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The History of Modern Kundalini Research
Gopi Krishna and the Transformation of a South Asian Goddess in the Late Twentieth Century

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THE HISTORY OF MODERN KUNDALINI RESEARCH

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Gopi Krishna and the Transformation of a South Asian Goddess in the Late Twentieth Century

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A Note on Transliteration

This study uses Sanskrit terms with diacritics and italics when referring to South Asian sources and concepts in premodern texts, e.g., *Upaniṣad* and *kuṇḍalinī*, and when referring to the process of transformation, modernisation, etc. of premodern concepts, e.g., the transformation of *kuṇḍalinī*. Diacritical marks are not used in place names, names, and authors, e.g., Swami Vivekananda. In all quotes and text titles, the original diacritics will be provided, whether correct or not. When addressing common adaptions of South Asian terms in modern European languages, no diacritics or italics are used, e.g., kundalini. In the case of transliteration, I follow the standard International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliterations (IAST).

Abbreviations

AAAS	American Academy of Asian Studies
AIIMS	All India Institute of Medical Sciences
AMI	Apparatus for Meridian Identification
ARC	American Religion Collection
ATP	Association for Transpersonal Psychology
BFT	Biofeedback Training
CCRIMH	Central Council for Research in Indian Medicine and Homoeopathy
CI	Chakra Instrument
CIAS	California Institute for Asian Studies
CIF	Cultural Integration Fellowship
CIHS	California Institute for Human Science
CIIS	California Institute of Integral Studies
CIKR	Central Institute for Kundalini Research
CTR	Center of Theory and Research (Esalen)
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders
EEG	Electroencephalography and electroencephalogram
ECG	Electrocardiography
ESF	Emerging Sciences Foundation
ESP	Extrasensory perception
FIND	Friends in New Direction (formerly KRFC)
FSP	Frederic Spiegelberg Papers
FWW	Forschungsgesellschaft für östliche Weisheit und westliche Wissenschaft
IARP	International Association for Religion and Parapsychology
ICR	Institute for Consciousness Research (formerly FIND)
IJPP	Indian Journal of Physiology and Pharmacology
IONS	Institute of Noetic Sciences
IRP	Institute for Religious Psychology
ITA	International Transpersonal Association
ITP	Institute for Transpersonal Psychology
JFFS	Japanese Foundation for Fundamental Search
KHAC	Kashmir Hindu Action Committee

KRA	Kundalini Research Association
KRF	Kundalini Research Foundation
KRI	Kundalini Research Institute (Yogi Bhajan)
KRFC	Kundalini Research Institute (Canada KRF branch)
KRN	Kundalini Research Network
LGK	Legacy Gopi Krishna
LWH	Legacy Werner Heisenberg
MIU	Maharishi International University
NIMHANS	National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences
PKYC	Patanjali Kundalini Yoga Care
PSI	People Searching Inside
SEN	Spiritual Emergency Network
SFF	Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship
TM	Transcendental Meditation
UC	University of California
UN	United Nations
3HO	Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ..... **i**

A Note on Transliteration ..... **v**

Abbreviations ..... **vii**

Table of Contents ..... **ix**

Introduction **1**

1. State of Research **5**

2. Methodological Approach **12**

3. Outline **17**

PART I Kundalini's Historical Roots **21**

4. *Kuṇḍalinī* in Premodern Tantra and Yoga **22**

4.1. *Kuṇḍalinī* within South Asian Subtle-Body Models 22

4.2. *Kuṇḍalinī* in Medieval Tantra and Yoga 27

4.2.1. *Kuṇḍalinī* in Early Tantric Texts 28

4.2.1.1. *Kubjikāmatatantra* 30

4.2.1.2. *Tantrāloka* 31

4.2.2. *Kuṇḍalinī* in *Haṭhayoga* Manuals 33

4.2.2.1. *Śivasaṃhitā* 35

4.3. Summary 38

5. *Kuṇḍalinī*'s Scientification in Colonial India **39**

5.1. Orientalism, Occultism, and Revivalism in Colonial India 39

5.1.1. Historical Background: Exchanges between South Asia and Europe 40

5.1.2. Approaching Orientalism as Science and Ideology 41

5.1.3. The Theosophical Society 44

5.1.4. Hindu Reform Movements and Controversies Revolving around Tantra 48

5.2. The First Wave of *Kuṇḍalinī*'s Scientification 51

5.2.1. Truth Seeker's Interest in "The Dream of Ravan" (1853–1854) 52

5.2.2. The Interpretation of *Kuṇḍalinī* as Electricity 58

5.2.3. *Kuṇḍalinī*'s Role in Theosophical Discourses between 1880 and 1891 61
5.3. The Second Wave of Kundalini's Scientification (1896–1933) 65
5.3.1. Swami Vivekananda's Experiential Kundalini 66
5.3.1.1. Vivekananda's Religious and Political Influences 66
5.3.1.2. *Raja Yoga*: Kundalini's Popularisation as "Scientific" Concept 69
5.3.2. Sri Aurobindo's Evolutive and Nationalised Kundalini 74
5.3.2.1. Shakti in Aurobindo's Hindu Nationalism 75
5.3.2.2. Aurobindo's Evolutive Kundalini..... 78
5.3.3. Arthur Avalon's Serpent Power 81
5.3.4. Vasant Rele's Mysterious Kundalini 88
5.3.5. Swami Kuvalayananda's Empirical Yoga Research.....93
5.4. Summary 98

KUNDALINI IN LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY 101

PART II Kundalini on the "Swami Trail"..... 103

6. Historical Background: South Asia and the United States..... 105

7. Swami Muktananda and his Interpretation of Shaktipat and Kundalini..... 107
7.1. Siddha Yoga.....107
7.2. Shaktipat.....110
7.3. Muktananda's Views on Kundalini 114
7.4. Summary 119

8. Yogi Bhajan 121
8.1. 3HO and Kundalini Yoga 122
8.2. Yogi Bhajan's Views on Kundalini.....126
8.3. The Kundalini Research Institute 131
8.4. Summary 134

PART III Gopi Krishna and the Global Project of Kundalini Research..... 135

9. Gopi Krishna. Life and Work 136

10. Krishna's Interpretation of his Experience 144
10.1. Krishna's Experience and his Search for Meaning 144
10.2. Krishna's Interpretative Model.....150
10.2.1. Kundalini as Biological Mechanism 150

10.2.2. Kundalini as Evolutionary Force 153
10.2.3. Kundalini as a Catalyst for Higher Consciousness 161
10.2.4. Summary 167

11. The Development of Krishna's Thought in his Publications 168
11.1. *From the Unseen* (1952) 169
11.2. *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967) 171
11.3. *The Shape of Events to Come* (1968) 177
11.4. *The Way to Self-Knowledge* (1985) 179
11.5. Summary 181

12. Travelling Persons, Travelling Ideas: Krishna's Increasing Impact and Activities 183
12.1. First Journey (December 1967–February 1968) 183
12.2. Second Journey (July 1969–September 1969) 185
12.3. Third Journey (October 1970–January 1971) 187
12.4. Fourth Journey (June 1971–April 1972) 188
12.5. Fifth Journey (November 1975–November 1976) 190
12.6. Sixth Journey (April 1978–January 1979) 190
12.7. Seventh Journey (April 1979–October 1979) 195
12.8. Eighth Journey (May 1983–January 1984) 200
12.9. Summary 206

13. Krishna's Kundalini Research Projects: The History of a Failure 207
13.1. The Kundalini Research Foundations 207
13.1.1. An Overview of Krishna-Related Kundalini Research Foundations 208
13.1.1.1. South Asia 208
13.1.1.2. Europe 216
13.1.1.3. United States 221
13.1.1.4. Canada 226
13.1.2. Activities after Krishna's Death 232
13.1.3. Summary 239
13.2. Gopi Krishna's Yoga Experimental Project 239
13.2.1. The Interplay Between Practice and Research 240
13.2.1.1. Practice 240
13.2.1.2. Research 243

13.2.2. The Yoga Experimental Project (1982) 250

14. Summary 258

PART IV Gopi Krishna's Key Collaborators 259

A European and US-American Collaborators 261

15. Carl Friedrich Freiherr von Weizsäcker and other European Voices of Support 261

15.1. Weizsäcker's Life and Work 261

15.2. The Relationship between Weizsäcker and Krishna 265

Excursus: The "Peace Angel" Barbara Rotraut Pleyer (Sinai) 269

15.3. Weizsäcker and Krishna's Key Projects 273

15.3.1. Weizsäcker and Krishna's "Forschungsgesellschaft für östliche Weisheit und westliche Wissenschaft" (1971) 274

15.3.2. Weizsäcker and Krishna's co-authored Book *Die Biologische Basis der religiösen Erfahrung* (1971) 280

15.4. Concluding Remarks: Kundalini's Initiation into European Scientific Circles 288

16. John White and the US-American Discovery of Krishna 291

16.1. John White and His Collaborative Support for Krishna's Work 291

16.1.1. The Relationship Between White and Krishna 292

16.1.2. White's Kundalini-Related Publications 295

16.2. Edgar Mitchell and the Institute of Noetic Sciences 300

16.3. Areas of Tension: White's Support for Maharishi Mahesh Yogi 307

16.3.1. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Transcendental Meditation 307

16.3.2. The Opposition between Krishna and Maharishi 311

16.4. Summary 320

B South Asian Collaborators 323

17. Karan Singh and the Nationalistic Politicisation of Kundalini 323

17.1. Karan Singh's Early Life and Patriotism 323

17.2. The Relationship Between Singh and Krishna 326

17.3. Krishna's Role in Kundalini's Popularisation and Nationalisation in India 334

17.3.1. The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (1974–1977) 336

17.3.1.1. AIIMS's Kundalini Research Plans 336

17.3.1.2. Promoting AIIMS's Kundalini Research 341
17.3.1.3. Further Developments at AIIMS 344
17.3.2. The Seminar on Yoga, Science, and Man (1975) 347
17.3.3. Project Consciousness (1977) 351

18. R. K. Karanjia and the "Kundalini Yoga" Series 355
18.1. The Relationship Between Karanjia and Krishna 355
18.2. The "Kundalini Yoga" Series (1976–1977) 358

19. Summary: Kundalini's Nationalisation 367

PART V Pivotal US-American Kundalini Research and Teaching Institutes and their Relationship with Gopi Krishna 369

20. The US-American Background 371
20.1. Subcultures and Countercultures 371
20.2. The Long Sixties 373
20.3. US-American Alternative Religion and Their Metaphysical Roots 377
20.4. US-American Investigations into the Mind and Consciousness 381
20.4.1. The Interest in Consciousness and the Emergence of a "Consciousness Culture" 381
20.4.2. The "New" Psychologies: Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology 385
20.4.2.1. Humanistic Psychology 386
20.4.2.2. Transpersonal Psychology 387
20.4.3. The Anti-Psychiatry Movement 390
20.5. Summary 393

A Kundalini in the Laboratory 395

21. Biofeedback Experiments at the Menninger Foundation and Beyond 396
21.1. The Invention of Biofeedback 396
21.2. The Yogi in the Lab: Elmer and Alyce Green's Biofeedback Experiments 399
21.3. The Relationship Between Biofeedback Pioneers and KRF 403
21.3.1. Elmer and Alyce Green's Relationship with Krishna 404
21.3.2. Gay G. Luce and Erik Peper's Relationship with Krishna 408
21.4. Summary 411

22. The Kundalini Clinic 413
22.1. Itzhak Bentov and Lee Sannella's Physio-Kundalini Models 415

22.1.1. Itzhak Bentov and the Mechanics of Consciousness 415
22.1.1.1. Bentov's View of the Universe..... 416
22.1.1.2. Bentov's Physiological Kundalini Model 421
22.1.1.3. Empirical Explorations into Consciousness..... 428
22.1.2. Bentov, Motoyama, and Sannella's Experimental Investigations into Kundalini 432
22.1.3. Lee Sannella and His Book *Kundalini: Psychosis or Transcendence* (1976).....436
22.1.4. Sannella's Model of the Physio-Kundalini Process as Rebirth 439
22.2. The Kundalini Clinic 445
22.2.1. Therapy.....450
22.2.2. Research 454
22.2.3. Education.....457
22.3. The Relation Between the Kundalini Clinic and KRF 460
22.4. Summary 467

Excursus: Hiroshi Motoyama and the Institute for Religious Psychology 469
1. Biographical Sketch of Hiroshi Motoyama.....470
2. Motoyama's Experience of Kundalini.....473
3. Motoyama's Empirical Research into Kundalini 476
4. Motoyama's Relationship with Gopi Krishna 481
5. Summary 486

B Kundalini in Seminar 489

23. Esalen..... 489
23.1. The Esalen Institute 490
23.2. Kundalini at Esalen 498
23.3. Christina and Stan Grof and the Spiritual Emergency Network 507
23.3.1. The Origins of Christina and Stan Grof's Concept of Spiritual Emergency 507
23.3.2. Christina and Stan Grof's Interpretation of Spiritual Emergency.....511
23.3.3. The Spiritual Emergency Network.....514
23.4. The Relation Between Esalen and KRF 520
23.5. Summary 527

24. The Californian Integral Institutes 529
24.1. The Lineage of the Californian Integral Institutes 530
24.1.1. The American Academy of Asian Studies 532
24.1.2. The Cultural Integration Fellowship 535
24.1.3. The California Institute of Asian Studies 536
24.1.4. The California Institute of Integral Studies 541
24.2. Kundalini at the Californian Integral Institutes 542
24.3. The Relation Between CIAS and KRF 550
24.4. Summary 555

PART VI Kundalini: The Symbol of an Era 557

25. Bodily Experience and Alterations of Consciousness: Kundalini as Integrative Tie 558
25.1. Bodily Experience 560
25.2. Alteration of Consciousness and the Future of Mankind 561

26. Psychologisation and Therapeutisation: Kundalini at the Intersection of Pathology and Personal Growth 564
26.1. Psychologisation 564
26.2. Therapeutisation 567

27. Transculturation: Kundalini as a Product of Transcultural Exchange 570

28. Scientism: Kundalini as Transgressor of Boundaries 574
28.1. Scientism(s) as Legitimising Strategy 575
28.2. Levels of Interactions between Religion and Science 577

29. Summary: Kundalini, the Goddess of an Era 581

List of Figures 583

Bibliography 587

Abstract 641

Abstract (German) 642

Introduction

Mein Schlaf ist Träumen,
mein Traum aber ward zur Erkenntnis
(Castalia Fountain, University of Vienna)[1]

Tracing the meandering path of the serpent as a symbol unveils a richly woven tapestry of religious, mythological, and artistic expressions, encompassing themes of knowledge, renewal, fertility, sexuality, (im)morality, protection, and peril.[2] Serpent myths have emerged and endured globally throughout history, reflecting the multifaceted, nuanced, and ambiguous symbolic meanings given to this fascinating animal (Charlesworth 2010). The shedding of its old skin epitomises transformation, a quality that reflects the serpent's dual roles in myth: healer and facilitator of knowledge on the one hand and harbinger of death and embodiment of sin on the other (Egli 1982, 62; Charlesworth 2010, 33).

