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Unique Insights from Rājayogatarala of Rāmasvāmipaṇḍita: An Unpublished Commentary on Yogatārāvalī Ascribed to Śaṅkarācārya

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ABSTRACT

Yogatārāvalī or Rājayogatārāvalī is a work on Yoga ascribed to Śaṅkarācārya. It comprises of 29 Sanskrit verses. The importance of the work is evidenced by the repeated publication of the work since 1898 till 2003 from different parts of the country. There are many manuscripts of this work across various manuscript repositories in India. Among these, there are two manuscripts (from Adyar and Mysore) that have a Sanskrit commentary Rājayogatarala by Rāmasvāmī paṇḍita alias Parānandanātha to Yogatārāvalī. It is the only available commentary to the text. The manuscripts were acquired by photocopying and digital imaging from the respective repositories based on the descriptions in the respective Descriptive catalogues. Although there are only 29 verses in the text Yogatārāvalī (by Śaṅkarācārya) Rājayogatarala, the commentary is very detailed (47 folios and 165 folios in Adyar and Mysore manuscripts, respectively). Each of the verses of Yogatārāvalī have been accorded anywhere between two to seven interpretations. The commentator quotes from Uttaraḡītā, Gurugītā, Nānārtharatnamālā, Mahārājatarala, Muktisopāna, Vijṛmbhita-yogaśāstra-bhāṣya, Śivayoga-praḍīpikā, etc., besides Upaniṣads and Āgamas. Further, works on Yoga enlisted above such as Mahārājatarala, Vijṛmbhitayogaśāstrabhāṣya are yet to be published. Multiple interpretations, detailed descriptions of Yoga concepts and copious cross-references make this a unique and important in the field of Yoga to be studied for deeper insights.

KEYWORDS: *Commentary, rājayoga, śaṅkarācārya, yogatārāvalī*

INTRODUCTION

This article attempts to throw light on an unpublished text called Rājayogatarala, which is a commentary on a work on Yoga, called Yogatārāvalī or Rājayogatārāvalī, ascribed to Śaṅkarācārya. Before we examine the commentary, let us gain an understanding of this main text, Yogatārāvalī.

There are 29 Sanskrit verses in this text. The yogic topics that are dealt in this work include:

- Nādānusandhāna (Verses 2–9)
- Kevalakumbhaka (Verses 10–13)
- Rājayoga (Verses 14–16)
- Manonmanī/Unmanī (Verses 17–19)
- Amanaskamudrā (Verse 21, 22)
- Yoganidrā (Verse 25, 26)
- Nirvikalpa-samādhi (Verse 29).

According to the details documented in the new catalogus catalogorum,^[1] there are many manuscripts of this work, stored in various manuscript repositories across the country, from Adyar to Ujjain and Varanasi. This work has been repeatedly printed from as early as 1898, to as recently as 2003. There are two commentaries to this text – one by Gorakṣanātha, and the other by Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita, alias Parānandanātha. The commentary by Gorakṣanātha, now housed in Punjab University, Lahore, is a short text that spans only one

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leaf. It is inscribed in Tamil script on a palm leaf. That leaves us with the commentary of Rāmasvāmiṇḍita, the subject matter of this paper.

Two manuscripts of this (yet-to-be-published) commentary are enlisted in the New Catalogus Catalogorum. One manuscript is in Adyar Library and Research Centre, Chennai, and other is in Mysore Oriental Research Institute, Mysore.

Table 1 presents details of the manuscripts as per the respective descriptive catalogs.^[2,3]

ABOUT THE COMMENTATOR

Lineage and teachers

The end colophon of the manuscript provides details about the lineage of the author:

*...śaunakagoṭrāvataṃsa-hiṅguvaṃśa-prābhātik
aprabhākarāyamāṇa-nāgāmbikāramaṇa-koneśv
ara-putreṇa...parānanda-nāthāparābhīdheyarā
masvāmiṇḍitena viracitā rājataralasamākhya
rājayogatārāvalīvyākhyā samāptā*

Details gleaned from the quote above are - The name of the author is Rāmasvāmiṇḍita alias Parānandanātha. He belongs to Śaunaka-gotra and Hiṅgu-vaṃśa (Hiṅgu the Telugu word for Hiṅgu is a Surname of Telugu Brahmanas). His father and mother are Koneśvara and Nāgāmbika.

