‘OPEN’ AND ‘CLOSED’ MODELS OF THE HUMAN BODY IN INDIAN MEDICAL AND YOGIC TRADITIONS

DAVID GORDON WHITE

Abstract

Most Indian and western commentators and scholars, following the Yoga Śūtras of Patañjali (c. third century CE), have assumed the Hindu yogic body to be a closed, self-contained system.1 However, a significant volume of data from a variety of sources—ranging from the classical Upaniṣads down through the Tantras (and including passages from the Yoga Śūtras themselves)—indicate that an ‘open’ model of the yogic body has also been operative in Hindu philosophical, medical, and mythological traditions. In these open models, the mind-body complex is linked, often via ‘solar rays’, to the sun and moon of the macrocosm, as well as to other mind-body complexes, which yogins are capable of entering through their practice.

The foundations of modern yoga

Over the past two decades, a certain Indian tradition of yoga has become part of the Zeitgeist of affluent western societies, drawing housewives and hipsters, New Agers and the old-aged, and body culture and corporate culture into a billion dollar synergy. Like every Indian cultural artifact that it has embraced, the west views Indian yoga as an ancient (the figures of five- and twenty-thousand years-old are frequently bandied about) unchanging tradition, based on revelations received by the Vedic sages who, seated in the lotus pose, were the Indian forerunners of the flat-tummied yoga babes who grace the covers of such glossy periodicals as the Yoga Journal and Yoga International.

In fact, much of what comprises ‘yoga’ as it is known in the west—with its emphasis on self-realisation, mind-expansion, and bodily attunement to the cosmos—has its origins in nineteenth-century European (as opposed to Indian) occultism and esotericism. As

1 By ‘closed’ and ‘self-contained’ I do not mean to imply that such subtle body systems are ‘stable’ or ‘static’. ‘Closed’ systems, through which the vital breaths, energies, fluids, and states of consciousness forcefully flow, are bipolar and dynamic.

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Elizabeth de Michelis has recently demonstrated, ‘modern yoga’ is the product of a late-nineteenth-century conversation between such western dilettantes as the Theosophists Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and W. Q. Judge on the one hand, and their mainly Bengali counterparts, Keshubchandra Sen and Swami Vivekananda, on the other. In spite of its claims to Vedic antiquity, the roots of modern yoga are to be found more among Calcutta-based Unitarian missionaries and Freemasons, British Orientalists, and American Transcendentalists than in the teachings of the nineteenth-century Bengali mystic Ramakrishna or the ancient ‘Aphorisms on Yoga,’ the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali. While Indian commentarial traditions have, since the time of Patañjali and the Bhagavad Gītā, carried forward a mainly philosophical understanding of ‘classical yoga’, those discussions were generally disregarded or misunderstood by the founders of ‘modern yoga’.

The great watershed in the history of modern yoga is the series of lectures, later published in his Collected Writings, which Swami Vivekananda offered to eager American audiences at the turn of the twentieth century. The cornerstone of the Swami’s presentation of yoga is his identification of the ‘essence’ of the Yoga Sūtras (c. third century CE) with what he termed rāja yoga, the ‘royal path’ to self-realisation and God-realisation. Nearly no element of Vivekananda’s epoch-making synthesis stands up to historical scrutiny. The term rāja yoga is nowhere to be found in the Yoga Sūtras, nor is it found in any work prior to the tenth century CE. Furthermore, Vivekānanda’s forced and erroneous identification of nirvikalpa samādhī—which he took to be the spiritual goal of Vedānta—with Patañjali’s definition of yoga in Yoga Sūtra 1.2, reduced yoga to a meditative practice through which the absolute was to be found by turning the mind and senses inward, away from the outside world. Vivekānanda’s synthesis has oriented virtually all subsequent interpretations and appropriations of yoga of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, for which the self-contained nature of the yogic (or subtle or medical) body has remained a basic assumption. It has also impacted the ecletic

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2 De Michelis 2004, pp. 74–90 (on Sen), and pp. 149–80 (esp. p. 178, on Vivekananda).
3 Ibid., pp. 53–55, 68–72, 81.
4 Vivekananda 1989, vol. 1, pp. 119 to 314, which reproduce a series of lectures made to the New York Vedanta Society devoted to the topic of rāja-yoga.
appropriations of Indian āyurveda by Indian and western entrepreneurs of holistic New Age medicine. This study will present data from a wide range of sources—ayurvedic, philosophical and mythological—that were earlier than or coeval with the Yoga Sūtras, in support of an argument that there were significant alternatives to such a ‘closed’ model of the mind-body complex.