The Judeo-Christian serpent symbolism exemplifies the serpent's inherent ambiguity. In Genesis 3 of the *Old Testament*, the serpent tempts Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, initiating the Fall of Man. This role has undergone numerous interpretations over time. Between the first centuries BCE and CE, Jewish groups and early Christians denounced the serpent in Genesis as fundamentally corrupt and enticing transgression, leading to its common portrayal as the devil (Frenschkowski 2011, 16). In contrast, Gnostic groups, like the Ophites and Sethians, revalued the serpent's role (Rasimus 2009, 66). For them, it symbolised enlightenment, salvation, and hidden or forbidden knowledge (Frenschkowski 2011, 19–23).[3] Accordingly, Gnostic groups "could in some cases revere the Edenic serpent as a bringer of *gnosis*" (Faxneld 2017, 38, original emphasis). Thus, the serpent in Genesis, dwelling on the Tree of Knowledge, simultaneously embodies the personification of the devil and humanity's epistemic revelation, reflecting dual perceptions of morally good and evil.

Mythological serpents are often either imagined as deities in their own right or as associated with gods and goddesses. Their numinous associations evoke themes of prophecy, wisdom,

[1] Translated from ancient Greek, by Kirchknopf (2017).

[2] Several studies examine the polyvalent symbol of the serpent in distinct cultural settings or in a comparative manner. Comprehensive examples include Mundkur's *The Cult Of The Serpent* (1983), Frenschowski's "Verführung als Erleuchtung" (2011), and Charlesworth's *The Good and Evil Serpent* (2010).

[3] Gnostic serpent symbolism entails more associations, as Rasimus' *Paradise Reconsidered in Gnostic Mythmaking* (2009, 65–101) details. Markschies (2009) examines the relationship between Gnosis and Christianity.

and knowledge, establishing the serpent as a mantic creature (Frenschkowski 2011, 13–15). This becomes particularly evident in the myth of the Delphic serpent or dragon (Fontenrose 1980).[4] In Greek mythology, the Oracle of Delphi is a sanctuary associated with divine guidance and knowledge, interlacing humanity, the Greek pantheon, and the Underworld. Like the Edenic serpent, different myths depict the Delphic serpent in a negative and positive light. In Homeric hymns, the Olympian deity Apollo slaughters the serpent Python. This evil creature guarded the Oracle of Delphi and caused depredations among the population (Ogden 2013, 42).[5] Other ancient sources[6] suggest that the oracle at Delphi (the Pythia) "was once inspired by the breath of the serpent as it coiled beneath her tripod" (*ibid*., 46). Thus, the Delphic serpent symbolises the guardian of the Delphic mysteries, either as a terrifying beast causing destruction or an inspiring creature enabling knowledge through prophecy.

The symbol of the serpent, as associated with transformation, renewal, and humanity's share of divine knowledge, finds equal expression in South Asian concepts of *kuṇḍalinī*.[7] Tracing back to medieval tantric and *haṭhayogic* texts, *kuṇḍalinī* is described equally as a goddess and a component of subtle-body models. These texts depict the goddess *kuṇḍalinī* symbolically as a dormant serpent that resides within the body of the yogi and yogini at the base of the spine. *Kuṇḍalinī*'s awakening might lead to liberation, divinity, and obtaining special abilities (*siddhis*) (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 178). South Asian concepts of *kuṇḍalinī* thus suggest that the seed of divine knowledge slumbers within, potentially awaiting the reunion with the divine.

From the late nineteenth century onwards, the serpent *kuṇḍalinī* attracted increasing attention and garnered global fame. In this study, I explore why this particular serpent captivated individuals of distinct cultural and religious backgrounds who aspired to know

[4] Joseph Fontenrose's *Python* (1980) and Daniel Ogden's *Drakōn* (2013) offer the best discussions of the Delphic serpent (or dragon), which is equally known as the female Drakaina and the male Python.

[5] Some myths suggest that Python also protected the Castalian Spring. Greek mythology associates this sacred spring on Mount Parnassus, near Delphi, with the nymph Castalia (Ogden 2013, 172). The Castalia Fountain in the Arkadenhof of the University of Vienna reflects this mythological ensemble. The sculpture depicts the serpent Python protectively encircling the seated figure of Castalia, who is in a dreamlike state. Greek inscriptions describe Castalia's condition: "My sleep is dream, but my dream became knowledge" (translated from ancient Greek by Kirchknopf 2017). Thus, Python, portrayed positively here, is guarding Castalia, the source of knowledge and symbol of revelation (Kirchknopf 2017; Wimmer and Ash 2011). I am grateful to Karl Baier for introducing me to the narrative of the Castalia Fountain.

[6] Ogden refers here to Lucian of Samosata and the *Suda*, a Byzantine encyclopedia (2013, 46).

[7] As Chapter 4 will demonstrate, South Asian texts did not convey a singular, unified concept of *kuṇḍalinī*. Instead, various (though related) concepts circulated. This trend continued in the transformation of the idea of *kuṇḍalinī* during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Therefore, to avoid an essentialist perspective, it is crucial to emphasise that no immutable original concept of *kuṇḍalinī* exists.

and experience it. I will examine how this growing fascination resulted in variant interpretations and inaugurated an incipient transformation of the initial concepts.

During the twentieth century, kundalini transcended its roles as a serpent, goddess, and subtle-energy notion. Recurring patterns of its reinterpretation included its interpretation in the light of modern physics, biology, theories of evolution, and psychology, as well as linking kundalini to altered states of consciousness and somatics.[8] Moreover, while premodern *kuṇḍalinī* concepts do not address the threatening aspects sometimes associated with serpents, modern interpretations framed kundalini as a hazardous force potentially resulting in a psychosomatic crisis.[9] By integrating elements from all these trends, kundalini became something like the symbol of an era (see Part VI). In any case, for a historian looking back from today's perspective, "the serpent power" summarised much of what moved people at that time. This development commenced in the late nineteenth century in South Asia and peaked during the latter half of the twentieth century across South Asia, Europe, and the United States.

During this period, the scientification of kundalini became a defining feature of its modern transformation.[10] By "scientification", I refer to the process of applying scientific methods and principles to the study and understanding of religious concepts, experiences, and practices. This encompasses empirical research, experimentation, and theoretical analysis to provide objective evidence and rational explanations for kundalini's existence and functioning. Following Hammer (2006), I call the strategy of utilising science for religious reasoning "scientism".[11] Thus, "scientism" in modern kundalini discourses is used as an

[8] As outlined in Chapter 25.1., somatics describes a range of body practises and therapies, which were particularly popular and widespread among members of the Californian counterculture (D. H. Johnson 2005; Klinkhammer and Tolksdorf 2015).

[9] To distinguish modern interpretations from views expressed in older South Asian texts, especially those written in Sanskrit, I am juxtaposing "premodern" with "modern". To emphasise this difference, I will use "kundalini" with diacritical marks and italicised, i.e., *kuṇḍalinī*, when referring to its use in these texts.

[10] The term "modern" with regard to transformations of *kuṇḍalinī* is used in this thesis for the period between the 1880s and 1980s. However, the process of *kuṇḍalinī*'s modernisation already began to take shape in the early nineteenth century, notably through the reception of the *Mahānirvāṇatantra* by Hindu reformers of the Brahmo Samaj (Strube 2022, 149–152; Urban 2003, 63–70). These early discussions were predominantly confined to South Asia, with limited transnational influence. Therefore, the present study does not address the question of possibly earlier manifestations of the modernisation of *kuṇḍalinī*, especially in South Asian languages.

[11] I adopt a broad interpretation of "science", which includes the humanities, medical science, social sciences, and natural sciences. However, medical and natural sciences were mostly employed for scientistic considerations of kundalini.

epistemological strategy that employs scientific theories, tools, and terminology to legitimise ideas and practices associated with kundalini (Hammer 2004, 203–206).

I consider three historical phases decisive when analysing how protagonists increasingly perceived *kuṇḍalinī* in a scientistic light. First, the initial interest and early interpretations by the Theosophical Society, Hindu reformers, and other South Asian intellectuals during the 1880s and early 1890s – in this study, rendered "the first wave of *kuṇḍalinī*'s scientification". The second phase revolves around a number of charismatic South Asian writers and publication projects. Far from being exhaustive, this study emphasises Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghose, Vasant Rele, Swami Kuvalayananada, and what Strube (2022) called the (Arthur) Avalon project as shaping "the second wave of kundalini's scientification".[12] Finally, kundalini experienced unparalleled popularity from the late 1960s through the mid-1980s. This phase corresponds to the international career of the South Asian author Gopi Krishna (1903–1984). His book *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967) stood at the beginning of kundalini's modern heydays and made him a leading voice of modern kundalini interpretations and research endeavours. Owing to these three key periods, I define *kuṇḍalinī*'s modern transformation as approximately lasting from 1880, when the Theosophical Society introduced the topic to an international audience, to Gopi Krishna's death in the mid-1980s.

The present thesis deliberately focuses on the third phase of kundalini's modern transformation. This choice is primarily based on two developments: First, research into kundalini was increasingly institutionalised and inspired international collaborations during this period. With respect to kundalini's scientification, the latter half of the twentieth century proves the most vital period. Second, during this period, views on kundalini changed in response to its growing international popularity. While the global flow of kundalini knowledge did not initiate in the third phase, I argue that increasing travel activities and transnational communication processes between South Asia, Europe, and the United States from the 1960s onwards contributed significantly to its increasingly global profile. Therefore, an analysis of modern views on kundalini must consider those cultural flows that accompanied kundalini's dissemination (Appadurai 1996).

[12] While it is challenging to establish a precise demarcation, I contend that twentieth-century kundalini concepts are transcultural products no longer exclusively rooted in premodern South Asian texts. Instead, the interpretations of kundalini in this period were largely influenced by its initial dissemination wave. Therefore, using diacritical marks for kundalini's processes during its second and third phases of dissemination would be misleading. However, when referring to the processes spanning from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century, I will use "*kuṇḍalinī*" to maintain inclusivity.

Moreover, I limit the spatiotemporal emphasis of this thesis by making Gopi Krishna its key protagonist. Extensive research has convinced me that Krishna's late life, work, and international collaborations provide the framework which facilitates mapping the field. Thus, Krishna's interpretations, publications, research projects, and international relations constitute the cornerstone from which kundalini's significance in the latter half of the twentieth century will be analysed.

Another reason for my focus on the third phase of kundalini's transformation is the lack of research in this regard, and thus my wish to fill this considerable gap. Despite the growing body of studies investigating the field of modern yoga and related currents, concepts of kundalini have been largely neglected or underexposed, with only very few studies exclusively addressing the serpent power (Silburn 1988; Scott 2006; Borkataky-Varma and Foxen forthcoming). Moreover, research on kundalini as a South Asian and particularly tantric tenet prevails (Silburn 1988; Padoux 1990; Mallinson and Singleton 2017; Hatley 2022), whereas analyses of it as a transnational phenomenon constitute the exception (Baier 2009a; Okropiridze 2017; Strube 2022; Urban forthcoming). Thus, while a comprehensive study of the modern transformation of *kuṇḍalinī* is still pending, modern yoga studies, global religious history, and esoteric studies have provided a basis for such an investigation, which is outlined in the following chapter.