Detailed subject-wise list of teachers of the commentator is presented as part of the invocatory verses of the commentary:

*yataye śrīnṛsiṃhāya bodhānandaghanāya ca |
śrīveṅkaṭāya rāmāya śivāya brahmaṇe namaḥ||
śrīmadveṅkaṭarāmaṃ taṃ śrīguruṃ chātrakāmadam.
sāṅgayogaprayogadam|| lakṣmīnṛsiṃhagurave
pāṇinīyapradāyine |
nānāvedāntacaryādhrvakelīkramaṇakesarī |
rājahaṃsāyatāmannaśūrirmama sumānasi||
vikāsayatu me cittakamalaṃ sāṅgavedavit|
śrīperabhaṭṭasavitā saccidānandacidghanah||*

Among the list of teachers presented above, it is noteworthy that the commentator mentions Sri Nṛsiṃhayati and Śivarāma-brahma-bodhānanda-ghanendra first. Later, Veṅkaṭarāma is mentioned as the teacher of yoga. The term used to describe him merits attention - *sāṅgayogaprayogada* - the one who gave the knowledge of the application of the Yoga with all its limbs.

Lakṣmīnṛsiṃha is mentioned as his teacher in Pāṇini Grammar. The name of Anna sūri as a scholar in various types of Vedāntas is also found among the list of teachers of the commentator. Perabhaṭṭa is saluted by Rāmasvāmiṇḍita as *Sāṅgavedavit* - the one well versed in the Vedas and its auxiliaries. Although so many names and details about the teachers and parents are given, no direct mention of the date and place of the author is found in the commentary.

Date and place of the commentator

B. Bhaṭṭacharya^[4] places Parānanda-sūtra, ascribed to Parānandanātha to the 9th century CE. However, Nānārtharatnamālā that has been referred to in this commentary (for four times) belongs to the 14th century.^[5] Multiple references to Yogayājñavalkya (13th or 14th century)^[6] is also a further indicator that pushes the author to a later date. Further, at many places, the author quotes verses from Śivayogapradīpikā ascribed to Sadāśivabrahmendra whose is placed in the 18th century.^[7] Hence, by these indications, it can be concluded that the author of this commentary is a different Parānandanātha and possibly belongs to a period after the 18th century.

There is no explicit mention of the geographic location of the author. However, there are certain clear evidences that show that he might have belonged to Andhra Pradesh. He mentions one of his Gurus as Pera Bhaṭṭa. It is to be noted that Perama Bhaṭṭa or Peru Bhaṭṭa is the name of the father of the illustrious Sanskrit poet Jagannātha paṇḍita (16th century), whose provenance has been fixed as Andhra Pradesh.^[8] Going by the previous discussion on the possible period of the composition of the text, this Pera Bhaṭṭa is most likely a different one. However, this shows the prevalence of such a name in the Andhra region.

Table 1: Details of the manuscripts

Name of the Manuscript repository/manuscript number	Script	Material	Size in cm	Number of Folios	Number lines per folio	Number letters per line	Extant	Condition
Adyar Library and Research Institute No. 72330	Telugu	Palm-leaf	39×4	47	7	60	Complete	Good
Mysore Oriental Research Institute Ms.No. 378	Devanagari	Paper	16×20	1-164	14	14	-	Damaged worm eaten

Further, in the beginning and also at the end, the commentator mentions Lord Dakṣiṇāmūrti of the region of Kadalī (near) Śrīśaila:

*brahmapīṇḍāṇḍakadalīśrīśailapuravāsine.../śrībhūbh
rdkadalīvihāra-rasikaśrīdakṣiṇāmūrti-satpādāmbhoj
a-yuge...*

This seems to be a clear reference to the Kadalīvana that is located in the western banks of the river Krishna, 12 km across the river, from the modern-day town of Śrīśaila in Andhra Pradesh. Alongside, in the invocatory verses, he also salutes Nṛsiṃhayatī (invocatory verse 12) and Dattātreyā (*vidhiviṣṇunurudravīnutam...* the one who is saluted by the Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra, verse 5). It is to be noted that Kadalīvana has both a temple of Dattātreyā and a statue of Nṛsiṃhayatī. Moreover, it is a holy place of worship for the devotees of Lord Shiva.^[9] Thus, all of these evidence point to the fact that the commentator might well have belonged to this region of Andhra Pradesh.