Models of the body in the Indian medical literature

As is well known, both ayurvedic and haṭha yogic traditions conceive of the human body as a microcosmic replica of the universal macrocosm, whence the following two aphorisms, found in the Caraka Saṃhitā: ‘Earth is that which is solid in man, water is that which is moist, fire is that which heats up, air is breath, ether the empty spaces, brāhman is the inner self (ātman);’ and ‘Indeed, this world is the measure (sammita) of the man. However much diversity of corporeal forms and substances there is in the world, that much [diversity] there is in man; however much there is in man, that much there is in the world.’ Similar statements abound in the later literature of haṭha yoga, which features extended reflections on the presence, within the yogic body, of the sun and moon, and all the worlds, landforms, flora, fauna, etc. found in the various levels of the cosmic egg. Here, the links between the human body and the universe, between microcosm and macrocosm (or ecocosm), operate on the level of homology: the sun in the heavens is like the sun within the yogic body.

Yet, there exists another type of link between the two cosms, of a more direct order, in which the matter and energy found in the one is transferred more or less directly to the other. In many cases, the transfer is mediated, for example, through the template of fire, as in the five fires doctrine found in two early Upaniṣads, in which the heavens, rain clouds, earth, man and woman are so many fires into which offerings of faith, the god Soma, rain, food, and, finally, male semen give rise to new life through the food cycle. Here, evap-

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6 Caraka Saṃhitā 4.5.5.
7 Caraka Saṃhitā 4.4.13.
8 For an extended discussion, see White 2002, pp. 189–212.
9 Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad 6.2.9–13; Chāndogya Upaniṣad 5.4–8.
oration, precipitation, digestion, and conception are described as so many ‘cooking’ processes.

Another sort of mediated transfer is recounted in the introductory chapters of every major ayurvedic treatise.\(^\text{10}\) Here, the medical literature divides the year into six seasons, even as emphasises the same as a bipolar system in which the relative influences of the sun and moon directly generate balances or imbalances of heat, moisture, and wind in the ecocosm, which in turn indirectly provoke discontinuities (\textit{dosas}), within the bodily microcosm, of the three humors: bile, phlegm, and wind. In these descriptions, the term \textit{yoga} (‘junction’, or \textit{samyoga}, ‘conjunction’) is employed, together with a variety of prefixes, to denote particular seasonal conjunctions between the outer world of the ecocosm and the inner world of the human organism.\(^\text{11}\) Throughout the ayurvedic year, it is the extreme effects of the sun and moon—and to a lesser extent, wind—on the ecocosm, which must be moderated within the body through special diets, regimens and behaviours; and it is the task of the physician to effect a ‘balanced junction’ (\textit{samayoga}) when confronted with humoral imbalances provoked by an ‘excessive junction of time’ (\textit{kālātiyoga}), a ‘deficient’ or ‘non-junction of time’ (\textit{kālāyoga}) or a ‘disjunction of time’ (\textit{kālamithyāyoga}).\(^\text{12}\) These sorts of mediated transfers are not unlike those found in alchemical reactions, in which closed bicameral apparatuses, when subjected to heating and cooling through exposure to outside agents, transform the reagents—mercury, sulfur, etc.—contained inside.\(^\text{13}\)

According to the ayurvedic literature, the impact of sun and moon on seasonal changes is explained in terms of the ‘pouring out’ (\textit{visarga}) of the moon’s cooling moisture, which ‘swells’ (\textit{ā-\textit{pyai}}) or moistens (\textit{kledayati}) the ecocosm during the latter half of the year, versus the sun, which desiccate (\textit{śoṣayati}) living organisms as it takes back (\textit{ā-\textit{ḍā}) the same during the former half of the year. These semesters are termed ‘lunar’ (\textit{saumya}) and ‘fiery’ (\textit{āgneya}) respectively. The \textit{Aṣṭāṅgahrdaya} describes these relationships aphoristically:

\(^{10}\) \textit{Caraka Samhita} 1.6.3–51; \textit{Sūruta Samhita} 1.6.1–38; \textit{Aṣṭāṅgahrdaya} 1.3.2–58.