1. State of Research

The relevant literature can be divided into studies addressing its South Asian appearance in tantric and *haṭhayogic* texts and those interested in *kuṇḍalinī*'s metamorphoses since the 1880s. Moreover, sketching the current state of research divides scholarly studies from those publications belonging to the field and thus deemed primary literature. Not least due to the lack of comprehensive academic literature addressing kundalini's role in twentieth-century religion and culture, emic approaches containing material relevant to the historiography of modern kundalini and demonstrating a minimum level of serious research must be recognised as significant contributions to kundalini scholarship. Accordingly, I will cover three interrelated categories: literature on *kuṇḍalinī*'s South Asian origins and history, scholarly sources interested in its modern variations, and non-scholarly publications discussing the origins and modifications of the modern kundalini. Considering this study's focus on the modern period, research into premodern material will only be summarised

briefly, with the larger part of this chapter looking into scholarship that covers the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

South Asianists, particularly tantra and yoga scholars, examined *kuṇḍalinī* as part of critical translations and comparative analyses of South Asian texts. These studies cover a wide range of centuries (eighth through eighteenth century CE), religious traditions (primarily Shaiva and Shakta Hindu traditions), and languages (Sanskrit and several local South Asian languages). Moreover, the observed South Asian texts advocate different subtle-body models and thus describe *kuṇḍalinī*'s location and movement differently according to the underlying scheme. Owing to this broad field, most studies discuss *kuṇḍalinī* along with broader contexts, such as subtle-body models and soteriological considerations. Lilian Silburn's *Kuṇḍalinī: The Energy of the Depths* (1988) considers *kuṇḍalinī* in the light of the non-dual tantra of the Trika, Krama and Kaula systems and represents the most comprehensive work on *kuṇḍalinī*'s Kashmir Shaiva origins. Silburn dedicates substantial portions of her study to translations and commentaries of primary sources, and details the phases of *kuṇḍalinī*'s movement, i.e., its awakening, unfolding, and ascent through the subtle body. Silburn's colleague André Padoux contributed with his book *Vāc. The Concept of The Word in Selected Hindu Tantras* (1990) to *kuṇḍalinī*'s cosmogonic implications, a notion that was equally addressed in Gavin Flood's *The Tantric Body* (2006). James Mallinson and Mark Singleton offer a useful overview of *kuṇḍalinī* in South Asian texts in their very informative *Roots of Yoga* (2017, 178–180). Despite its brevity, it introduces the most important associated South Asian texts and gives an overview of varying interpretations of *kuṇḍalinī* as a goddess and a component of subtle-body models. Shaman Hatley's encyclopedia entry "Kuṇḍalinī" (2022) is an equally important source. Introducing the history of *kuṇḍalinī* from its origins through its reception in modern times, Hatley covers *kuṇḍalinī*'s most important historical periods while referencing the key texts associated with *kuṇḍalinī*. Ruth Westoby's thesis "The Body in Early Haṭha Yoga" (2024) analyses *kuṇḍalinī* as one of three main pillars of early *haṭhayogic* texts.

Aside from premodern concepts, recent scholarly research considered *kuṇḍalinī*'s role in theosophical, Bengali, and medical discourses during the first and second phases of its modern transformation. Karl Baier's *Meditation und Moderne* (2009a) is a piece of pioneering research that sheds light on *kuṇḍalinī*'s initial examination on the part of the Theosophical Society. Truth Seeker's article in *The Theosophist* was likely the first reference in an internationally distributed journal, as Baier discovered (Baier 2009a, 1:325). Baier further analysed theosophical interpretations of *kuṇḍalinī* in light of mesmerism (*ibid*., 359–

373). Strube's *Global Tantra* (2022) builds on Baier's findings, adding South Asian (particularly Bengali) perspectives and source material (Strube 2022, 44–45). In addition to the Theosophical Society, Strube strongly emphasised the appropriation of *kuṇḍalinī* by Hindu reformers and Hindu nationalists, painting a larger picture of *kuṇḍalinī*'s involvement in late nineteenth-century South Asian currents.[13]

Scholarly research contributing to the understanding of kundalini during its second period of dissemination includes studies looking at the publications and lasting impact of Arthur Avalon (Strube 2022; 2023; Taylor 2001) and studies that shed light on the increasing scientification and medicalisation of yoga (Baier 2009b; De Michelis 2004). Kathleen Taylor's *Sir John Woodroffe, Tantra and Bengal* (2001) and Strube's *Global Tantra*, along with Strube's article "(Anti-)Colonialism, Religion and Science in Bengal from the Perspective of Global Religious History" (2023), dedicated substantial portions to the project Arthur Avalon, introducing the use of kundalini and shakti in Avalon's works.[14] Taylor's chapter "Tantric Yoga and Kuṇḍalinī: The 'Serpent Power'" addresses kundalini and kundalini yoga as understood by Avalon (Taylor 2001, 168–173). However, in her analysis, Taylor does not unambiguously distinguish between Avalon's interpretation and her contextualisation of kundalini as a tantric tenet. Thus, when Taylor writes, "the *cakras* are seats of the conscious energy called *kuṇḍalinī*" (*ibid*., 170, original emphasis), it is not clear if she reiterates Avalon's interpretation or makes a claim about kundalini's nature. Moreover, Taylor's frequent references to Mircea Eliade's *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (1958), which she recommends as "a 'classic'" (*ibid.*, 154) introduction to kundalini yoga, further weakens her critical analysis of kundalini in Arthur Avalon's publications.[15] Strube (2022;

[13] Keith Cantú's study *Like a Tree Universally Spread: Sri Sabhapati Swami and Śivarājayoga* (2024) is another example of critical scholarship examining *kuṇḍalinī*'s role in late nineteenth-century South Asia. However, while Cantú offers the first in-depth study on Sabhapati Swami's *kuṇḍalinī* interpretations, he refrains from further analyses of *kuṇḍalinī*'s transformation. Arjan Dass Malik's *Kundalini and Meditation* (2002) compares Sabhapati Swami's teachings on *kuṇḍalinī* with those of Arthur Avalon.

[14] Shakti is the impersonal female aspect of the divine. In its manifestation of the divine feminine, kundalini resides in the body of the yogi and yogini and is rendered kundalini shakti. Shakti encompasses a range of meanings, including goddess, power, and force (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 178; Strube 2022, 2).

[15] Throughout the twentieth century, Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) was respected as an esteemed scholar of religion and his studies were indeed considered "classics," as Taylor suggested. However, Eliade was increasingly criticised as a "generalist and popularizer" (Wasserstrom 1999, 14), who largely employed a religionist and phenomenological approach in his scholarship. Nevertheless, along with figures such as Heinrich Zimmer, Wilhelm Hauer, and C. G. Jung, Eliade played a significant role in entrenching Avalon's works in academic and alternative religious contexts (Strube 2022, 5). His *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (1958) includes a chapter on kundalini emphasising its tantric origins, tantric means of activation, and metaphorical interpretations. The chapter "Kuṇḍalinī" largely relies on Arthur Avalon, thereby consolidating

2023) discusses kundalini against the backdrop of Bengali tantra, mainly however looking into the notion of shakti. In "(Anti-)Colonialism", he demonstrates the significance of shakti for Arthur Avalon and their ideas on anti-colonial nationalism and education (Strube 2023, 100–102). Strube thoroughly expounds on this link in *Global Tantra*, where he also includes reference to kundalini. However, while Strube provides vital details about the historical, political, and religious context of kundalini's interpretation by the team Avalon, he does not examine Avalon's kundalini conceptualisations (*ibid*., 187–241).

Regarding kundalini's early scientification, several studies touch upon Swami Vivekananda, examining his role as a religious agent transmitting his ideas in a transnational context (Baier 2009b; De Michelis 2004; Foxen 2020; Kraler 2022; Singleton 2010). While these studies noticed Vivekananda's scientistic understanding of kundalini and how he shaped further discourses, none offers a comprehensive discussion of his distinct views on kundalini in the light of Advaita Vedanta as a "scientific religion". This early phase of kundalini's scientification was equally neglected in Joseph Alter's *Yoga in Modern India: The Body between Science and Philosophy* (2004). Alter nonetheless provides critical details of the entanglement of religion and (medical) science in twentieth-century transnational yoga contexts from a medical anthropology perspective.

The transformation of kundalini in the latter half of the twentieth century was mainly discussed along the lines of "neo-tantra" (Urban 2003), guru movements (Deslippe 2012; Williamson 2010), and psychology (Shamdasani 2012; Okropiridze 2017).

Hugh Urban, the leading scholar on Euro-American expressions of tantra and neo-tantra, barely touches upon concepts of kundalini in his monographs *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (2003), *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism* (2006), *and Zorba the Buddha: Sex, Spirituality, and Capitalism in the Global Osho Movement* (2015). His forthcoming contribution, "The Paths of the Serpent: *Kuṇḍalinī* as Subtle Energy, from Tantra to Neo-Tantra", poses a notable exception. It mainly focuses on Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (better known as Osho), assessing the South Asian guru as one of the most important figures in reimagining kundalini. Along these lines, Urban claims that kundalini discourses of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries exclusively revolve around interpretations of kundalini as "sexual energy". While this is evidently the case with Osho's movement, as Urban demonstrates in his article, limiting

Avalon's authority in defining kundalini (Eliade 1958, 245–249). For a critical reading of Eliade, see Rennie's edited volume *Mircea Eliade. A Critical Reader* (2006) and Idel's *From Magic and Myth* (2014).

kundalini's modern metamorphosis to the notion of "sexual energy" ignores large portions of its reception history (Urban forthcoming). Moreover, given Urban's claim of Osho's significance for kundalini's modern interpretation as "sexual energy", it is curious that his book *Zorba the Buddha: Sex, Spirituality, and Capitalism in the Global Osho Movement* (2015) omits reference to "kundalini", "sexual energy", and their alleged link to Osho.

Other scholars addressing transnational guru movements with a distinctive focus on kundalini include Philipp Deslippe (2012; 2024) and Lola Williamson (2005; 2010). Deslippe's "From Maharaj to Mahan Tantric: The Construction of Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga" (2012) was the first in-depth study of Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga, which maintains influence today. However, despite the significance of Deslippe's findings, he barely contributes to understanding kundalini within Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga. Indeed, Deslippe avoids defining kundalini despite Yogi Bhajan's claiming its Sikh origin. Williamson's analysis of what she called "Hindu-inspired Meditation Movements" (Williamson 2010) includes an examination of Swami Muktananda's Siddha Yoga. Therein, she details Muktananda's understanding of kundalini as originating in Kashmir Shaivism and highlights his interpretation of *śaktipāta*, a practice where the guru's grace is believed to descend upon the disciple (Williamson 2005, 150–153). Moreover, Williamson includes a brief section where she compares kundalini interpretations by Muktananda and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. However, beyond offering a broad overview of Muktananda and Maharishi's views, which she complemented with testimonials from interviews she conducted, the section remains general without offering new insights (Williamson 2010, 168–173).

Sonu Shamdasani's book *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1932* (2012) is a critically introduced edition of C. G. Jung and Jakob Wilhelm Hauer's 1932 "Kundalini Seminar".[16] While Shamdasani's book is of great interest to the transmission history of kundalini during the early twentieth century, in his introductory chapters, Shamdasani limits his scope to the 1920s and 30s, thus omitting discussion of its impact in the latter half of the twentieth century (Shamdasani 2012, xvii–xlvi). Due to limited availability, the Seminar barely affected modern attempts to understand yoga and kundalini through a psychological lens before the 1970s. Unfortunately, Shamdasani's omission makes it difficult for the reader to grasp the Seminar's impact. Moreover, his introductory chapters lack a differentiated discussion of "kundalini" He does not provide a critical definition and

[16] Jung and Hauer's "Kundalini Seminar" plays only a marginal role in the history of kundalini research. Nonetheless, it contributed to the psychologisation of kundalini in the late twentieth century, as discussed in Chapter 26.1.

partly relies on emic literature, e.g., Sannella (1987), when addressing kundalini.[17] In contrast, Dimitry Okropiridze's article "'East' and 'West' in the Kaleidoscope of Transculturality" (2017) offers a critical and thoughtful examination of Jung and Hauer's Seminar in the latter half of the twentieth century. What is relevant to this study is Okropiridze's examination of kundalini's "discursive production" (Okropiridze 2017, 142). According to him, Woodroffe, Jung, and Krishna operated as "discursive agents" (*ibid*.) in a "globally active religio-therapeutic discourse" (*ibid*.), fostering kundalini's modern construction. Okropiridze's article is a vital contribution to investigating kundalini's "discursive production" in orientalist, psychological, and therapeutic frameworks and will be revisited in Part VI of this study.[18]

A special note is due to Sravana Borkataky-Varma and Anya Foxen's forthcoming volume, *The Serpent's Tale*.[19] The authors trace *kuṇḍalinī*'s history from its appearance in South Asian texts to its contemporary use in the context of digital tantra from a South Asian and religious-studies perspective. Several chapter headings indicate the book's alignment with topics addressed in the present thesis, e.g., Chapter 5, "When the Serpent Rises: What Happened to Gopi Krishna?" and Chapter 7, "The Serpent in the Melting Pot: Kuṇḍalinī in North American Counterculture". These similarities notwithstanding, the objectives and distinct emphasis distinguish *The Serpent's Tale* from the present thesis.

The Serpent's Tale primarily considers how images, symbolic systems, and narratives create a feedback loop with the "experience" of kundalini, mutually shaping and being shaped by one another. The authors thus examine the modern history of kundalini through the lens of the history of ideas. The present study, in contrast, examines international networks and collaborative efforts to find evidence for ideas and concepts associated with kundalini. This scientistic approach to kundalini research involves seeking empirical validation through laboratory measurements, experimental confirmations, and theoretical discussions in seminars. Alongside this scientistic discourse runs a parallel discourse on kundalini

[17] The present study defines Sannella as a research subject, deeming his writings emic literature. For Shamdasani, in contrast, who writes from a psychology historian's perspective, Sannella – a trained psychiatrist – serves as a reliable source whose research into "spontaneous Kundalini experiences in the West" (Shamdasani 2012, xliv) provides valuable insights.

[18] A considerable amount of literature looks at kundalini from the perspective of transpersonal psychology (Greenwell 2009; Goretzki 2007) or examines its use by transpersonal psychologists during the 1970s and 80s (Hofmann 2016; Kripal 2007).

[19] I have consulted the table of contents of *The Serpent's Tale*, though I have not yet engaged with its content as it is still in pre-publication status. I am indebted to Anya Foxen for providing additional information on the manuscript (personal email communication).

experiences, where individuals, most notably Gopi Krishna, share unverified experiences to reinforce their views on kundalini and their authority on the subject. The forthcoming publication of *The Serpent's Tale* complements the present study's efforts to illuminate the transnational discourse on kundalini experiences and research, highlighting the broad spectrum of kundalini experience. In any case, it demonstrates the relevance of hitherto neglected scholarly research into kundalini.