FOUR ASPECTS FROM THE COMMENTARY

The commentary is quite elaborate, as is evinced by the number of folios (47 in palm leaves and 164 in paper manuscript). The critical edition of the work is currently underway. Therefore, without venturing into a detailed analysis (which would be more appropriate after the completion of the critical edition), this article proposes to discuss a few salient features (which are not necessarily mutually connected) of the commentary, based on an initial analysis.

Four unique features/contributions stand out in this commentary:

- Classification of Yoga through multiple interpretations
- Avoidance of Nāthasampradāya texts and its probable implications
- Unique classification of Aṣṭāṅgayoga
- Hands-free alternative nostril breathing.

Classification of Yoga and multiple interpretations

A study of the initial portions of this commentary gives an impression that he is intent on standardizing a specific kind of graded classification of Yoga. It is evidenced by the fact that (i) he states the classification right in the introductory passage that comes after the invocatory verses, (ii) he argues for, and (iii) adopts the method of multiple interpretations of a couple of verses and a few terms of Yogatārāvalī to represent all the constituents of his classification.

- i. Classification as stated in the introductory passage:

*sa punaryogaścaturvidhaḥ|
mantralayahaṭharājayogabhedāt|*

*tatrāṅgī rājayogo mukhyaḥ|
so'pi trividhaḥ|
sāṅkhyatārakāmanaskabhedāt|
tatrāmanaskaṃ pradhānam bhavati|*

Yoga is of four types, namely Mantrayoga, Layayoga, Haṭhayoga, and Rājayoga. Of these, the first three are the limbs and the fourth is principal yoga. Even Rājayoga is of three types Viz Sāṅkhyayoga, Tārakāyoga and Amanaskayoga. Among the three, Amanaska is the main (Yoga).

This classification is not a unique contribution of Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita as he quotes verses from Śivayogapradīpikā which discuss this classification.

- ii. The second instance that brings out the focus of the commentator to establish the aforementioned classification of yoga is indirect but interesting. He presents two arguments that aid his objective. Let us look at them briefly. The first verse of Yogatārāvalī begins with the words “*vande gurūṇāṃ caraṇāravinde...*” (*salutations to the lotus like (two) feet of the Guru*). In the course of the commentary, Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita interprets the term *aravinda* in four different ways. The fourth interpretation which is quite uncommon is as follows:

*raṃ prakāśaṃ vindete iti ravinde, ebhyaḥ
brahmaviṣṇunurudrebhyaḥ
ravinde prakāśaprade|
akāro brahmaviṣṇvīśakamaṭheṣviti
nānārtharatnamālāyām|
govindanāmayākyāne vindateḥ
dānārthakatvamācāryaireva prakaṭitam|
caraṇam ca caraṇam ca caraṇe|
... aravinde ca te caraṇe caraṇāravinde|.*

From the above quotation of the commentary, it is evident that the term *aravinda* has been split into *a* and *ravinda*. Unusual meaning to the two words has been presented and so on. After such an attempt, the commentator gives two reasons to explain multiple and unusual interpretations to the terms of Yogatārāvalī. The first reason is:

*ācāryavacasaḥ chandastulyatvāt|
na ca. eka evārthaḥ vācyaḥ na bahuśaḥ iti vācyam|
tvaduktanyāyasya prākṛtaviśayatvāt|*

-The words of the Ācārya (Śaṅkara) are equal to the Vedas. Hence, it cannot be stated that one word (of Śaṅkara) has to have only meaning and not many.

The second reason is:

etasya granthasya sampūrṇayogapratipādatvābhāvāt nyūnatāpatteḥ

(If one word is given only one interpretation then) due to the inability to represent the entire yoga, there will be lacuna.

Through the first point, the commentator uses his regard for Ācārya Śaṅkara to gain license to carry out multiple interpretations. Had he stopped at that, one could have assumed that to be the genuine reason for multiple interpretations. However, since he makes the second statement mentioned above, it becomes evident that the commentator is bent upon interpreting the text in such a way that it represents the entire body of yoga (based on the classification that he proposed in the introductory passage).

It is to be noted here that nowhere in the source text (Yogatārāvalī) does Śaṅkara give any indication that he wants to do *Sampūrṇa-yoga-pratipādana*. Hence, this clearly seems to be one of the major objectives of Rāmasvāmiṇḍita in attempting this commentary. Tables 2 and 3 bring out the effort of the commentator in multiple interpretation to realize the said objective.

