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## Cosmic understanding of Kuṇḍalinī

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### Abstract

Chakras are a constituent part of old Tantric and Shakti Yoga reasoning available inside the scope of sacred Hindu writings. Chakras are believed to be personally associated with our subtle bodies as swirling vortices of aggregated magical energy at different points along our spinal alignment, called the sushumna nadi. Every vortices make up a chakra, and each chakra is inseparably associated with different emotional, mental, bodily, and spiritual functions. Consequently, the general wellbeing inside the overall previously mentioned classes is totally reliant upon the equilibrium and arrangement of the individual chakras and the enlivening of the creative Kuṇḍalinī spirit. This chakra understanding could be a basic concept of yoga, but scientific research mostly neglects this philosophy because of its mythological aesthetic; hence, no essentially acknowledged understanding of how chakras influence physiological function has been discovered amongst yoga researchers or scientific researchers. Hence, the present paper is being written through the lens of Kundalini Yoga with the intention of understanding how this ancient Indic philosophy is being applied within the modern West. The aim of this paper is to give a brief explanation of the chakras and their application in the Hindu faith tradition and to show how these ancient yoga philosophies are being recently applied.

**Keyword:** Chakra, tantric, Shakti, kuṇḍalinī, yoga, mythological, aesthetics, spirit

### Introduction

The work of Gorsakṣanātha reveals a broad understanding of the connection between the cosmic landscape and subtle human autonomy. In particular, his Siddha-Siddhānta-Paddhati is devoted to explaining the origin of the body (piṇḍa) and its role in the view of the universe and salvation. Śakti is identified as the original force that forms the basis of all creation and functions through its five evolutions: nijā (innate or constant), parā (superior), aparā (lower), sūkṣmā (subtle), and kuṇḍalī. The teachings of the Siddha-Siddhānta-Paddhati are tantric in nature which aims at realizing identity in the unity of the universe, and the yogis symbolized interiorly by the fusion of Shiva (Akula) and Shakti (kula). The sleeping and awakening aspects of the Kuṇḍalinī are explained in detail in connection with the cosmic evolution: When kuṇḍalinī is raised, the expanded śakti turns into a creative primus motor for cosmic manifestation; whereas when she coils, the contracted śakti parallels the dissolution of the world. According to the subtle body-locations of śakti at the mūlādhāra, hr̥daya, and sahasrāra the kuṇḍalinī is respectively called adhaḥ ("below"), Madhya ("center"), and ūrdhva ("above")<sup>[1]</sup>. The first aspect ensures the connection between the practitioner and the outside world. The second is between superior and subtle, which promote the foundation or liberation, respectively. The third is to achieve the last eight blessings (paramapada).

In Gorakṣapaddhati, it is also mentioned that it had an influence on the later haṭhayoga literature, borrowing many verses from it. Entirely devoted to the six limbs of yoga starting with the postures, it teaches widely on the kuṇḍalinī awakening but nothing of the micro-macro cosmic theories. Furthermore, the Gorakṣapaddhati associates the three vessels of the subtle body, idā, piṅgalā, and suṣumṇā, respectively with the deities of the moon, sun, and fire<sup>[2]</sup>. However, these impressions of identity, as in the later teachings of haṭhayoga, seem to be symbolic rather than a clear example of the micro-macro theory.

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<sup>1</sup> Kenn Dongart, Kuṇḍalinī: The Hindu Tenets of the Supreme Energy in Theory and Practice (University of Copenhagen, 2016), P 24.

<sup>2</sup> Kenn Dongart, Kuṇḍalinī: The Hindu Tenets of the Supreme Energy in Theory and Practice (University of Copenhagen, 2016), P 24.

Śivasamhitā introduced Kuṇḍalinī as the "Supreme Goddess" (paradevatā), explaining that She represents the creativity of the world and is always committed to the creation. In addition, Śivasamhitā identified her as the "Goddess of Speech"(Vāgdevi). The Śivasamhitā contains these specific descriptions and connections between kuṇḍalinī and the divine energy manifested in the macrocosm, presumably because it is a mixture of the non-dual Śaiva tradition and the Śrīvidyā cult, and completely absent of anything to relate it with the Nāth tradition.

### The etymology of the Term Chakra

Etymologically speaking, the term 'chakra' literally means 'circle' or 'wheel. However, contextually speaking, the term 'chakra' seems to have different meanings; depending on the context, Sanskrit sources suggest different definitional meanings for the word 'chakra' as a circle, in a variety of senses; primarily symbolizing endless rotation of Shakti, a circle of people; in certain rituals, adherents perform some rites cyclically. The chakras are the centre of Shakti as the vital force <sup>[3]</sup>. It can also denote mystic diagrams or yantras. From some earliest discussion of the chakras, we find reference to only four. However, some early sources discuss five. They are not necessarily called chakras. Every school has their own chakras, which are developed over time; in fact, there is no standard of chakras.