The final category of the current state of research consists of primary literature, whose valuable contributions added to the knowledge about kundalini and thus enriched kundalini scholarship. I would like to highlight two books in this category: John White's edited volume *Kundalini. Evolution and Enlightenment* (1979) and Teri Degler's *Gopi Krishna. A Biography* (2023).[20]

John White's volume *Kundalini: Evolution and Enlightenment* includes all the significant voices in empirical kundalini research, practice, and philosophy during the 1970s and 1980s. Most of its contributors are discussed throughout the present thesis, including Gopi Krishna, Swami Muktananda, Yogi Bhajan, Lee Sannella, Itzhak Bentov, Gene Kieffer, and Christopher Hills, to name but a few. The volume's key topics are kundalini interpretations, personal accounts, empirical kundalini research, kundalini's link to the occult, and advice for kundalini practitioners (J. W. White 1990a, 11–13). The value of White's volume is twofold. On the one hand, it provides an overview of the critical topics and protagonists of kundalini's modern heyday, thus offering vital perspectives of the field from the field. On the other hand, White added crucial information in the volume's appendix, "Suggestions for Further Exploration" (*ibid*., 467–476). For instance, he lists periodicals and organisations primarily looking into kundalini. Moreover, he added books and articles that he considered valuable for studying kundalini. White's volume thus serves as a useful resource for popular views and practices of kundalini during its heydays.

[20] Kurt Leland's *Rainbow Body* (2016) and Mary Scott's *Kundalini in the Physical World* (1983) represent other excellent pieces of scholarship from emic perspectives. Leland's book primarily examines modern interpretations of the chakra system while frequently referring to kundalini as part of its discussion of theosophy and modern expressions of psychology. Scott, then again, explores kundalini's involvement in several entangled fields, such as contemporary paganism, theosophy, and transpersonal psychology. While barely any information is available regarding Scott's background, in the book she provides scattered insights into her biography, which includes involvement with the Theosophical Society and parapsychology, and teaching experience in philosophy, psychology, and the social sciences (Scott 1983, 3–9). The British (para)psychologist David Fontana, then Chair of the transpersonal psychology section within the British Psychological Society, wrote a foreword to Scott's revised edition of *Kundalini in the Physical World*, now titled *The Kundalini Concept. Its Origin and Value* (2006). Fontana's foreword suggests Scott's ties with transpersonal psychology.

Teri Degler's *Gopi Krishna. A Biography* (2023) is the outcome of several decades of research, and the most important resource for Gopi Krishna's life and work. Degler interviewed Krishna's family and his most important supporters and collaborators, undertook research trips to South Asia, Switzerland, and the United States, and had full access to Gopi Krishna's legacy. While Degler writes from an emic perspective[21] and unfortunately left most of her cited material unreferenced, her book proves a critical resource on Gopi Krishna's seminal role in the transformation of kundalini and modern kundalini research. Surprisingly, despite Degler's otherwise accurate research, some key events of Krishna's international career are missing from her biography. Most striking is Degler's apparent ignorance of the "Kundalini Yoga" series in the South Asian tabloid *Blitz*, a key event of Krishna's career in South Asia. Accordingly, Degler writes about the series' first article: "Although it is not clear whether an actual series ever appeared, the newspaper's influence was such that the impact on Gopi Krishna's renown in India from even one article was tremendous" (Degler 2023, 223). Overall, however, Degler's book is very well researched.

As this survey has shown, several studies discuss *kuṇḍalinī* in its premodern setting, as outlined in South Asian tantra and yoga texts and as reiterated by religious players such as Arthur Avalon. Indeed, scanning through scholarly publications addressing the transformation of religion as propelled by South Asian influences, kundalini is an omnipresent, if marginal, theme. However, barely any of these studies provide insights into alterations of *kuṇḍalinī*'s ontological and epistemological status aside from its interpretation as a tenet of South Asian subtle-body models. The present thesis aims to unfold seminal strands of kundalini's multifaceted interpretations and to shed light on its role in alternative religious, scientistic, educational, and therapeutic discourses.

2. Methodological Approach

The current state of research demonstrates that while a wide range of studies has addressed kundalini, its transformation from the nineteenth century onwards remains largely

[21] Teri Degler has been a member of the Canadian Institute for Consciousness Research (ICR) for several decades. As discussed in Chapter 13.1.2., ICR succeeded the Canadian branch of Gopi Krishna's Kundalini Research Foundation (KRF). Several statements in her book demonstrate that Degler was not merely interested in Gopi Krishna as a historical figure but considered him an enlightened being whose teachings contain religious truth (Degler 2023, 5).

unexplored. Particularly Gopi Krishna's research endeavours and collaborative efforts have received scant attention in the research literature. Owing to the lack of previous research, the research data in this thesis are drawn from three main sources: archival material (including letters, leaflets, and newspaper articles), interviews with key protagonists from the field, and printed and published primary literature. Other sources include secondary academic literature, biographical accounts, ethnographic fieldwork, and photographic evidence. The methodology behind this dissertation is historical-critical and attempts to reconstruct the process of kundalini's modern metamorphosis by interpreting this variety of sources. My methodological approach, particularly the archival research, interviews, and primary literature, warrants closer attention.

The archival research was primarily conducted in Switzerland and California. Under the auspices of a Marietta Blau Research Grant, I spent eight months collecting data and gaining insights at various archives, libraries, and institutes. The most relevant and fruitful periods of research were at the Central Library in Zurich (one month), the Special Collections at UC Santa Barbara (two months), and the Esalen Institute in Big Sur (two months).[22]

In Zurich, I examined parts of Gopi Krishna's extensive legacy. This collection comprises seven categories with sixty-one boxes filled with letters, articles, newspapers, leaflets, photographs, and more, mainly concerning Gopi Krishna's research activities and interests. Besides its size, working with the largely unprocessed material was challenging due to the lack of an organised catalogue.[23] Additionally, for data-protection reasons, several boxes were not accessible.[24]

While the archival research in Zurich exclusively targeted Gopi Krishna's kundalini research and collaborations, data examined at the UC Santa Barbara Special Collections covered a

[22] Other archives I visited for the purpose of this thesis include the "Rice University Manuscript Collection" (Houston, Texas), where I examined the "Stanley Krippner Publication Archive", and the Department of Special Collections at Stanford University to study the "Frederic Spiegelberg Papers". Moreover, I consulted online material from the Werner Heisenberg legacy, stored in Berlin as part of the archive of the Max Planck Society.

[23] Margaret Kobelt, Gopi Krishna's secretary who lived in Zurich, preserved the legacy and ultimately donated the collection to the Central Library of Zurich. Kobelt diligently retained a variety of materials, providing unique insights into Gopi Krishna's life and work. However, no professional filing was ever undertaken. Thus, I was confronted with a mass of documents that lacked any chronological or thematic structure. More research is definitely required to fully exploit the legacy's rich materials.

[24] Due to the disorganised and unprocessed nature of the legacy, the archive staff encountered difficulties in determining which materials were legally protected and which were accessible. It is possible that some restricted boxes contained materials that were, in fact, legally accessible. Conversely, those boxes to which I was granted access contained sensitive materials that might have been considered protected under Swiss archival law and that I treated accordingly.

broader range of themes. In the American Religion Collection and the Humanistic Psychology Archive (both part of the UC Santa Barbara Special Collections), I found additional data on Gopi Krishna, competing kundalini research institutes (e.g., those set up by Yogi Bhajan and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi), transpersonal psychological views on kundalini, and various general links of kundalini to US-American religion and culture. Much of the material collected in Santa Barbara complemented and supported earlier findings from Zurich while shedding light on distinct US-American examples.

During my research stay at the Esalen Institute, I gained precious insights into the place and its dynamics. In addition to participating in Esalen's everyday operations, I received access to the complete collection of the Esalen Programs, which cover the Institute's course schedules since 1962. Moreover, I gathered data through participatory fieldwork in addition to the archival materials. These insights enhanced my understanding of the historical relevance of Esalen and, more generally, Californian alternative religion.

All three research stays and the data gathered contributed to my analysis of kundalini's role in cultural developments in Europe and the United States during the latter half of the twentieth century. The discovery of Gopi Krishna's legacy was particularly significant, marking a milestone in my research that substantially consolidated the focus of this thesis. However, substantial gaps remained despite the rich content of the collected data. As a consequence, I reached out to protagonists from the field to get additional first-hand accounts.

I conducted interviews with six individuals; all took place between February 2023 and April 2024.[25] The selection of my interviewees was based on identified gaps in the research literature; in chronological order: Michael Murphy (in-person, at Esalen), Peggy Horan (online), Stuart Sovatsky (online), Gabriel Cousens (online), Ted Esser (online), and Erik Peper (phone call). I approached my interviewees with what Luhrmann called an "'anthropological attitude': [meaning] that one seeks to listen in an open, respectful, curious manner, and to understand before judging" (Luhrmann 2021, 347).[26] Moreover, I was well aware of the "risks" involved in an interview, i.e., "that the practice is subjective, that people are not always honest, and that individuals do not always represent the larger group they are thought to represent" (*ibid*., 347). Nonetheless, the outcome outweighed the "risks", with valuable insights gained from the interviews.

[25] All interviewees permitted me to cite from the interviews.

[26] All insertions within square brackets throughout this thesis are my own. For clarity and readability, I will not indicate this in subsequent instances.

The types of interviews I conducted are best described as oral history and semi-structured expert interviews (*ibid*., 348–350). For each interview, I designed a semi-structured protocol consisting of a flexible set of questions and topics, i.e., concerning their understanding of kundalini, their involvement in kundalini research, their relationship with Gopi Krishna, and more personal questions and topics. However, I did not rigidly adhere to the questions and instead allowed the interviewees' narratives to guide the conversation. Some interviews resembled informal conversations (e.g., with Michael Murphy), while others had a more formal tone (e.g., with Gabriel Cousens). The length of the interviews also varied; most lasted about sixty to ninety minutes, but my interview with Stuart Sovatsky extended over several hours and three sessions.

I encountered several challenges in evaluating the interviews. Some statements pertain to developments that occurred over sixty years ago. It is uncertain whether the interviewees recalled these events accurately. Consequently, the reliability of certain statements must be considered with caution. This was particularly the case with Gabriel Cousens, Michael Murphy, and Erik Peper – some acknowledged this challenge themselves. Another related challenge referred to some interviewees' contradictory opinions about historical developments. For example, Stuart Sovatsky and Gabriel Cousens had divergent memories of the San Francisco-based Kundalini Clinic. I noted these discrepancies unless I could refute one of the accounts based on additional evidence. In any case, I treated the data gathered through the interviews in my thesis as inherently subjective, and thus as primary sources requiring additional corroboration. Frequently, the information from the interviews also served as confirmatory data, enhancing my ability to reconstruct historical developments accurately and vividly.

The extensive publication output of my protagonists resulted in a vast list of relevant literature, which necessitated a judicious selection of representative works. In the context of this thesis, I assessed the significance of an author or text based on their pertinence to modern kundalini research. By "pertinence", I refer to the degree of engagement and reception within transcultural kundalini discourses, their link to Gopi Krishna, and the originality of the perspectives offered on kundalini. The data collected from the primary literature provided first-hand evidence to support my critical engagement with the authors' ideas. Additionally, it ensured a solid foundation for tracing the development of kundalini interpretations among my main protagonists.

The corpus of Gopi Krishna's writings required a nuanced selection approach. As detailed in Chapters 9 through 11, Gopi Krishna's ideas evolved throughout his international career.

Consequently, I selected works from various stages of his career to capture the evolution of his thought comprehensively. Moreover, many of his publications were revised editions with minimal new insights. Therefore, the selection process partly involved a critical evaluation to differentiate between works that introduced novel ideas and those that primarily reiterated previous content.

Whenever feasible, I related the data drawn from archival research, interviews, and primary literature. In doing so, I aimed to provide a more comprehensive, nuanced understanding of the research topic and to validate findings through multiple forms of evidence. For instance, without further information drawn from interviews, evaluating the authenticity of undated unnamed documents in Gopi Krishna's Legacy would have been challenging. Similarly, Gopi Krishna's private correspondence confirmed several statements in published material. Additionally, I compared different sources to recognise gaps and inconsistencies within the source material. This was especially the case with the Kundalini Clinic: Due to large research gaps, I had to conduct two interviews, which required additional literature research owing to the inconsistencies in their statements.

In general, I organised the three types of source material into two categories, each corresponding to a major research question. The first category, "Gopi Krishna", included Krishna's writings, extensive correspondence, publications by his immediate fellowship, and interviews with his supporters. Additionally, it encompassed sources that examine Krishna's research from an outsider's perspective. The following question arose from the source material belonging to this category: how did Gopi Krishna's experiences, theories, and research endeavours shape the image and understanding of kundalini in South Asian and non-South Asian contexts?

The second category, "other research endeavours", is directly related to the first but encompasses a significantly broader range of material. The central question in this case was: what other protagonists, institutes, and networks were involved in the modern project of kundalini research, and how were they interconnected? Given the scope of the chapters addressing kundalini research without Gopi Krishna's involvement (see part V), the material in this second category required further structuring and selection.

To adequately analyse the institutes included in the category "other research endeavours", I first gathered data on each institute (i.e., the Menninger Foundation, Kundalini Clinic, Institute for Religious Psychology, Esalen Institute, and Californian integral institutes). Subsequently, I organised the material according to several criteria, including leadership structures, targeted audience, associated theories and (fringe) disciplines, means of

communication, and connections to Krishna. These criteria enabled a comprehensive presentation of these institutes and facilitated an analysis of their contribution to kundalini research.