Let us consider the second verse, listed first in Table 2:

sadāśivoktāni sapādalakṣalayāvadhānāni vasanti loke|

nādānusandhānasamādhimekaṃ manyāmahe mānyatamaṃ layānām||

This verse has seven interpretations, which is a classic example of the commentator's objective. The first six interpretations present six types of yoga, namely Mantra,

Table 2: Multiple interpretation of verses

Verse number	Interpretations
2	7
3	4
5	2
11	2
12	2

Table 3: Multiple interpretation of terms

Word	Interpretations
Rājayoga	7
Guru	5
Nādānusandhāna	13
Aravinda	4
Kumbhaka	3
Sadāśiva	2
Sapādalakṣa-layāvadhānāni	7
Bhūmi	6

Laya, Haṭha, Sāṅkhyā, Tāraka, and Amanaska. That is, he first interprets the verse in such a manner that one finds Mantra yoga being conveyed by the verse. The second interpretation points to Laya yoga, the third, to Haṭhayoga and so on. The sixth interpretation presents Amanaska yoga, and the seventh interpretation again speaks about a slight variation of Amanaska yoga.

We must note here that in attempting to provide multiple interpretations to the yogic words that are listed in Table 3, the commentator carefully sticks to grammatical and conventional frameworks. He refers to lexicons such as Nānārtharatnamālā, Śabdārthakalpataru, and Amarakośa. Indeed, in 26 instances, the commentator refers to the works related to Pāṇini grammar. Where his interpretations do not find lexical or grammatical support, the commentator quotes portions from other works of Śaṅkara to show precedence.

As is evident, it is indeed rare to find a yoga text/commentary that is written with an objective of presenting entire classification yoga within a span of just 28 verses, that too with a unique method of multiple and uncommon interpretations, all the while operating within grammatical and conventional frameworks.

AVOIDANCE OF NĀTHASAMPRADĀYA TEXTS AND PROBABLE IMPLICATIONS

To explain this aspect, texts cited by Rāmasvāmiṇḍita in the course of the commentary should be taken into consideration. Table 4 presents the classification of texts quoted by the commentator.

As the table reveals, Rāmasvāmiṇḍita cites profusely from the Vedas, Vedāntic texts, lexicons, Tantra texts, and Smṛitis. He also quotes from other Yoga texts such as Yogasūtras, Yogayājñavalkya, Śivayogapradīpikā (in seven instances), and Svaracintāmaṇi. However, in the list of texts above, it is noteworthy that works on Yoga from the Nāthasampradāya such as Gorakṣaśataka and Haṭhayogapradīpikā are conspicuous in their absence. Although Yogatārāvalī holds discussions on concepts that are mentioned in Nāthasampradāya texts-concepts such as Nādānusandhāna, the three mudrās (Jālandhara, Uḍḍiyāna, and Mūlabandha), Manonmanī-Unmanī, and Kumbhaka Prāṇāyāmas – Rāmasvāmiṇḍita consciously avoids quoting Nātha texts while explaining these concepts. Instead, he prefers quoting Śivayogapradīpikā, Yogayājñavalkya, and Yogopaniṣads in these situations. It is also to be noted that Rāmasvāmiṇḍita does not discuss yogic practices such as the six Kriyās, Amarolī, and Vajrolī (introduced by Nātha texts). Can this be thought of as mere aversion of the commentator to some elements of yoga ascribed to Nātha texts, or does this have any other implication?

Table 4: Texts cited by the commentator

Vedas/upaniṣads	Vedānta	Lexicons	Tantra/purāṇa	Yoga	Smṛti and other works
Śrīrāma-tāpinīya	Bādarāyaṇa-sūtrabhāṣya (śāṅkara)	Laghu-nānārtha-ratnamālā	Skānda	Yogasūtra-bhāṣya (vyāsa)	Gurugītā
Taittirīya-upaniṣad	Bhagavad-gītā	Nānārtha-ratnamālā	Kādima-tantra	Mahārājatarala	Ānanda-laharī
Brahma-vidyopaniṣad	-	Amarakoṣa	Kujñā-tantra	Śivayoga-pradīpikā	uttaragītā
Chāndogya	-	Śabdārtha-kalpataru	-	Svaracintāmaṇi	Vāmadeva-saṃhitā
Maṇḍala-brāhmaṇa-upaniṣad	-	-	Sūta-saṃhitā	Yoga-yājñavalkya	Viśvesvara-smṛti
Kaivalya-upaniṣad	-	-	-	Vijṛmbhita-yogaśāstra-bhāṣya	sūtagītā
Yogatattva-upaniṣad	-	-	-	-	Mukti-sopana
Yoga-cūḍāmaṇi-upaniṣad	-	-	-	-	Viṣṇu-sahasranāma-bhāṣya