The chakras explained in the Tantric treatise are six in number. They are independent units that carried on the work assigned to them. The activity of each chakra is controlled by his own Shakti. Moreover, in relation to these independent Shakti of each chakra, there is a cosmic Shakti or energy which has the power of controlling all these chakras.

### The Seven Chakras

Before any cosmic understanding of the chakras, one must first understand them literally. Therefore, here we must describe each of the seven unanimously accepted main chakras through etymology, colour, anatomical location associations, their expected duties, and the divinity of the corresponding material elements. It is important to note that different Hindu tantric texts and teachings present different numbers of chakras.

Chakras are discussed in various ancient Hindu literature, such as the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhitā, Siva-Samhitā, amongst others, leaving room for a lot of subjective explanation and experiments.

Each chakra has a specific location on the physical body, corresponding element, mantra, deity, colour, shape, animal, sense organ, as well as a particular number of petals. Each of these chakras is neatly strung up along the spinal region within a central channel called a *sushumna nadi*, beginning in your pelvic region up to the crown of your head. These chakras and channels lie within what is known as the subtle body <sup>[4]</sup>. These chakras and channels are located in the so-called subtle bodies. In Vedic philosophy, the subtle body is understood as a carrier of consciousness, which is essentially a part of every person and accompanies it from one life to another. Although this body is invisible, it is directly connected to our body through sushumna nadi and can significantly affect the confidential material world. Next, we

will explore the understanding of the universe in more detail; but first, below is the explanation of each chakra:

**1. Sahasrāra (Crown Chakra):** Sahasrāra's literal translation means lotus with one thousand petals; therefore, the chakra is symbolized by a bright magenta or white geometric lotus flower. It is usually considered the seventh chakra of the human body. It is generally considered as a state of pure consciousness, and it means "I understand". It is associated with the anatomical location of the crown of the head or just above the head. The beeja mantra of sahasrāra is 'Omkar'. Only a few eminent yogis reached this chakra, such as Buddha. When the female energy of Kundalini Shakti rises to this point, it combines with the male energy of Shiva, resulting in an independent state of Samadhi. The role of the crown chakra can be imagined to be somewhat similar to that of the pituitary gland: The pituitary gland is responsible for secreting hormones, which in turn communicate with the rest of the endocrine system and connect the central nervous system with the hypothalamus. This is crucial when it comes to the chakras because it is believed that the hypothalamus plays a potentially crucial role in the physical basis of consciousness. Therefore, the inner qualities of the Sahasrāra are related to the maintenance and release of karma and the psychological and emotional behaviour of "existence". Sahasrāra may take many years of tapa to activate, and it is only possible when the eternal power wants it.

**2. Ajna (Guru Chakra):** It is the sixth chakra of the human body, and it is also known as the third-eye chakra or guru chakra. Guru means one who enlightens the path of life. Ajna is generally described as violet or dark blue, although traditionally, it is described as white and is symbolized by a lotus with two petals. By daily practice of meditation and focusing on the third eye, a yogi can attain the state of wisdom. The chakra of Ajna is located in the centre of the forehead between the eyebrows, called the third eye. The main god of Ajna chakra is Ardhanarishvara, he is half-male, and half-female, i.e. Shiva/Shakti, and this double-petalled lotus symbolizes the end of duality because the seed of this chakra is "Om". This mantra is taken from "Omkara", which is the name of Lord Shiva. After opening the chakra, one can see the real things behind the visible things. The activation of the Ajna makes people's vision and imagination very clear. After this chakra is activated, you have a feeling of Shivoam Shivoam, Shiv O Ham means = I am Shiva, I will never deceive you because I am far from people's hearts and I can see the truth.

**3. Vishuddha (throat chakra):** It is located at the throat region above the collarbone in the centre of the throat. It is generally depicted as a silver crescent moon in a circle, emitting sixteen light blue or turquoise colour petals. This chakra is usually parallel to the connection of the thyroid gland, which is the gland responsible for maturation and growth. Systematically, it breaks down the general responsibilities of the throat chakra; physically, it controls communication, emotionally, it controls independence, mentally it controls quiet thoughts, and spiritually it controls the sense of security. Vishuddha is a syllable of 'ham' that represents the goddess Saraswati who is also known as 'Hamsini'; that is why the seed mantra is called Ham.

