitable for a comparative usage within the field. Buswell and Gimello (1990) understand *mārga* to denote a broader category of religion to create "a commonality of concern that reticulates all the various strands of its religious endeavor – moral values, ritual observances, doctrinal teachings, and contemplative exercises – into a unified network of practices focused on liberation" (Buswell & Gimello 1990: 81). In brief, they equate it with "soteriology" (*ibid.:* 80). Quite obviously, South Asian religions that often employ yoga feature these dimensions of *mārga.*

As should be added, yoga as a set of technologies was incorporated into various doctrinal environments (or "*mārga*s") and, in its basic form, as Gavin Flood has argued, is "constructed to facilitate the transformation of consciousness" (Flood 1996: 94). If we acknowledge that yogic breath cultivation carries an enormous cultural baggage of *prāṇāyāma* as practised in various contexts of South Asian religion, it is helpful to see it as part of a path, or several paths, that are mapped out to attain final liberation. However, since "soteriology takes place gradually", yoga (and therefore also *prāṇāyāma*) is often conceived of as an "indirect means to liberation" (Moise 2020: 172). *Prāṇāyāma* is then mainly applied to purify and balance the body, enhance health, bestow extraordinary powers (*siddhi*s), still the mind, and prepare one for higher yogic states such as *samādhi.* However, in Haṭhayoga, one of the main religious paths to concern us here, some texts even ascribe superior soteriological potential to *prāṇāyāma* that can lead directly to liberation (chapter 3.3.7).

The possibility of liberation and liberation-in-life through Haṭhayoga and related religious paths (Pātañjalayoga, Advaita-related movements, Advaita Vedānta) are thus worth keeping in mind when examining modern yoga's soteriological explications. Although modern yoga as a hybrid form of theories and

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practices has a life on its own, many of the soteriological themes persist. Huge soteriological potential is still associated with *prāṇāyāma*, and modern yoga discourses highlight *prāṇāyāma* as a promising practice suitable for attaining both mundane benefits and soteriological goals. From this perspective, it may be less surprising that yogis like Vivekananda, Sivananda, and Yogananda were celebrated as accomplished yogis (despite the above-noted elusiveness of such a state). The concepts that they highlight are "freedom" (*kaivalya*) as part of an exegesis of the *Yogasūtra* (Vivekananda 1896: 117, 205), self-realisation (*ātmajñāna*) as part of an Advaita Vedāntic set of thoughts (*ibid.:* 223; Abhedananda 1905: 36–37; Sivananda 1937: 6, 8),[25] and liberation-in-life (*jīvanmukti*) as prevalent in Haṭhayoga and Vedānta (Sivananda 1929: 45; Yogananda 2016 [1946]: 297). An intermediate goal appears to be *kuṇḍalinī* arousal, which is often induced by *prāṇāyāma* and eventually bestows certain powers (e.g., Vivekananda 1896: 54–55), or at least extraordinary forms of perception (Kuvalayananda 1931: 96).[26] All yoga pioneers highlight *prāṇāyāma* as an important tool on the yogic path to enhance health and to still the mind. Although the claims that such practices may lead to the attainment of final liberation are not necessarily explicit, yoga pioneers seem to suggest that one can attain these states of final liberation in this life if one follows the practice accordingly. The final goals appear to function as a soteriological potentiality which could, eventually, be realised in any given moment.

Since premodern South Asian traditions and thinkers were seminal for modern yoga theory in this regard, the doctrine of liberation informed modern yoga on a transnational scale.[27] On the other hand, self-enhancement in American New Thought was somewhat compatible with the yogi on his quest for health, magical powers, and liberation. In other words, all these approaches were suitable for an individual seeking perfection. In some Euro-American contexts, as in American Delsartism, this perfection was also linked to the notion of self-expression. However, the self (*ātman*) in the tradition of Advaita Vedānta in quest for its unity with the ultimate (*brahman*) is not necessarily the self to be developed by New Thought advocates like William Walker Atkinson, Adelia Fletcher, and Elizabeth Towne. Self-cultivation – a concept discussed in detail below – could still denote a great many trajectories. What persists is a continuum conceived as extending from the cultivation of the body to soteriological ends of

25 For a discussion of self-realisation that includes the premodern notions of *ātmajñāna* and *brahmajñāna* in modern yoga, see De Michelis (2004: 127–146).

26 For an indepth-analysis of *kuṇḍalinī* arousal in modern yoga and its scientistic interpretations by Gopi Krishna and others, see Thaler (2024a; 2024b).

27 This was achieved, in the case of Vivekananda and others, in an often polemic attitude toward the Christian belief in salvation, which allegedly included the belief in a self in need of liberation by an authoritative personal god.

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