Alongside, we must also consider another stance that Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita adopts in his commentary. He stresses the importance of the practice of Sandhyāvandana, even while practicing Yoga. Commenting on the fifth verse, he poses a mocking question, meant to show the mindset of some people:

mṛtā mohamayī mātā jāto bodhamayaḥ sutaḥ|

sūtakadvayasamprāptau katham sandhyāmupāśmahe||

-Mother called delusion is dead. Son called enlightenment is born. When there are two Sūtakas (impurity that disqualifies one from performing Vedic rituals), how can I practice Sandhyā?

Further, he names those who advise yoga practitioners to desist from practices like Sandhyā, as *yogaveśadhāriṇaḥ* (masquerading in the form of Yogis). In the same portion of the commentary, he further describes them as:

*sāmānyasvakulāśramācārān vihāya mahāyoginaḥ
iti santuṣṭyā yathecchaṃ viṣayānupabhuñjānāḥ
tiṣṭhanti| te andham tamaḥ praviśanti||*

Shunning basic practices that are obligatory and which are in accordance to one's own community and station of life and considering themselves to be Mahāyogis some people enjoy sensual pleasure according to their desire. They enter dense darkness.

These hints presumably imply that Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita might have felt that Yoga had taken a turn toward the esoteric due to some practices advocated by Nātha texts, and he attempts to reposition yoga into the Vedic fold.

One can see similar views in yoga texts often quoted by the commentator (such as Yogayājñavalkyasamhitā and Śivayogapradīpikā). In Yogayājñavalkyasamhitā, there are no Kriyās, no practices like Amarolī, etc., and there is emphasis on practice of Vedic rituals (on seven occasions in the text Yogayājñavalkyasamhitā we find the

words *nityakarma samācara— perform obligatory (Vedic) rituals*). Similarly, Śivayogapradīpikā also avoids Kriyās, practices like Amarolī, etc., and stresses the importance of Vedic practices (4th Pāṭala 17th verse).

In modern times, a study of life and teachings of Sri T Krishnamacharya provide the same indications. Sri T Krishnamacharya also did not promote uncommon yogic practices. He states “...practices like *Vajrolī, Sahajolī and Amarolī*. Can these lead to the health of people... the question here is not the possibility or impossibility of doing such practices, can this be used for the betterment of people around?”.^[10] It is also to be noted that he prescribed and taught texts like Yogayājñavalkyasamhitā, Yogatārāvalī that echo similar sentiments.

Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita's noteworthy contribution lies in the fact that in the process of subtly, yet clearly, delineating his stand on the nature of yoga that is to be practiced, he also tries to uncover a minority of yogic texts including Yogatārāvalī which held analogous thinking on Yoga.

UNIQUE CLASSIFICATION OF AṢṬĀṄGAYOGA

The first two viewpoints presented above have analyzed the probable larger goals that the commentator could have had in composing his detailed commentary of Yogatārāvalī. Through the current viewpoint and the next, a couple of unique contributions of the commentator on specific aspects of Yoga are put forth. Let us consider the first point.

Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita classifies Aṣṭāṅgas presented by Patañjali into four stages viz Ārambha, Ghaṭa, Paricaya and Niṣpatti. One finds references to these four stages in Haṭhayogapradīpikā, Śivasamhitā, Yogopaniṣads, and such other texts. In Śivasamhitā (chapter 3 verse 31, 32) and Yogattatvopaniṣad (Verse 20) the four stages are discussed in relation to Prāṇāyāma. Haṭhayogapradīpikā (Chapter 4 verse 69) discusses the progress in Nāḍānusandhāna under these four stages.