Thanks to the methodical approach described above, it was possible to discover numerous new sources, e.g., from Gopi Krishna's legacy and Hiroshi Motoyama's Institute for Religious Psychology. This substantial task will benefit scholars of alternative religion beyond the specific scholarly investigation of kundalini research.

3. Outline

The thesis is divided into six thematic parts that reflect the main dimensions of the modern transformation of kundalini, emphasising its scientistic interpretations, international dissemination, integration into educational centres, and the institutionalisation of kundalini research promoted by Gopi Krishna. While Part I introduces kundalini, tracing its origins and early scientification, Parts II through V focus on the history of kundalini research in the late twentieth century. Part VI considers kundalini's ties with broader contexts of late twentieth-century religious history. To provide an overview of the study, I will briefly discuss each part.

Part I examines the historical roots of the transformation of *kuṇḍalinī* and especially of its scientification. First, I trace *kuṇḍalinī*'s appearance in medieval tantric and *haṭhayogic* texts (Chapter 4). Drawing on secondary literature by South Asianists and yoga study scholars, I depict kundalini as a tenet of subtle-body models and as a goddess. The entangled contexts of orientalism, occultism, and Hindu revivalism informed the initial phases of *kuṇḍalinī*'s scientification in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as demonstrated in Chapter 5. I will underscore this claim by highlighting key figures, such as Swami Vivekananda and Vasant Rele, who interpreted kundalini through a scientistic lens.

Part II introduces two contemporaries of Gopi Krishna, Swami Muktananda (Chapter 7) and Yogi Bhajan (Chapter 8). Both operated in transnational contexts and travelled to the United States during the 1970s to expand their fellowship overseas. Their teachings revolved around kundalini, and the success of their schools significantly contributed to kundalini's dissemination in the United States and Europe. Yogi Bhajan also engaged in modern kundalini research, which he institutionalised in a research institute.

Part III introduces Gopi Krishna, the key protagonist of the present study. Emphasising the final fifteen years of his life, this part traces Krishna's efforts to promote kundalini research and analyses his views on kundalini. First, I will provide an overview of Krishna's life and work, particularly focusing on his publication activities between 1967 and 1984 (Chapter 9). Gopi Krishna's autobiographical account *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967) garnered him international fame and will thus be discussed in detail along with an analysis of his interpretation of kundalini (Chapter 10). A substantial portion of Part III explores Krishna's activities and research projects, which were internationally institutionalised as Kundalini Research Foundations (KRF) (Chapter 13.1.). However, I will demonstrate that Krishna's research endeavours failed to meet his expectations, and ultimately constitute a history of failure.

Despite these shortcomings in establishing a successful research institution, Krishna successfully convinced many intellectuals, scientists, politicians, and authors in South Asia, Europe, and the United States to collaborate on his project. Part IV highlights Krishna's international relations and introduces key collaborators. The category of "collaborator" refers to those who worked closely with Krishna without committing to his KRF. These protagonists exhibited varying motivations for their collaboration; either they showed genuine interest in Krishna's projects and ideas, or they hoped to appropriate the notion of kundalini as propagated by Krishna for their own purposes. I distinguish between European and US-American collaborators on the one hand and South Asian collaborators on the other. Among his European and US-American collaborators, I mainly focus on Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, who was his most important European supporter (Chapter 15), and John White, who assumed a similar function in the United States (Chapter 16). Weizsäcker and White introduced Krishna's work to intellectual and alternative religious circles in Europe and the United States, respectively and promoted his work through publications. In South Asia, the politician Karan Singh (Chapter 17) and the journalist R. K. Karanjia (Chapter 18) were Krishna's main local collaborators. As I will demonstrate, Singh and Karanjia joined Krishna in situating his project in a Hindu nationalistic context. This chapter thus also sheds light on kundalini's nationalisation and Krishna's role therein.

Part V extends the scope of this study to US-American kundalini research projects and institutions beyond Krishna's sphere of influence. This part is divided into two sections, which shed light on distinct approaches to the scientification of kundalini during the latter half of the twentieth century: Part A, "Kundalini in the Laboratory", introduces efforts to study kundalini through evidence-based research within empirical-experimental settings,

while Part B, “Kundalini in Seminar”, examines Californian educational institutes that incorporated kundalini into their curricula, conveying and interpreting it through a humanities-based perspective. Each institute is analysed in terms of its key protagonists’ views on kundalini and their relationship to Krishna and his Kundalini Research Foundation. “Kundalini in the Laboratory” primarily looks at biofeedback experiments at the Menninger Foundation (Chapter 21), the Kundalini Clinic (Chapter 22), and, as an excursus, Hiroshi Motoyama’s Institute for Religious Psychology. The Menninger Foundation was a pioneering institution in conducting biofeedback research. While kundalini research was not its central focus, this chapter reveals the interplay between kundalini and biofeedback research. Of all my case studies, the Kundalini Clinic is the best example of an institute facilitating kundalini research and therapy. Two of its key associates, Lee Sannella and Itzhak Bentov, developed physio-kundalini models that laid the foundation for the Clinic’s mode of operation. Hiroshi Motoyama and his Institute for Religious Psychology are included as an excursus. Although he primarily operated in Japan, his activities are crucial to the history of kundalini research, and he maintained contact with Krishna. The Esalen Institute (Chapter 23) was a key site for kundalini seminars. Aside from its public programming, Christina Grof’s Spiritual Emergency Network represents Esalen’s most significant contribution to kundalini’s transformation. Chapter 24 addresses what I call the Californian integral institutes, comprising four educational institutes in San Francisco that existed (and partly still exist) successively or simultaneously. These institutes exemplify Californian-styled kundalini education.

Part VI discusses kundalini’s significance for the comprehension of late twentieth-century transformations of religion by situating it within broader cultural contexts. Chapter 25 addresses kundalini’s link to alternative religious considerations about consciousness and somatics; Chapter 26 situates kundalini at the intersection of pathology and personal growth; Chapter 27 underscores the significance of transcultural exchange; and Chapter 28 considers kundalini’s role within the context of scientism.

To sum up, this thesis aims to reconstruct the history of kundalini research. Examining national and international endeavours to interpret kundalini through a scientistic lens, it illustrates a distinct form of *kuṇḍalinī*’s modern transformation, which acted upon overlapping fields of alternative religious history. Gopi Krishna’s projects serve as the central example, equally reflecting the enthusiasm and futility revolving around kundalini research. Despite the overall failure of national, international, and transcultural research efforts, the symbol of kundalini remains instructive in analysing prevailing concepts and

processes during its heydays. This thesis, therefore, suggests the broader significance of kundalini for understanding religious developments in recent history, demonstrating its relevance as a symbol of an era.

PART I

Kundalini's Historical Roots

Kundalini has undergone significant transformations during the past century, evolving into the roles it continues to occupy. The following chapters trace its origins in South Asian tantra and yoga, as well as its resurgence in Colonial India on the part of orientalists, Hindu reformers, and theosophists.[27] There is a notable temporal gap between the first chapter, set in medieval tantra and yoga, and the second, which primarily explores developments during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While the intervening centuries did not pass uneventfully, with the emergence of religious traditions and prolific writings, *kuṇḍalinī* retained its key function as a component of South Asian subtle-body models – which differed significantly across different religious traditions. Nonetheless, the renewed interest in *kuṇḍalinī* during the 1880s occurred within the framework of "revivalism", suggesting a disrupted transmission of a presumed uniform tradition. The strategy of Hindu revivalism, which advocated for the revival of *kuṇḍalinī* and other tantric concepts, was closely aligned with Hindu reform movements and nationalism, seeking to validate the superiority of Hinduism and highlight tantra's role as its esoteric core.[28] As argued throughout this thesis and demonstrated in the second chapter of this part, South Asian and non-South Asian protagonists equally appropriated *kuṇḍalinī*. While Chapter 4 offers selected information on the early emergence of *kuṇḍalinī* in South Asian texts, Chapter 5 sheds light on the intricate structures and diverging interests associated with its reassessment in Colonial India. Examining the historical roots of kundalini is essential for understanding its significance in the twentieth century.

[27] Throughout this study, I will use the designation "South Asia" except when referring to the political ideas of "Colonial India" and the nation-state of India after independence (1947). For a broad introduction to the history of South Asia from the prehistoric era to the Republic of India today, see Keay (2010).

[28] The category "Hinduism" does not adequately reflect the range of religious traditions that emerged around charismatic Hindu teachers and the belief in an eternal order (sanatana dharma). In this study, the usage of "Hinduism" is restricted to those instances when protagonists employ the term themselves or when referring to the imagined essentialised core of all Hindu religions among Hindu reformers and Hindu nationalists. Despite emphasising its emic meaning, I will refrain from using quotation marks.

4. *Kuṇḍalinī* in Premodern Tantra and Yoga

This chapter aims to introduce kundalini's original narratives in medieval South Asian texts, which depicted *kuṇḍalinī* as an inherent component of the South Asian subtle body and as a goddess of tantric origin.[29] Advocates of kundalini discussed in this study frequently claim detailed knowledge about its origin in South Asian tantra and yoga. To evaluate their assertions, it is vital to introduce and define the categories they adopt for their own purposes. Despite the global occurrence of ideas revolving around subtle bodies, this chapter will limit its scope to South Asia, highlighting *kuṇḍalinī*'s role in tantric and *haṭhayogic* subtle-body concepts.

This chapter is composed of two interconnected sub-chapters. It first provides an overview of South Asian subtle-body theories, followed by an introduction to *kuṇḍalinī*'s role in early tantric and yogic sources. The reader should bear in mind that each of these sub-chapters encompasses extensive fields and comprehensive theories, the exhaustive discussion of which would exceed the scope of the present study.

4.1. *Kuṇḍalinī* within South Asian Subtle-Body Models

Ideas revolving around subtle anatomy and physiology have prevailed in various religious and philosophical traditions throughout the world and history.[30] The earliest sources discussing subtle bodies trace back to South and East Asia.[31] In the Chinese context, archaeological findings in the Mawangdui tombs (c. second century BCE) have unearthed perhaps the earliest manuscripts and images of subtle bodies. These revolve around biomedical and sexual practices, including descriptions of subtle channels and the flow of substances within the body (Samuel 2013, 13). In South Asia, subtle-body concepts already

[29] Unlike the remaining parts of this study, this chapter uses Sanskrit terms with diacritical marks and italicised, e.g., *kuṇḍalinī*, to distinguish their use in early South Asian texts from their modern reinterpretations. Refer also to this study's "Note on Transliteration."

[30] Notable publications addressing subtle-body ideas include Simon Cox's *The Subtle Body. A Genealogy* (2022), Geoffrey Samuel and Jay Johnston's *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West: Between Mind and Body* (2013), Foxen's and Kuberry's chapter "Bodies", in their volume *Is this Yoga?* (2021, 39–70), and (from a practitioner's perspective) Kurt Leland's *Rainbow Body: A History of the Western Chakra System from Blavatsky to Brennan* (Leland 2016).

[31] I use the term "subtle body" as an umbrella term that enables a comparative perspective on "quasi-material" and "quasi-immaterial" layers of the human body. Not all traditions discussed in this chapter use the notion of "subtle body", such as representatives of Neoplatonism. For elaborated definitions, see Cox (2022) and Samuel and Johnston (2013).

played a minor role in texts such as the Vedic *Upaniṣads* (c. eighth to fifth century BCE). However, elaborate theories and practices did not fully develop before the emergence of medieval (Hindu and Buddhist) tantric texts (c. seventh to tenth century CE) (Foxen and Kuberry 2021, 46–48). Of equal importance are Neoplatonic conceptions of "quasi-immaterial" (Cox 2022, 8) bodies. Prominent Neoplatonic philosophers such as Iamblichus (c. 245–325) and Proclus (412–485) pondered such bodies mainly within soteriological frameworks, viewing them as a vehicle of the soul (*ibid*., 9–34). Ensuing philosophical and religious discourses on the subtle body incorporated and synthesised these early conceptualisations.[32]

Various Vedantic contexts distinguish between a causal body (*kāraṇa śarīra*), a gross or material body (*sthūla śarīra*), and a subtle body (*sūkṣma* or *liṅga śarīra*).[33] However, viewing these bodily dimensions as opposites would be too simplified. Instead, it makes sense to define them as complementary aspects of the South Asian human body in its broadest sense.[34] Sometimes, the subtle body is portrayed as an intermediary between micro- and macrocosmic conceptions. Foxen and Kuberry (2021), for instance, suggest that "the major function of the [South Asian] subtle body is to triangulate between the human being (body and conscious Self), the greater cosmos, and ultimate reality" (Foxen and Kuberry 2021, 41). This resonates with David G. White's attribution of the subtle body to what Robert I. Levy called the "mesocosm" (1991). This intermediary plane bridges physical and spiritual components of the human body, as well as physical and metaphysical realities (D. G. White 2012, 18; Levy 1991). Barbara Holdrege reinforces the perspective of the subtle body's role as a mediator between micro- and macrocosmic planes. According to her, Hindu traditions consider the body a "psychophysical continuum encompassing both gross physical constituents and subtle psychic faculties" (Holdrege 2015, 12). Holdrege underpins her claim by highlighting the Hindu doctrine of the five sheaths (*pañca-kośa*) alongside the distinction

[32] Shaman Hatley's article "Mapping the Esoteric Body in the Islamic Yoga of Bengal" (2007) discusses the fascinating synthesis of tantric and Neoplatonic elements among Arabic and Persian translators and practitioners.

[33] The Vedantic framework distinguishing between *kāraṇa*, *sthūla*, and *sūkṣma śarīra* originates in Shankara's views on bodies and embodiment (Pokazanyeva 2016, 333–334).