\(^{11}\) An important study of this terminology is Zimmermann 1975, pp. 87–105.

\(^{12}\) Caraka \textit{Samhita} 1.11.42–43. For a discussion, see Zimmermann 1975, p. 92.

\(^{13}\) For an extended discussion, see White 1996, pp. 240–52. The closest ayurvedic homologue to this configuration and dynamic is \textit{kuti-prāvesa}, that type of rejuvenation therapy, which treats the most extreme imbalances between the microcosm and ecocosm. For a discussion, see White 1996, pp. 26–27.
Now, one should know the northern course [of the sun] by those three [seasons] that begin with the cold season. That [which is known as] ‘taking back’ (ādhānam) daily takes back the strength (balam) of men. In this [semester] especially, the solar winds—which, due to the nature of the path [taken by the sun], are exceedingly hot, penetrating, and dry—diminish the lunar qualities of the earth. Here, the bitter, the astringent, and the sharp are [the] strong[est] flavors. Thus the [semester of] taking back is fiery. The southern course [comprises] the seasons beginning with the rains and the [the period of] pouring out, and strength is what it pours out.14 At this time, due to its lunar qualities, the moon alone is strong, [whereas] the sun is on the wane on the surface of the earth whose [accumulated] heat has subsided through the effect of the cooling clouds, rain, and breezes. Here, the oily, the acidic, salty, and the sweet are [the] strong[est] flavors.15

Here, we may observe that a shift in language, if not a conceptual shift, has occurred, because these transfers are now described not as mediated, but rather as direct. The ‘moon, filling the world with its cool rays, causes it to swell’,16 while ‘in the hot season, the sun intensively drinks up (pepiyate) the world’s moisture’.17 This is, in fact a commonplace of South Asian medical and yogic traditions: the media or means by which these heavenly bodies extend their influence into the ecocosm are their rays or beams (kiraṇa, raśmin, mayūka, marīci), effulgence (bhā), threads (guna), or filaments (aṃśū), rays which are not simply comprised of effulgent light, but which are also conduits for the transfer of heat and, especially, fluids, between the heavens, the earth, and the bodies of creatures. It is these conduits that make possible ‘the relationships between a living being and his natural environment, which give rise to a vast metabolism of foods and fluids’.18

An early mythological presentation of this dynamic is found in the Mahābhārata. Here, when the Pāṇḍava king Yudhiṣṭhira has gone into exile in the forest together with his brothers, his wife, and a sizable community of Brahmans, and finds himself unable to provide for them, he asks the advice of Dharma, who replies with an origin account:

14 Āstāṅgaḥṛdaya 1.3.2–6.
15 The oily (snigdha) flavor is out of place here. The other three flavors mentioned here, together with the three listed in verse 4a, constitute the standard “six flavors” of ayurvedic diet.
16 Caraka Saṁhitā 1.6.5.
17 Caraka Saṁhitā 1.6.27a. Cf. Suśruta Saṁhitā 1.6.8a.
18 Zimmermann 1975, p. 94.
In the beginning, the emitted beings were greatly afflicted with hunger. Then Savitṛ [i.e., the sun], out of compassion, [acted] like their own father. Having gone to its northern course, [and] drawing resins of effulgence (tejorasaṁ) [of earth] upward with [its] rays, the sun, [having now] returned to its southern course, entered into the earth. When this [sun] had become the field, the Lord of Plants (i.e., the Moon), condensing the effulgence of heaven (divastējāh), engendered the plants with water. Sprinkled with the resins of effulgence of the moon, the sun that had gone into the earth was born as the nourishing plants of the six flavors. That [sun] is the food of living creatures on earth. Yes indeed, solar food is the staff of life of every living being. The sun is the father of all beings. Therefore, take refuge in him!\(^\text{19}\)

The fact that this passage concludes with a reference to the six flavours, also evoked in the Aśṭāṅgahṛdaya excerpt quoted above, establishes that its context is ayurvedic. This passage also confirms the direct nature of the transfers that occur—between the sun and moon and the broader ecocosm—via the conduits of those heavenly bodies' rays. As has been indicated, terms based on the word yoga figure prominently in ayurvedic discussions of the relationships between seasonal changes in the ecocosm and humoral changes in the human microcosm. So the question arises: what relationship, if any, is there between the yogas of āyurveda and the many forms of yoga found in coeval textual sources? An answer to this question must also address the role of rays, solar or lunar, as conduits linking the microcosm of the human body to those two heavenly bodies, as well as to other microcosms, other human bodies.