Even though this is the case, it is for the first time that Aṣṭāṅga yoga is discussed under these four stages by Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita in Rājayogatarala. The commentator includes the first four limbs Yama, Niyama, Āsana and Prāṇāyāma under Āramabha or the preparatory stage. He describes the second stage - Ghaṭa as:

*prāṇāpānayormanobuddhyorjīvātmaparamātmanoḥ
yatraikyam bhavati sā ghaṭāvasthā.*

- The stage of Ghaṭa is the one where Prāṇa and Apāna, Mind and intellect, the individual soul and supreme should get united.

The commentator brings Pratyāhāra, 5th limb of Aṣṭāṅga, under this stage. He seems to imply that, for the Prāṇa to join with Apāna, for the mind to unite with intellect etc., Pratyāhāra is essential. It is true that until the senses turn away from outwardly actions/objects and follow the mind in its spiritual pursuits, higher states cannot be achieved.

The commentator defines the third state (Paricaya) as follows:

*vāyuh yadā kevalakumbhakābhyāsaviṣaye paricitah
syāt tadā paricayāvasthā|*

- Paricaya is state where the breath is introduced to Kevalakumbhaka condition.

It is to be noted that Dhāraṇā and Dhyāna have been insightfully brought under this state by Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita. He seems to suggest that only when the control of breath reaches such a high state, i.e., Kevala-kumbhaka, can the practice of Dhāraṇā and Dhyāna might really bear the intended results. When such Dhāraṇā and Dhyāna are practiced, Niṣpatti, the fourth stage, is achieved in reaching Samādhi, which according to him is as follows:

*jīvātmaparamātmanoḥ aikyabhāvanā eva samādhiriti
niṣpattiḥ|*

- Unification of the individual soul and the Supreme being

No text that has discussed the four stages of yoga has discussed the utility of these stages. Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita also does not discuss the utility of classifying Aṣṭāṅga in four stages. Nevertheless, it can be stated that Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita has attempted a new way of looking at Aṣṭāṅgayoga. It is worth exploring whether the parameters for defining progress in the practice of Aṣṭāṅgayoga can be evolved based on this unique attempt.

HANDS-FREE ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING!

The fourth and final unique aspect from Rājayogatarala is the description of breathing pattern to be followed during

the practice of Mahāmudrā. As part of the commentary of the 10th verse of Yogatārāvalī, Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita describes Mahāmudrā. In this practice, both the hands are engaged in holding the big toe of the feet.

Here comes the unique/puzzling observation of Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita. In the process of describing Mahāmudrā, the commentator says:

*vāmapārṣṇīm yonisthāne samsthāpya dakṣiṇam
prasārya hastābhyām dṛḍham grhītvā cubukam hr̥di
vinyaset iḍayā vāyumāpūrya yathāśakti kumbhayitvā
punardakṣiṇayā virecayet...*

- (Having placed the left heel close to the perineum, stretching the right one, placing the chin on the chest) When both the hands are engaged in holding the right big toe of the feet, one should inhale through the left nostril, Iḍā, and hold the breath as much as possible and exhale through the right Nāḍī, Piṅgalā (After this, he states the converse also)

Is such a thing possible? Can one regulate the flow of breath through alternative nostrils without using fingers? Is this a fallacy? To answer such questions, after making this comment, he immediately quotes a verse as authority to this from a text called Muktisopāna which states:

*“candrāmśena samabhyasya sūryāmśena
tato bhyaset”*

- Practice this (Mahāmudrā/breathing pattern) through the Candra aspect and then through Sūrya aspect.

Interestingly, this question has also been dealt by Brahmānanda who wrote a commentary, Jyotsnā, on Haṭhayogapradīpikā. Haṭhayogapradīpikā (3.10) also has descriptions of Mahāmudrā, and in the context, it also has the following verse:

*“candrāmśena samabhyasya sūryāmśena
tato bhyaset”(3.15)*

This verse was quoted by Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita as an authority for hands-free alternative nostril breathing. The reading in Haṭhayogapradīpikā (of the above verse) is a bit different. In the place of the word Amśa (aspect), the term Aṅga (limb) has been used. Explaining this Brahmānanda states:

*candranāḍyā upalakṣitamāṅgam candrāṅgam
vāmāṅgam...*

(Note: Candrāṅga refers to left limb (of the body) and not iḍā as Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita might have thought).