[34] The body has assumed various roles in Hindu religion and philosophy. Notable studies discussing Hindu perspectives on the body include Barbara Holdrege's embodiment studies (2015), Joseph Alter's (2004) and Mark Singleton's (2010) research into the body in modern yoga, David G. White's introduction to alchemical implications of South Asian bodies (2012), and Gavin Flood's examination of the tantric body (2006).

between the subtle and physical body.[35] This doctrine elaborates on the "psychophysical continuum" by providing a layered understanding of the embodied self (*śarīra ātman*), illustrating how different compositions of the self are interconnected and form a continuum. Each sheath represents a progressively more subtle constituent, with food representing the outermost layer, followed by breath, mind, consciousness, and ultimately, bliss. These layers indicate that subtle and gross elements significantly overlap in the Hindu subtle body (*ibid*., 12–13).

While philosophical and religious schools have attempted to define the quality of "subtle matter" and its association with micro- and macrocosmic ideas, other fundamental questions have pertained to the composition of the subtle body's elements. Different "bodies" comprise varying elements. Medieval tantric texts, such as the c. tenth-century *Kubjikāmatatantra*, count among the earliest sources that offer a detailed depiction of the South Asian subtle body, suggesting movements of subtle substances through subtle channels and centres. *Haṭhayogic* texts carried these ideas further and significantly contributed to popularising the subtle body in subsequent centuries (Foxen and Kuberry 2021, 42–51). The remaining part of this chapter will explore the composition of yogic and tantric bodies and emphasise how *kuṇḍalinī* assumed an increasingly important position.[36]

Considering the spectrum of textual sources, it is challenging to delineate *the* South Asian subtle body.[37] Mallinson and Singleton underscore the necessity of defining subtle bodies against the backdrop of their respective specific traditions:

> Yogic bodies arise according to the particular ritual, philosophical or doctrinal requirements of the tradition at hand, and because they are expressions of these requirements, rather than descriptions of self-evident, empirical bodies common to all humans. In other words, the goals of a particular system determine the way the body is imagined and used within its yoga practices. The yogic body was – and continues to be in traditional practitioner circles – one that is constructed or "written" on and in the body of the practitioner by the tradition itself. (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 172)

[35] The scheme of the five sheaths (*pañca-kośa*) is first outlined in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (2.1–5). In yoga, the idea first appeared in the seventeenth century and did not gain traction until the twentieth century (Holdrege 2015, 12; Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 184).

[36] There are specific differences between the tantric and the (hatha) yogic subtle body. While the next chapter will address some of these shades, this chapter will refrain from stressing tantric and (hatha) yogic nuances in medieval subtle-body conceptions. For a discussion of the differences, see Foxen and Kuberry (2021, 43–51).

[37] The description of the components of the subtle body is based on previous scholarship by Mallinson and Singleton (2017, 171–227) and Flood (2006, 157–162).

Broadly speaking, the subtle body comprises nexuses, conduits, and circulating subtle substances, such as endogenous winds and vital forces. The subtle substances move or circulate through the body along a network of channels (*nāḍī*s), whose number depends on the specific tradition. While some of the earliest references in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (700–500 BCE) suggest approximately seventy-two thousand channels, later tantric sources, e.g., the *Vīṇāśikhatantra* (fifth or sixth century CE), mention only three *nāḍī*s. These three channels were named *suṣumnā*, *iḍā*, and *piṅgalā* and maintained a key role in subsequent subtle-body conceptions. According to the thirteenth-century *Vasiṣṭhasaṃhitā*, *suṣumnā* represents the central channel, which is flanked by *iḍā* on the left and *piṅgalā* on the right (*ibid*., 194–195, 2.24–27).[38]

Along the central axis of the yogic body, a distinct number of centres are located, which are imagined as wheels (*cakra*), knots (*granthi*), or lotuses (*padma*). As with the *nāḍī*s, there is no consensus on the number of the centres. However, from the *Kubjikāmatatantra* (c. tenth century CE) onwards, a six-*cakra* system prevailed for some time (*ibid*., 204, II. 34–35).[39] The names of the *cakra*s in the *Kubjikāmatatantra* (and subsequent texts) are *ādhāra* (in later texts, *mūlādhāra*) in the perineal region, *svādhiṣṭhāna* in the genital region, *maṇipūraka* in the navel region, *anāhata* in the heart region, *viśuddhi* in the throat region, and *ājñā* between the eyebrows. Later texts, e.g., the *Śivasaṃhitā* (thirteenth to fifteenth century CE), include a seventh *cakra*, *sahasrāra*, at times believed to be located at the top end of *suṣumnā*, or even beyond the constraints of the physical body, above the head. While some texts specified the *cakras*' positions in the human body, others prioritised their visualisation over assigning their distinct physical locations.

The question of what circulates through the channels and crosses their nodal points equally varies depending on the tradition. Most commonly, it is a set of five or ten winds (*vāyu*s) that move in habitual locations and directions. The most important of these winds is *prāṇa*, which is already mentioned in the *Ṛg Veda* (fifteenth–twelfth century BCE), where it simply means breath. Either described as one of the five bodily winds or as their generic designation, *prāṇa* later assumed a seminal role in the subtle body, with *iḍā* and *piṅgalā* representing its

[38] When referring to translated texts I am including references to page numbers of the secondary literature and (where accessible) verse numbers. Most translations are from Devanagari scripts, Devanagari being the most common script representing the sounds of Sanskrit.

[39] Despite the widespread prevalence of the six-*cakra* scheme in subsequent *haṭhayogic* texts, it was only one model among many (Leland 2016). A key reason for its acceptance as the blueprint for the subtle body was Arthur Avalon's 1918 translation and interpretation of the *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa* (sixteenth century CE) (Strube 2021). The next chapter will explore this in more detail.

habitual location. With the help of yogic practices, the yogi can manipulate these winds, such as changing their direction or location or stopping them, thereby accumulating the wind at a desired location. A special case of these endeavours to manipulate bodily winds relates to another component of the subtle body: *kuṇḍalinī*.

Kuṇḍalinī is neither a wind nor equivalent to the vital principle or soul (*jīva*). Instead, tantric and *haṭhayogic* texts frequently describe *kuṇḍalinī* as a vital force and a goddess.[40] Some texts, e.g., the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* (eighteenth century CE), also associate *kuṇḍalinī* with consciousness (*ibid*., 216, 4.14). From at least the eighth century, tantric texts depicted *kuṇḍalinī* as a dormant serpent lying coiled at the entrance of the subtle body's central channel (*suṣumnā*), corresponding to *mūlādhāra cakra*.[41] Unlike *prāṇa* and other bodily winds, the movement of *kuṇḍalinī* is a rare exception. Its activation, which is commonly rendered as awakening due to its imagined dormant condition, may be triggered by yogic practices, including visualisation, breath restraint, *mudrās*, and mantras. A key pillar for *kuṇḍalinī*'s activation is *prāṇa*. When forced out of *iḍā* and *piṅgalā*, *prāṇa* ascends through the central channel and thereby "awakens" *kuṇḍalinī*. Upon activation, *kuṇḍalinī* breaks through the entrance of *suṣumnā*, ascends along the central axis, and crosses the body's subtle centres. If the journey of *kuṇḍalinī* is successful, it ultimately reaches the top end of the central channel, which some texts call the "aperture of Brahman" (*brahmarandhra*). There, at the crown of the head, *kuṇḍalinī śakti* dissolves in her male counterpart, the god Shiva, who is believed to be located in the head or twelve fingers beyond the head (the *dvādaśānta*). Texts such as the thirteenth century *Gorakṣaśataka* suggest that *kuṇḍalinī*'s dissolution into Shiva leads to liberation (*mokṣa*) (*ibid*., 214–215, 74–86). Alternatively, *kuṇḍalinī* may access the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*), which is stored in the head. In this case, upon *kuṇḍalinī*'s return to its abode at the bottom end of the central channel, it distributes the nectar throughout the body, thereby engendering immortality. The fourteenth-century CE *haṭhayogic* text *Khecarīvidyā* describes the process of *kuṇḍalinī*'s awakening with the following words:

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[40] The distinction between *kuṇḍalinī*'s interpretation as a vital force and as a goddess is reflected in the designations *kuṇḍalinī* and *kuṇḍalinī shakti*, respectively. Owing to *kuṇḍalinī*'s attributed divine femininity, several original texts and modern sources address "her" with a female pronoun. This study, however, refrains from this custom and uses "it" instead to encompass the spectrum of interpretations associated with *kuṇḍalinī*.

[41] Earlier texts situated the entrance to the central channel, and thus *kuṇḍalinī*'s location in a motionless state, in the heart or navel region (corresponding to *maṇipūra cakra* and *anāhata cakra,* respectively). Today, the idea of *mūlādhāra cakra* as *kuṇḍalinī*'s primary abode prevails. This prevalence notwithstanding, Borkataky-Varma describes how earlier beliefs centering around heart and navel remain relevant to contemporary practitioners of *kuṇḍalinī yoga* in Assam, India (Borkataky-Varma 2020, 371–375).

> Between Iḍā and Piṅgalā is the luminous Suṣumnā. (9) […] She who looks like a sleeping serpent is the great Kuṇḍalinī. (10) Gaṅgā and Yamunā are called Iḍā and Piṅgalā. [The yogi] should insert that goddess, in the form of the supreme *amṛta*, between Gaṅgā and Yamunā, (11) as far as the abode of Brahmā, O goddess. Truly he becomes identical with Brahmā and automatically gets an immortal body for ever. (12) The goddess, having reached the abode of Śiva, the place beyond the Supreme Lord, satiated by the pleasure of enjoying that place and filled with supreme bliss, (13) sprinkling the body of the yogi from the soles of his feet to his head with the dewy, unctuous, cool nectar, O supreme goddess, (14) proceeds again by the same path to her own home, O goddess. (*ibid*., 213–214, 3.8c–14d, original emphasis)

Even if the journey was not successful, meaning that *kuṇḍalinī* did not pass the *brahmarandhra*, the yogi whose *kuṇḍalinī* had moved might attain paranormal abilities (*siddhi*s). Owing to these supernatural concomitants and attainments, one cannot limit *kuṇḍalinī*'s nature to a bodily wind or vital principle. Nevertheless, movements along the central channel are not limited to *kuṇḍalinī*. Other subtle substances include the vital principle (*jīva*), which departs through the *brahmarandhra* after the yogi's physical death; vital air (*prāṇa*); mantras; or *bindu*, the seminal seed or semen, which will be addressed in the next chapter.

To conclude, there is no such thing as *the* South Asian subtle body, but rather many overlapping concepts. Several of the attributes introduced in this chapter appear in one or the other shape in various subtle-body concepts. *Kuṇḍalinī* assumes a special role in its dual nature as subtle component and goddess, potentially enabling liberation and immortality. As the next chapter will demonstrate, *kuṇḍalinī*'s depictions have varied in tantric and *haṭhayogic* texts, with its elusive nature captivating Hindu religious and philosophical thought for centuries.

4.2. *Kuṇḍalinī* in Medieval Tantra and Yoga

Kuṇḍalinī started to play a role in South Asian religion and philosophy roughly from the eighth century CE when the tantric text *Tantrasadbhāva* mentioned it as a vital component of the yogic body. Thenceforth, several tantric and *haṭhayogic* texts included *kuṇḍalinī* as a cosmogonic element. The Indologist Lilian Silburn even suggests that the understanding of tantra presupposes exhaustive knowledge of *kuṇḍalinī*: "Since tantric practices aim at

awakening and controlling Kuṇḍalinī, it is not possible to grasp the true meaning of Tantrism without a real knowledge of Kuṇḍalinī" (Silburn 1988, 4).

Considering the numerous shared ideas and techniques, early tantra and yoga frequently overlap. It is therefore challenging to address these domains separately in their early stages. Nevertheless, with the help of central texts, I will discuss each in terms of its relevance to the development of *kuṇḍalinī*. For the sake of chronology, tantra will be explored first.