**Upanishadic and epic sources on ‘exiting the body’**

Early and precious sources on the role of rays are the classical Upaniṣads, in particular the Chāndogya (c. sixth century BCE), which postulates that the solar rays that creep into the channels of the individual subtle body also constitute the path taken by the dead:\(^\text{20}\)

Like a road between two villages goes from one to the other, so too the solar rays go to two worlds, this world below and the world above . . . But when he [the deceased] is departing from this body, then he progresses aloft (utkramati) along these very rays . . . No sooner

\(^{19}\) *Mahābhārata* 3.3.5–9.

\(^{20}\) On the dates of the principal Upaniṣads, see Olivelle 1996, pp. xxxvi–xxxvii.
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does he cast his mind to it, than does he go to the sun. Truly, that is the very door of the world (lokadvāram), an entrance for those who know . . . 21 On that subject, this verse: 'There are a hundred and one channels of the heart. One of these passes up to the crown of the head. Progressing aloft (utkramane), one goes to immortality . . .' 22

The Katha Upaniṣad (third- to first-century BCE) reproduces the same passage, and links it directly to the practice of yoga, in one of the very rare uses of the term in the entire corpus of the classical Upaniṣads. 23 The Maitri Upaniṣad calls the channel that leads to immortality the susumnā, along which, through the junction (yukti) of breath, the syllable om, and the mind, one may progress aloft (utkramel). 24 This same channel, 'piercing through the solar orb, progresses beyond (atikramya) [the sun] to the World of Brahman. They [the dead] go by it to the highest station (parām gatim). ' 25 Elsewhere, the Praśna Upaniṣad explains that the sun gathers all living beings (or life-breaths, prāṇān) into its rays (rasmīsu) as it moves across the sky. 26

The Praśna Upaniṣad and the Maitri Upaniṣad, relatively late Upaniṣads, are likely coeval with both the ayurvedic Caraka Saṃhitā and with the Mahābhārata, 27 which, like the Maitri Upaniṣad, evokes the piercing of the solar orb, and links said piercing to the practice of yoga: 'Two penetrate the orb of the sun: the recluse and the hero who, yoked to yoga, has laid down his life on the battlefield.' 28 As Peter Schreiner has noted, 29 the term 'yog-' appears nearly 800 times in the Mahābhārata, of which well over 300 in the didactic teachings of the 'Mokṣadharma' section of the epic's twelfth book, and nearly 150 in the Bhagavad Gītā alone. It is, however, the use of the terms yoga and yogin [practitioner of yoga] in the narrative portions of the great epic that are of greatest interest here. In fact, the most common epic use of the term yoga, when narrativised as a practice undertaken by human practitioners, depicts 'dying as a yogic event' by means

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21 Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.6.2.5.
22 Chāndogya Upaniṣad 8.6.6.
23 Katha Upaniṣad 6.16, which is framed by 6.11, which "defines" yoga, and 6.18, the final verse of the Upaniṣad, which alludes to the "entire set of yogic rules taught by Death."
24 Maitri Upaniṣad 6.21.
25 Maitri Upaniṣad 6.30.
26 Praśna Upaniṣad 1.6.
27 The Mahābhārata is dated in Hildebeitel 2001, p. 18 to approximately 150–0 BCE.
28 Mahābhārata 5.33.52 (*178 in the critical edition, following 5.33.52 in the K2.4.5; D8.10; K1; and D2.7 manuscripts).
29 Schreiner 1999a, p. 756.
of which a hero wills his luminous lifebody to rise up out of his recumbent if not comatose body.\textsuperscript{30} Humans who are ‘yoked to yoga’ (\textit{yoga-yukta}) transcend their human condition, as in the case of the awesome Bhīṣma,\textsuperscript{31} the heroic Balarāma\textsuperscript{32} and Kṛṣṇa,\textsuperscript{33} as well as the five Pāṇḍavas, who, together with their common wife Draupādi, ascend the snowy fastnesses of the Himalaya to meet their death.\textsuperscript{34} As in the case of the aphorism quoted above, the apotheosis of certain epic heroes is linked to the sun, as, for example, the warrior Bhūrīśravas, who, knowing his end is at hand,