**4. Anahata:** It traditionally means "unhurt or unbeaten"; it indicates serenity, peace and balance. It is generally

<sup>3</sup> Sri Swami Sivananda, *Kundalini Yoga* (The Divine Life Society Publication, 1994), P xi

<sup>4</sup> Erica Vansteen, "Understanding the Subtle Body", *Hinduism and Yoga* (April 2014).

symbolized as a round flower with twelve green petals, which is called the mind. In this round flower, there is a yantra composed of two intersecting triangles, forming a perfect hexagon. This geometric symbol is an illustration of the union of women and men. Anahata is anatomically located in the chest area in and around the heart. Anahata is in a place where our T-cell is mature. This is essential for our immunity and resistance to disease but can be adversely affected by stress. Too systematically break down the responsibilities of the heart chakra, physically control circulation, emotionally control unconditional love for self and others, spiritually control passion, and spiritually control devotion. The syllable of the mantra is "yam", which indicates "Yogi".

**5. Manipura (Solar Plexus Chakra):** The Manipura is usually symbolized by a downward pointed triangle surrounded by a circle, with ten projectile petals that are yellow in colour. It is located above the naval. It literally means 'mani', which according to the Vedic stories, are property of Naag and Naagin. It indicates the transformation of yogi's because it is the home of fire and wind, which controls digestion and metabolism. The seed mantra is the syllable 'ram', and the deity of this chakra is Rudra (Mahadeva Shiva).

The one who focuses on karma and always is happy is the one who activates the Manipura. This chakra helps us to remove all the confusion about destiny because one who is enamoured with action knows the play of destiny in life.

**6. Swadhisthana:** It means "Swa", which means self and "adhsthana" means established, so "where your being is established". This chakra holds fear, especially the fear of death. It is anatomically located to the position of the genitals or sacrum and corresponds directly to the female ovaries and male testes; therefore, it is involved in the production of sex hormones and the reproductive cycle. It contains unconscious desires. It is generally symbolized by a lotus flower with a crescent moon, and six bright orange petals emerge from the outer circle. Some of its fundamental responsibilities are pleasure, addiction, interpersonal relationships, basic emotional needs and violence. To systematically break down the responsibilities of Swadhisthana, it physically governs reproduction, it mentally governs creativity, emotionally it governs happiness, and spiritually it governs enthusiasm.

**7. Muladhara (Root Chakra):** It is located in the root and basis of existence. It literally means root, and adhara means the basis. It is symbolized by a lotus with four petals and red colour. The seed mantra syllable is "lam". It is located at the base of the spine or near the anus. Because of the deep-rooted position in the body, the root chakra represents our foundation and our ability to maintain the spiritual foundation. This is where we place our basic identities and values. This root chakra is usually related to survival, instinct, safety, and essential human potential.

To break down the responsibilities of the chakra systematically, physically, it governs sexuality, mentally, it governs stability, it governs sensuality emotionally, and a sense of security governs spiritually.

As we can clearly see from the definition of chakras provided above, the chakras are inextricably linked to our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health.

### The Spirit of Kuṇḍalinī

In Kuṇḍalinī Yoga, the creating and sustaining Shakti of the entire subtle body is genuinely united with Lord Shiva. The

rousing of Kundalini Shakti and Her Union with Lord Siva affects the state of Samadhi (Ecstatic union) and spiritual Anubhava (experience) [5]. It is she who gives knowledge or Jnana because she is Herself that. When Yogins awakened Kuṇḍalinī, she Herself achieves Jnana (illumination) for them. It can be awakened by different methods and thus, called by different names, i.e., Hatha Yoga, Raja Yoga etc. The practitioner of this Kuṇḍalinī Yoga claims that it is more than any other process and thus, the Samadhi achieved is more perfect.

The Kuṇḍalinī can be awakened in two ways, namely, Shaktipat, which is spiritual transmission through a guru, or spiritual practices, such as yoga and meditation. There have been stated cases that the Kuṇḍalinī awakening occurred spontaneously due to psychological or physical trauma, or even for no apparent reason. However, despite the method of awakening the Kuṇḍalinī, the process of awakening and its activation is universal. Once awakened, the Kuṇḍalinī is believed to rise from its starting point in the Muladhara chakra and travel up through the central sushumna nadi. As the Kuṇḍalinī ascends along the sushumna nadi, it reaches each chakra and in turn releases different levels of mystical and awakening experiences, until; the Kuṇḍalinī reaches the Sahasrāra chakra in the top of the head ultimately. When Kuṇḍalinī arrives at Sahasrāra, a profound mystical experience occurs, unlike anything the person may have before.

### Conclusion

Fully understanding the complex philosophy of yoga is not something that can be achieved in a single paper; it needs much time to study, practice and dedication. However, this present study serves its purpose as a basic overview of the outlines of understanding of yoga chakras in the modern West. The present study served as a resource for understanding what is commonly understood about chakras in the modern West; moreover, discussing how and why chakra application has become so popular in the West will be emphasized in subsequent articles.

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<sup>5</sup> Sri Swami Sivananda, *Kundalini Yoga* (A Divine Life Society Publication, 1994), P 3.