4.2.1. *Kuṇḍalinī* in Early Tantric Texts

Defining tantra is a demanding undertaking that has challenged many scholars of various disciplines.[42] For this study, it suffices to understand tantra as a set of South Asian texts and a body of knowledge that has fundamentally shaped (South) Asian religious, cultural, and political history. Mallinson and Singleton even considered tantra as "India's dominant 'religion' in the period from the sixth to the thirteenth century" (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, xviii). Despite this assessment, tantra cannot be limited to a monolithic tradition due to its diversity of doctrines, rituals, and practices. The two central aims of tantric practices are attaining supernatural powers (*siddhi*s), such as levitation or clairvoyance, and reaching proximity or attaining temporary union with the deity associated with the tantric system concerned. Examples of deities that have played a role in tantric systems are the Hindu god Shiva (*Śiva*) and, particularly relevant for this study, Shakti, venerated as a goddess and as the divine's female aspect (*śakti*), which is not a deity in the strict sense, but rather an impersonal force pervading the cosmos. Tantric systems associated with these deities are frequently referred to as Shaivism (*Śaiva* systems) and Shaktism (*Śākta* systems). The striven-for unity with the divine accounts for the non-duality inherent to some tantric systems, with Kashmir Shaivism representing a crucial example based on Kashmir Brahmins' Shaiva exegesis. Kashmir, a region in the north of today's India, played a central role in forming and disseminating tantric texts. André Padoux assessed Kashmir as "an especially important and intellectually brilliant center […]. Some of the main religious and philosophical (as well as literary and historical) Indian texts are from Kashmir" (Padoux 2017, 22). Perhaps the most important non-dual Shaiva thinker was the Kashmiri philosopher Abhinavagupta (c. 975–1020 CE), whose exegetic work *Tantrāloka* (c. tenth

[42] This chapter is based on previous scholarship by Mallinson and Singleton (2017, xviii–xx, 178–180), Padoux (2017), and Silburn (1988). Unless otherwise marked, all information is derived from these sources.

century) is considered a key tantric text. Abhinavagupta further most prominently represents tantra's transgressive elements. Transgressive rituals that matter in some schools deliberately challenge social and religious norms, including through consumption of forbidden substances, sexual practices, and physical proximity to the bodies of the deceased (D. G. White 2003). It must be emphasised that transgression, though commonly traded as tantra's hallmark, is only performed in certain schools in highly ritualised settings, therefore constituting the exception in tantra rather than the norm. Then again, the body and its fluids, play an important role in most tantric schools. While most prevalent in Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions, tantra has also played a role in other denominations and has undergone substantial change in its interaction with the New Age movement during the latter half of the twentieth century.[43]

Kuṇḍalinī is a key element in the tantric body, corresponding to the above-outlined South Asian subtle-body model. Central texts of tantra that play a role in the development of *kuṇḍalinī* include the c. eighth-century *Tantrasadbhāva*, the c. tenth-century *Kubjikāmatatantra*, Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka*, and the tenth-century *Pādmasaṃhitā*. This selection is evidently not exhaustive, considering that *kuṇḍalinī* was a key feature of many tantric texts. The *Tantrasadbhāva* counts among the earliest texts to speak of *kuṇḍalinī*'s serpentine shape and provide a detailed description of its position in the yogic body (*ibid*., 231). Padoux translated portions of the *Tantrasadbhāva*, including the relevant paragraph that details the characteristics of *kuṇḍalinī* – in the *Tantrasadbhāva* rendered *kuṇḍalī*, meaning "she who is ring-shaped" (*ibid*., 230):

> This energy is called supreme, subtle, transcending all norm or practice […], her aspect is that of a snake lying in deep sleep […] she is awakened by the supreme sound whose nature is knowledge, being churned by the *bindu* resting in her womb. […] Awakened by this (luminous throbbing), the subtle force […], Kuṇḍalī is aroused. (Padoux 1990, 128–129, original emphasis)[44]

Subsequent texts adopted *kuṇḍalinī*'s serpentine shape and its meaning in the context of the yogic body. The next two chapters will present two such examples, exploring *kuṇḍalinī*'s role in the *Kubjikāmatatantra* and the *Tantrāloka*.

[43] The New Age movement is a paradigmatic short-lived religious group that emerged in the late twentieth century. Bochinger (1994) and Hanegraaff (1996) offer the best introductions.

[44] Padoux does not offer any verse numbers. Mallinson and Singleton mention the *Tantrasadbhāva*, verses 15.128–30 (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 179).

4.2.1.1. *Kubjikāmatatantra*

The c. tenth-century *Kubjikāmatatantra* belongs to the "Western Transmission" of Kaula Shaivism, centred around the goddess Kubjika. The Kaula (or Kula) systems originated in "ancient transgressive Yoginī cults" (Padoux 2017, 53) and developed in the Kashmir region. The diverse schools of nondualist Shaivism emerged from four transmissions of the metaphysical and soteriological frameworks evolved by the Kaula systems. These transmissions are named after the four cardinal directions in which they branched out from Kashmir: East, North, South, and West. Each of them possesses a unique set of deities, rituals, and practices. Nevertheless, they share many common practices and beliefs. For this study, only the Western Transmission (*paścimāmnāya*) and the Southern Transmission (*dakṣināmnāya*) play a role, with the latter being addressed below.

The *Kubjikāmatatantra* is significant in two ways. It provided the earliest detailed exposition of *kuṇḍalinī*, and by delineating the elements of the yogi's subtle body, it laid the groundwork for the prevalent representation of the yogic body found in later *haṭhayogic* texts (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, xix). The text describes six subtle centres in the yogic body (*cakra*s) and six variant forms of the goddess Kubjika, which are also believed to be situated within the body.[45] The *Kubjikāmatatantra* equates *kuṇḍalinī* with the goddess Kubjika, who, while known in different manifestations, is most frequently described as an old, crooked woman.[46] According to Mark Dyczkowski, this crooked form of Kubjika provides insights into early ontological dimensions of *kuṇḍalinī*'s link with consciousness:

> Kubjikā's crooked form relates to her nature as *Kuṇḍalinī* […]. As such, she is bent over, not when awakening but when she is dormant, and the power of consciousness (*cicchakti*) is contracted, which is as one would expect, and is in fact usually the case in representations of *Kuṇḍalinī*. From this point of view, consciousness is "straight", i.e., unconditioned when it is free of "crooked" obscuring thought-constructs. (Dyczkowski 1988, 89, original emphasis)

While the notion of *kuṇḍalinī*'s serpentine shape originated in earlier tantric texts, the *Kubjikāmatatantra* details its location(s) in the subtle body.[47] Furthermore, through the

[45] Later chapters of the *Kubjikāmatatantra* mention only five centres instead of six, which are not related to *kuṇḍalinī* (Heilijgers-Seelen 1994).

[46] Indologist Mark S. G. Dyczkowski describes the different forms of Kubjika and how they relate to distinct forms of *kuṇḍalinī* (Dyczkowski 1988, 88–90).

[47] The *Kubjikāmatatantra* first describes *kuṇḍalinī*'s location at the base of the spine and her journey through the central channel to the crown of the head (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, xix–xx).

equation of *kuṇḍalinī* with Kubjika, the central deity of the "Western Transmission" of Kaula Shaivism, *kuṇḍalinī* achieves divine status.

4.2.1.2. *Tantrāloka*

The Kashmiri philosopher and exegete Abhinavagupta is the most famous proponent of the Trika school of Kashmir Shaivism. Though he authored several treatises, his *Tantrāloka* (*Light on the Tantras*) overshadows them all in terms of significance.[48] Composed in the tenth century, it synthesises philosophical and ritual aspects of tantric teachings in thirty-seven chapters, comprising means of liberation, cosmogonical narratives, perspectives on divine grace, and (most extensively) rituals. The *Tantrāloka* features detailed descriptions of various *kuṇḍalinī* motifs outlined in earlier tantric texts. An important source for Abhinavagupta's presentations of *kuṇḍalinī* was the earlier tenth-century text *Jayadrathayāmala*, which, for the first time, used "*kuṇḍalinī*" instead of the earlier "*kuṇḍalī*" (Saraogi 2020, 104; D. G. White 2003, 232). This chapter will only highlight selected elements of Abhinavagupta's presentation of *kuṇḍalinī* in his *Tantrāloka.*[49]

According to Silburn, the text emphasises *kuṇḍalinī*'s quality as a "high-frequency vibration" (Silburn 1988, 6).[50] The vibration in question relates to the belief in the divine vibration of Shiva, as outlined in the *Spandakārikās*, the central text of the Spanda school of Kashmir Shaivism. This school considers Shiva as the all-pervading single consciousness and emphasises vibration as Shiva's essential nature. According to the Spanda school, one must "mystically realize that this vibration is the essential nature of all human states of consciousness […] to gain liberation" (Padoux 2017, 61). Against this backdrop, *kuṇḍalinī śakti* is a manifestation of Shiva's "vibrating dynamism" (*ibid*.), prevalent both in the body and the cosmos.

On a microcosmic level, *kuṇḍalinī*'s rise in the body is attended by powerful vibrations. If the yogi realises the true meaning of these vibrations as a manifestation of Shiva, they

[48] Dyczkowski (2023) published the first complete English translation, with commentaries, of the *Tantrāloka* in eleven volumes.

[49] Recommended sources that offer a more exhaustive presentation of *kuṇḍalinī* in tenth-century tantra include Lilian Silburn's *Kuṇḍalinī: The Energy of the Depths* (1988), David G. White's *Kiss of the Yoginī* (2003), Paul E. Muller-Ortega's *The Triadic Heart of Siva* (1989), and Gavin Flood's *The Tantric Body* (2006).

[50] André Padoux dedicated his book *Vāc. The Concept of The Word in Selected Hindu Tantras* (1990) to the process of the materialisation of the word (*vāc*) into a subtle form of phonetic vibration, which ultimately takes on the form of *kuṇḍalinī*, thereby giving birth to the world.

progress from duality to unity – for Abhinavagupta's school, an essential goal of ritual: "Thus, the objective of *kuṇḍalinī* yoga in Kashmir Śaivism is for the yogi to make an inward turn by which he can be attuned to and finally identify and recapture the primordial pulsation of Śiva" (Borkataky-Varma 2020, 370, original emphasis).

Abhinavagupta introduces three aspects (or emissions) of *kuṇḍalinī*'s cosmogonic meaning: the *śaktikuṇḍalinī* (power of creation), the *prāṇakuṇḍalinī* (life force), and the *parākuṇḍalinī* (supreme goddess). In Silburn's words:

> In a move toward her origin, Kuṇḍalinī, after having become *śaktikuṇḍalinī*, then *prāṇakuṇḍalinī*, spontaneously returns to plenitude [the inseparable union of Śiva and Śakti] […]; the entire universe, inseparable from Siva, abides in the supreme energy, *parākuṇḍalinī*. […] Thus in the Kula system Kuṇḍalinī is regarded as the origin, the substance and the consummation of everything. (Silburn 1988, 24, original emphasis)

These three aspects can be further understood as stages in *kuṇḍalinī*'s creative actions. It first emerges and expands from the *bindu* (drop), which is sometimes described as Shiva, located in Shakti's womb, or as the motionless union of Shiva and Shakti. In any case, *bindu* is the "source of manifestation" (Flood 2006, 161) from where *śaktikuṇḍalinī* exerts her cosmogonic creative power, generating the division of *bindu*, i.e., Shiva and Shakti's union. Triggered by the vibration of primal sound, *prāṇakuṇḍalinī* arouses in the form of vital breath. In the form of *parākuṇḍalinī*, she is the supreme goddess, the ineffable power of the divine. This threefold scheme, as outlined by Abhinavagupta, pertains to macro- and microcosmic dimensions (Flood 2006, 161; Padoux 1990, 131; Hatley 2022, 823).

In addition to these three levels of *kuṇḍalinī*, Abhinavagupta distinguishes between *kuṇḍalinī*'s descent and ascent. These two phases of *kuṇḍalinī*'s movement in the yogi's body belong to the *prāṇakuṇḍalinī*; they are expressions of the descending and ascending breath energy. Its first manifestation is called *adhaḥkuṇḍalinī*. An experienced yogi may be able to collect the breath at the back of their throat, with parts of the breath departing through the nostrils and parts descending through the central channel downwards to the base centre. During *adhaḥkuṇḍalinī*'s descent, none of the wheels are awakened, meaning none of the *cakra*s start to vibrate. For this reason, *adhaḥkuṇḍalinī* is considered of lower rank among the different forms of *kuṇḍalinī*. The notion of "*adhaḥ*", therefore, signifies "lower" not only regarding its movement but also its status. The second manifestation of *prāṇakuṇḍalinī* is *ūrdhvakuṇḍalinī*. This ascending energy takes the same route as *adhaḥkuṇḍalinī*; however, *ūrdhvakuṇḍalinī*'s ascent brings movement to the wheels, thus purifying the body and the

breath.[51] Once it has reached the highest centre, accomplishing the reunion of Shiva and Shakti, all duality vanishes: "According to Abhinavagupta, the rising movement of the vital breath activity 'causes all duality to melt away, just like melting butter, and generates a state of oneness. Such is the function of the vertical breath in those who have overcome illusion (*māyā*)'" (Abhinavagupta, in Silburn 1988, 66, original emphasis). Just as the three aspects of *kuṇḍalinī*'s cosmological dimensions, its manifestations as down- and upward-flowing energy along the central channel of the yogic body correspond to the expansion and contraction of the universe (Flood 2006, 161).

4.2.2. *Kuṇḍalinī* in *Haṭhayoga* Manuals

The Sanskrit word "*yoga*" first appears in the *Ṛg Veda*, where it generally refers to the yoking of horses to chariots. One of the earliest definitions of *yoga* appears in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (probably composed between the third century BCE and the second century CE). While still employing the chariot metaphor, the liberation of a living human being, whose body is likened to a chariot, is now at the centre of interest. The text that is often hailed as the cornerstone of yoga is the fourth-century CE *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, xiv–xvii).[52] The philosopher Patanjali crafted this collection of one hundred and ninety-six aphorisms (*sūtra*s) and detailed commentaries, offering a comprehensive guide to yoga techniques.[53]

An equally important text was the *Haṭhapradīpikā* (fifteenth to sixteenth century CE), which represents the key texts of *haṭhayoga*. The system of *haṭhayoga* thrived from the thirteenth through the eighteenth century CE. The Sanskrit term "*haṭha*" signifies "forceful" (Birch 2011). While not belonging to a single school of South Asian thought, its corpus largely rests on the philosophical and technical frameworks of Śaiva tantra. *haṭhayoga* encompasses a small number of principal practices, including breath retention (*kumbhaka*), body postures (*āsana*s), and yogic seals (*mudrā*). Particularly, *prāṇāyāma* developed into the defining

[51] The tenth-century *Vijñānabhairavatantra* mentions a similar upward movement of *prāṇa*, without however referring to *kuṇḍalinī* (Flood 2006, 160).

[52] While it is beyond question that the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* exerted a profound influence on subsequent yogic treatises, its authoritative status for South Asian yoga traditions is not evidenced. European scholarship and early promoters of modern yoga, such as Swami Vivekananda, popularised the text. This popularisation, in turn, led to its recognition as the foundational yogic treatise for yoga philosophy and modern postural yoga (Singleton 2010, 35–36).

[53] Mallinson and Singleton (2017) and White (2014) offer valuable introductions to *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*.

technique in some *haṭhayogic* systems.[54] It sought to cleanse and balance the body's subtle channels (*nāḍī*s) to facilitate the ascent of *prāṇa* through the central channel (*suṣumnā*), thereby awakening *kuṇḍalinī* (Kraler 2022, 68–82).