\ldots entered into [the state of] going forth [from life] (\textit{prāya}) on the battlefield\ldots Desiring to go to the World of Brahman, he thereupon offered his vital breaths into [his] breaths. He fixed his eye on the sun with his mind placid, in internal acquiescence. Meditating on the great Upaniṣad, that sage became yoked to yoga.\textsuperscript{35}

Similarly, Droṇa, the epic master of weapons, upon hearing the announcement of the death of his son, ‘yokes himself to yoga’.\textsuperscript{36} Here as well, the sun is evoked in a number of ways. As he rises toward heaven, it appears that two suns have seemingly merged into a single point, following which he enters into the moon, ‘which was shining like the sun\ldots’\textsuperscript{37}

The sun is not, however, the sole final destination of epic yogins. In fact, when he is not a hero laying down his life on the battlefield, the epic practitioner of yoga enters not into the sun, but rather into the bodies of other human beings. The most famous example of such a yogic transfer is that involving the Pāṇḍava king Yudhīśṭhira and his ‘uncle’ Vidura, both of whom are incarnations of the same god, Dharma. Coming upon Vidura alone in the forest, Yudhīśṭhira announces himself, at which point Vidura,

fully fixed his gaze upon the king, having conjoined (\textit{samyojya}) with his faculty of sight the faculty of sight in him. And the wise Vidura, who was fixing his breaths in his breaths and his senses in his senses, also verily entered [Yudhīśṭhira’s] limbs with [his own] limbs. Using his

\textsuperscript{30} Schreiner 1999b, p. 141; and Schreiner, 1988, pp. 12–18.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Mahābhārata} 13.154.3b.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Mahābhārata} 16.5.11–15.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Mahābhārata} 16.5.18–20.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Mahābhārata} 17.1.28, 44; 17.2.1.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Mahābhārata} 7.118.16b, 17a–18b.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Mahābhārata} 7.165.35b.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Mahābhārata} 7.165.39a–41a, 41c–42b
power of yoga (yogabalam), he did enter into the king's body. Vidura was seemingly set ablaze with the fiery splendor of the righteous king. Then the king likewise saw that [that] body of Vidura, whose eyes were dull and glassy, and which was propped up against a tree, was devoid of consciousness. He then felt himself to be several times stronger [than before], and the righteous king of great splendor, the son of Pāṇḍu, recalled his entire past; and...[he recalled] the practice of yoga (yogadharma) as it had been recounted [to him] by Vyāsa.  

In this case, the yogic transfer is final: Vidura has left his now dead body behind to permanently cohabit the body of Yudhiṣṭhira. Other epic accounts of more temporary yogic transfers explicitly designate solar rays as transfer media. So, for example, a story from the ‘Mokṣadharma’ section of the Mahābhārata describes a Buddhist nun (bhikṣuṇī) named Sulabhā who, giving up her former body through yoga (yogatas), has taken on the appearance of a beautiful woman to appear before King Janaka of Mithila. Then, at the conclusion of a 160-verse ‘inner dialogue’ that takes place inside the king’s body, Sulabhā states: ‘Just as a solitary mendicant would dwell for one night in an empty citadel, so indeed do I dwell tonight in this body of yours.’ A similar scenario is found in the epic account of Vipula, a hermit who protects his guru’s wife from the god Indra’s advances by yogically (yogena) entering into her body. 

With [his] two eyes [locked] into her two eyes, having conjoined (samyojya) his rays in her rays, Vipula was entered into [her] body like the wind into the sky.

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38 Mahābhārata 15.33.24-29.
39 Mahābhārata 12.308.7b, 10a, 12ab. For a discussion, see Fitzgerald 2002, pp. 641-77.
40 Mahābhārata 12.308.16b-17b.
41 Mahābhārata 12.308.190ab.
42 Mahābhārata 13.40.50a.
43 Mahābhārata 13.40.56.
Other epic figures who undertake this sort of yogic entry into a foreign body include Kāvyā Uśanas and Bharadvāja. In the latter case, a newborn child named Pratardhana, having been yogically penetrated by Bharadvāja, instantaneously ‘matures’ into a thirteen-year-old youth, who is learned in the Veda and the science of archery.