In essence, according to Brahmānanda, Mahāmudrā has to be practiced first in the left side of the body by bringing the left leg close to the body, etc., and after this, through the right side. According to such an explanation,

the question of hands-free alternate nostril breathing appears to be ruled out. However, even Brahmānanda, a couple of lines later in the commentary to the same verse, makes a comment regarding the breath during this practice, which is worth noting. With reference to the Vāmāṅga practice (practice on the left side) he states:

asminnabhyāse pūrito vāyuh vāmāṅge tiṣṭhati

- The air inhaled stays in the left limb (Nāḍī?)

And with reference to *Dakṣiṇāṅgābhyāsa* he states:—

asminnabhyāse pūrito vāyuh dakṣāṅge tiṣṭhati

- The air inhaled in this practice stays in the right limb (Nāḍī?)

It is to be noted that the word *aṅga* has not been clearly defined by Brahmānanda. In the first occasion, it seems to refer to the left limb of the body (*candranāḍyā upalakṣitamāṅgam...*). In the second instance (*asminnabhyāse pūrito vāyuh.*) it may either be the left side of the body or even the left *Nāḍī*. Even if it is taken to mean that the air inhaled stays in the left side of the body, it is a well-known yogic fact that *Prāṇa* traverses and stays in the body only through and within the *Nāḍīs*. Hence even terms *Vāmāṅga* and *Dakṣiṇāṅga* should mean left and right *Nāḍīs* respectively in the second instance.

This further implies that, if the inhaled *Vāyu* has to stay in *Candraṅga* during *Mahāmudrā* it should have entered through *Candranāḍī*, and the air that stays in *Sūryanāṅga* should have entered through *Sūryanāḍī*. Therefore, should one conclude that during the left side practice, the right *Nāḍī* is automatically blocked to allow air passage only through the left nostril? Should *Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita*'s comment regarding alternate nostril breathing be adjusted and interpreted to the seemingly logical conclusion of Brahmānanda?

Although it can be argued in this way, a convincing explanation of *Rājayogatarala*'s important and subtle proposition of hands-free alternative nostril breathing during *Mahāmudrā* can be given only based on further literary evidence. After all, when Yogis like Sri T Krishnamacharya controlled even the heartbeat,^[11] can the flow breath not be regulated without the help of fingers?

However, in the process of discussing the possibility or impossibility of such a practice, even Sri T Krishnamacharya^[10] would advise to ensure the utility of such an investigation. At this juncture, it can be stated that, if the method of such practice is unraveled, then it would be an important contribution towards understanding and gaining better/conscious control

over *Prāṇa* which is a key factor to health. In this era of scientific of evaluation of Yogic practices, scientific equipment can also play an important role in finding an answer to this proposition of hands-free alternate nostril breathing.

CONCLUSION

Through this cursory examination of the commentary on *Yogatārāvalī*, some unique propositions and ideas have come to light. It is not surprising that this detailed commentary has some unique observations on Yogic practices such as *Aṣṭāṅgayoga* and *Mahāmudrā* (as revealed through the third and fourth points). However, the first and second points require wider debate, both by scholars and practitioners of Yoga. The commentator painstakingly focuses on the graded classification of yoga. In the wake of widespread global patronage of yoga and the associated evils of commercialization and dilution, it would be a worthwhile exercise to discuss the utility of classification, grading, and systematization of yogic teachings as attempted by *Rāmasvāmī Paṇḍita*. Sustained, focused discussion about this aspect initiated by the commentator might provide a definite direction to yoga studies and research.

Further, the second aspect (avoiding certain elements of *Nāthasampradāya* Yoga) discussed from the commentary highlights an important piece of yoga history which was thus far overlooked. Yoga, which was earlier seen as an ascetic, esoteric practice, has now become a widely accepted practice for health and wellbeing in its birthplace, India, and abroad. Can one credit the current mainstream acceptance of Yoga, to the concerted efforts (in the shunning of esoteric practices of *Nāthasampradāya* Yoga) by the authors of works such as *Yogayājñavalkyasamhitā*, *Śivasamhitā*, and *Rājayogatarala* and in the modern times, to the work and teachings of Sri T Krishnamacharya who also adopted the same approach?

It is hoped that in the course of (or on completion of) the critical edition of the commentary of *Rājayogatarala* of *Rāmsvāmī Paṇḍita*, many more issues of fundamental significance to the field of Yoga would come to the fore for further discussion.

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