The principle behind these narrative accounts is expressed aphoristically in the Yogakathana chapter (289) of the epic’s twelfth book:

... practitioners of Yoga who are without restraints and endowed with the power of yoga (yogabalānvitaḥ) are supreme beings who enter into [the bodies of] the Prajāpatīs, the sages, the gods, and the great beings. Neither Yama nor angry Antaka nor death of terrible prowess has dominion over the Yogi who is possessed of immeasurable splendor. The practitioner of yoga may act upon many thousands of bodies (ātmanām) [at a time], and having obtained [their] power, walk the earth with all of them. And having moreover obtained the objects of his senses, he may again undertake terrible austerities [and] further condense [them, i.e. those other bodies], like the sun does [its] threads of light.

The last two verses of this passage are quoted in the Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkara—whom I follow in glossing the term ātmanām (selves) as sarirāṇī (bodies)—and who also offers an alternate reading of the final hemistic: in place of sūryastegunāṇīva (‘like the sun its threads of light’), he proposes sūryo raśmigaṇāṇīva (‘like the sun its mass of rays’).

These epic narrativisations of yoga are presented aphoristically in three of Patañjali’s Yoga Sūtras, all of which are devoted to the ‘extraordinary powers’ (vibhūtis) gained through the practice of samyama, ‘perfect discipline’:

3.26: ‘From perfect discipline on the sun, knowledge of the worlds.’
3.38: ‘From loosening the fetters of bondage to the body and from awareness of the bodily processes, the mind’s [power of] entering into another [being’s] body (cittasya paraśarāraśvāteḥ).’
3.39: ‘From mastery of the upward breath (udāna), non-engagement in water, mud, thorns, etc., and progressing aloft [out of the body] (utkṛṣṭāteḥ).’

As is well known, Patañjali’s principal emphasis is not on the vibhūtis or the power of leaving an ‘open’ yogic body, but rather on the

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44 Mahābhārata 13.31.29–30, noted in Brockington 2003, p. 18.
46 Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya of Śaṅkara 1.3.27,28, which is also cited in the critical edition’s notes on alternate readings to Mahābhārata 12.289.26, 27.
total isolation (kaivalyam) of the transcendent self through total yogic integration (samādhi), based on a ‘closed’ model of the same. Such is also the case with later hatha yoga, in which both the sun and moon are located within the yogic body, in the lower abdomen and cranial vault, respectively. However, as Peter Schreiner has argued, and as I have attempted to demonstrate here, the earliest and most concrete conceptualisations of yoga cast it as a state of union outside of the bodily envelope, following a death understood as a release from the human condition. Only later, but still at a relatively early point in the history of yoga as evidenced in the bulk of the Yoga Sūtras and its commentaries, the term becomes psychologised and abstracted into a corpus of meditative techniques that are identified as ‘classical yoga’ today.47

Having said this, the earlier ‘open’ model has not disappeared altogether: far from it. On the one hand, the great majority of descriptions of the subtle yogic body depict that body as extending beyond the contours of the gross flesh-and-blood body of the practitioner. In Hindu traditions, this extension is most commonly referred to as the dvādaśānta, the ‘end of the twelve’, a point generally located twelve finger-breadths above the fontanel, the semi-permeable membrane that separates the cranial vault from the outside world.48 In many Hindu yogic and Tantric traditions, it is via the end of the twelve that the divine enters into the human body, and through which a yogin’s exit from the body is effected.49 This is but an expansion on the insight of those early Upaniṣads that linked the channels of the yogic body to the rays of the sun, an expansion whose history begins, if we are to follow Paul Mus, with the celebrated Rigvedic ‘Hymn of the Man’ (10.90) and early Buddhist considerations of the Buddha’s luminous cranial protuberance (usñīśa).50

Conclusion

The open body model, in addition to its instantiations in ayurvedic traditions, also undergirds the dynamics of initiation, in which the

47 Schreiner 1988, p. 17.
48 Or the upper jaw: Mus 1968, p. 549.
50 Mus 1968, pp. 561–63.
mind-stuff (citta) of the guru leaves his body to enter into and transform that of his disciple, before returning to the guru’s own bodily envelope. It is also operative in the many, many Tantric accounts of the technique of parakāyapraísesa involving the ‘hostile takeover’ of another person’s body by a tantric yogin. This, I would argue is the most perennial and pervasive understanding of yoga in South Asia: not the identification of the individual self with the universal Self in meditative isolation (kaivalyam), but rather the yoking of the mind-body complex to an absolute located outside of the self—often behind the sun—or to that of other bodies, other selves, through networks of interlinked cosms.

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