Kuṇḍalinī indeed plays a central role in *haṭhayoga* manuals. Jason Birch, who associates the meaning of "*haṭha*", i.e., forceful, with *kuṇḍalinī*'s forced ascent in the *haṭhayogic* subtle body, observes: "*Kuṇḍalinī* is to be forcibly seized (*balāt*), roused from sleep and forcefully (*haṭhāt*) rises upwards by the practice of *śakticālana*. […] In this context, it is apparent that the force of Haṭhayoga refers to forcing what […] is usually dormant (*kuṇḍalinī*) to move upwards" (Birch 2011, 537, original emphasis). Singleton further highlights the significance of *kuṇḍalinī* in *haṭhayogic* practices, such as the attainment of supernatural powers (*siddhi*) and liberation from the cycle of rebirth (*mokṣa*). He suggests that "raising Kuṇḍalinī becomes one of the central aims of yoga practices in early haṭha texts that derive from tantric sources, as well as in later syntheses such as the *Haṭhapradīpikā*" (Singleton 2020, 122, original emphasis).

There is only limited availability of translated and critically commented-upon texts belonging to the *haṭhayogic* tradition.[55] The best-known (and most-studied) *haṭhayogic* texts are the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, the *Śivasaṃhitā* (thirteenth to fifteenth century CE), and the *Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā* (seventeenth to eighteenth century CE). Kraler underscores that these texts "were considered to be part of a 'classical triad' of Haṭhayoga in the yoga revival of the late nineteenth-century" (Kraler 2022, 70). According to Singleton, the *Haṭhapradīpikā* attained a particularly popular and influential status: "The centuries following its composition saw an increasing assimilation of its techniques into mainstream religious practice in India" (Singleton 2020, 120). Despite the singular importance of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* for the *haṭhayogic* canon, the present study focuses on the *Śivasaṃhitā*. The reason for this emphasis lies in the *Śivasaṃhitā*'s 1887 translation by Srishchandra Basu, which substantially fuelled ensuing kundalini discourses among early theosophists. While the next chapter will address these matters more thoroughly, the *Śivasaṃhitā* first warrants a preliminary introduction.

[54] According to Kraler, in *haṭhayoga*, *prāṇāyāma* is synonymous with *kumbhaka* (Kraler 2022, 74).

[55] Recent research projects have set the goal of increasing the number of available translated *haṭhayogic* texts. Yoga scholars Mark Singleton, James Mallinson, and Jason Birch have been at the forefront of this endeavour (Haṭha Yoga Project 2016).

4.2.2.1. *Śivasaṃhitā*

The *Śivasaṃhitā* is a collection of verses originating from an unknown author, who frames his yoga teachings in the literary form of a dialogue, in which Shiva answers the questions of his consort Parvati.[56] It is probable that the text was composed between the thirteenth and fifteenth century CE in the area of Varanasi (today's India). Comprising five chapters, the *Śivasaṃhitā* contains yogic teachings and philosophical elements of the non-dual Shri Vidya school of tantra, making it an eclectic composition. The subtle-body model outlined in the manual aligns with the model first introduced in the *Kubjikāmatatantra*; however, it adds a seventh *cakra*, the *sahasrāra*, to the set of six. *Kuṇḍalinī* plays a prominent role throughout the treatise, especially in chapters four and five (Mallinson 2007, ix–xiv; Singleton 2020, 123). Mallinson, who published the first critical English translation of the *Śivasaṃhitā* in 2007, defines its significance with the following words:

> The Shiva Samhita is an important text and a repository of teachings not found elsewhere in the Hatha Yogic canon. […] Its most systematic and thorough teaching is that on mudras found in chapter four. Complementing this are its many subtle body visualizations and mantra techniques, found for the most part in chapter five. These beautiful meditations often have no parallels in other Hatha Yogic texts, but rather echo Tantric texts of the Sri Vidya tradition. (Mallinson 2007, xiii)

Chapter four of the *Śivasaṃhitā* emphasises the significance of yogic seals (*mudrā*s) for the attainment of *siddhi*s and the movement of *kuṇḍalinī*. A *mudrā*, as Mallinson and Singleton explain, is "a method of manipulating the breath and other vital energies" (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 228). This practice forms a cornerstone of *haṭhayoga*, setting it apart from other yogic systems.[57] The *Śivasaṃhitā* mentions a total of ten *mudrā*s, all of them believed to nourish the vitality of the physical body and thereby bolster the awakening of *kuṇḍalinī*:

> Now I shall teach the greatest means of success in Yoga.
> Adepts must guard this extremely precious Yoga.
> When the sleeping Kundalini awakens through the grace
> of the guru, all the lotuses and knots are pierced.

[56] When quoting from the *Śivasaṃhitā*, I use Mallinson's translation (2007). Although he adds the Sanskrit original to each verse, this chapter only replicates his English translation. In the text, these ellipses will not be additionally marked.

[57] *Mudrā*s also hold significant importance in tantric rituals. However, the meanings of *mudrā*s vary, including hand gestures, a combination of body postures, muscle contractions, and breathing exercises (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 229).

> Therefore, in order to awaken the goddess sleeping at
> the opening of the gateway of Brahman, the yogi should
> make every effort to practice mudras. (Mallinson 2007, 77, 4.20–22)

While the ten *mudrā*s described in the *Śivasaṃhitā* are also mentioned in earlier *haṭhayogic* texts,[58] the explicit aim of stimulating the ascent of *kuṇḍalinī* represents a new development (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 232). Mallinson underscores that this is the result of a "process of appropriation that brought about the superimposition of Kuṇḍalinī Yoga onto the ancient Haṭha techniques […]. It is seen most clearly in the *Śivasaṃhitā*, the first text to teach that the haṭhayogic *mudrā*-s are for the raising of Kuṇḍalinī rather than the control of breath and *bindu*" (Mallinson 2018, 197, original emphasis).[59]

The *mahāmudrā* ("great seal") poses a significant example. Practised in a seated position, the yogi first extends the right foot and holds it by gripping the toes with both hands. He then continues the same practice with the left leg, and then once more with the right leg. While situated in this position, the yogi must place their chin on the chest, hold their breath, and calm their mind. The *Śivasaṃhitā* claims multifarious benefits when regularly practising this *mahāmudrā*:

> The ability to make all the nadis flow, the steadying of
> bindu, the incineration of impurities, the destruction of
> sins, the heating of Kundalini, the insertion of the wind
> into the aperture of Brahman, the curing of all diseases,
> the increase of the digestive fire, perfect physical beauty,
> the destruction of old age and death, the achievement of
> desired goals, happiness, and the conquest of the senses:
> through practice, all these arise for the yogi on the path
> of Yoga. This is not to be doubted. (Mallinson 2007, 80, 4.31–34)

A final note is due to the relationship between *kuṇḍalinī* and *bindu*. The meaning of *bindu* varies depending on the text and tradition. As stated above, in the *Tantrāloka*, *bindu* sometimes signifies Shiva, emphasising the close tie between the goddess *kuṇḍalinī* (Shakti)

[58] The ten *mudrā*s mentioned in the *Śivasaṃhitā* are "Mahamudra, Mahabandha, Mahavedha, Khechari, Jalandhara, Mulabandha, Viparitakarani, Udyana, Vajroli, and the tenth, Shaktichalana" (Mallinson 2007, 77, 4.23–24).

[59] The goal to stimulate the ascent of *kuṇḍalinī*, as facilitated by *mudrā*s, is also mentioned in the third chapter of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* (fifteenth to sixteenth century CE) (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 181, 3.5). However, since Mallinson (2007) argues for the earlier dating of the *Śivasaṃhitā* (between the thirteenth and the fifteenth century CE), the link between *kuṇḍalinī*'s ascent and *mudrā*s likely originated in the *Śivasaṃhitā*.

and *bindu*. On a microcosmic level, *haṭhayogic* texts commonly use the term *bindu* in the sense of semen. *Bindu* signifies the essence of life, the nectar of immortality, which is preserved in the yogi's head. From this storage point, the nectar constantly drips – this metaphor accounts for *bindu*'s literal meaning of "drop" or "point". Owing to this dripping, the semen is at risk of getting lost – either through ejaculation or through burning during digestion. As a result, the individual undergoes physical decline, ageing, and, ultimately death. Mallinson and Singleton refer to ancient ascetic traditions that attempt to prevent this devastating process. "The *ūrdhvaretāḥ tapasvī* ('the ascetic whose seed is [turned] upwards')" (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 180, original emphasis) performs several practices to reverse the movement of *bindu*, i.e., encourage its ascent. In later *haṭhayogic* texts, the ascetic practice of semen reversal continues to play a role: "The (*haṭha*-) yogi can reverse this flow, impelling *bindu* upwards through the central channel and into the head by means of various *mudrā*s […], thereby attaining immortality" (*ibid*., original emphasis).

As mentioned, in early *haṭhayogic* texts, *mudrā*s originally served the purpose of regulating breath or *bindu*, with the *vajrolīmudrā* denoting the key practice of controlling *bindu* (Mallinson 2018, 189).[60] Unlike earlier texts, the *Śivasaṃhitā* assigns a new primary purpose to *mudrā*s, including *vajrolīmudrā*, which is to assist *kuṇḍalinī*'s rise. At the same time, "the *Śivasaṃhitā* praises the technique's [*vajrolīmudrā*'s] usefulness in bringing about *bindusiddhi*, mastery of semen" (*ibid*., 190, original emphasis). This presents a seeming contradiction: texts such as the *Śivasaṃhitā* and the *Haṭhapradīpikā* include two distinct schemes involving the ascent and descent of either *bindu* or *kuṇḍalinī* along the central channel. The older *bindu* model aimed at achieving the "mastery of semen" by preserving and protecting *bindu* in the head. This earlier model was gradually replaced by the newer *kuṇḍalinī* model, which endeavours to stimulate *kuṇḍalinī*'s ascent to the head to imbue the body with the "nectar of immortality", effectively distributing the preserved *bindu*. Despite this apparent paradox, the *Śivasaṃhitā* synthesised the two models, presenting both *bindu* and *kuṇḍalinī* as travelling along the central channel, each leading to immortality. This synthesis is also evident in the *Śivasaṃhitā*'s statements about *mudrā*s: "Similarly, of the ten *mudrās* of the *Śivasaṃhitā*, some work on *bindu*, some on Kuṇḍalinī, and some on both, but

[60] V*ajrolīmudrā* is a *haṭhayogic* practice that aims at preventing the loss of semen by overcoming the impulse to ejaculate and instead enabling an upward flow of liquids through the urethra (Mallinson 2018, 183; Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 229). For a thorough discussion of the purpose, practice, and uncertainties of the *vajrolīmudrā*, see Malinson (2018).

the text explicitly states that the purpose of *mudrās* is the raising of Kuṇḍalinī" (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 181, original emphasis).

To conclude, the *Śivasaṃhitā* stands as a notable example illustrating the expanding significance of *kuṇḍalinī* beyond the confines of tantra within the realm of *haṭhayoga*. The redefined purpose of *mudrā*s in the *Śivasaṃhitā* exemplified this development. Furthermore, by acknowledging *kuṇḍalinī* as a crucial element of the yogic subtle body, the *Śivasaṃhitā* reinforced *kuṇḍalinī*'s role as a vital energy located at the entrance of the central channel.

4.3. Summary

In resonance with the manifold roles, images, and narratives attributed to kundalini from the late nineteenth century onwards, its South Asian origin was also not uniform. Depending on various factors such as historical period, religious tradition, and associated subtle-body models, *kuṇḍalinī* was venerated as a goddess, conceptualised as a component of the subtle body, yearned for as a distributor of the "nectar of immortality" in the yogi's body, and envisioned as a dormant serpent whose awakening involves bodily movements akin to cosmogenic vibrations. The objective of this chapter was to provide a broad historical contextualisation of *kuṇḍalinī* and its association with related South Asian concepts. Moreover, the chapter is intended to demonstrate that *kuṇḍalinī*'s modern interpretations have drawn from a spectrum of origin stories that extend beyond its depiction as a dormant serpent. Thus, the multifaceted nature of modern kundalini interpretations is rooted in an equally diverse historical background.

5. *Kuṇḍalinī*'s Scientification in Colonial India

This chapter explores *kuṇḍalinī*'s reinterpretation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on the part of theosophists, orientalists, and South Asian intellectuals. This period in South Asia was marked by significant political, social, and religious changes, set against the backdrop of the broader sociocultural context of Colonial India, characterised by orientalist perspectives and Hindu reformism. These developments escape a simplified reduction to a binary opposition between "East" and "West". *Kuṇḍalinī* emerged as a central theme in a burgeoning discourse, negotiating the subtle body within the frameworks of South Asian religion and non-South Asian (fringe) science. This chapter aims to illustrate how the interpretation of *kuṇḍalinī* in Colonial India was shaped by dynamic interactions between South Asian and non-South Asian players, who maintained *kuṇḍalinī*'s conformity with modern science, thus initiating an international discourse. Structured into three main parts, this chapter starts by setting the context for late nineteenth-century Colonial India, introducing key figures, currents, and prevailing ideas. Subsequently, it presents a twofold examination of *kuṇḍalinī*'s scientification, guided by the coherence of the source material.

5.1. Orientalism, Occultism, and Revivalism in Colonial India

The nineteenth century witnessed the rise and popularity of religious movements and organisations with a social and political agenda that shared several ties while operating independently. In Colonial India, the Theosophical Society and Hindu reform movements, including the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj, were among the most successful organisations. Orientalism was a third force that affected the dynamics in this multifaceted setting and largely determined the relationships between its actors.[61]

[61] Orientalism has two distinct yet entangled meanings. On the one hand, orientalism refers to a branch of scholarly study that investigates (depending on its definition) the Middle East, North Africa, South, Central, and East Asia. On the other hand, orientalism depicts an ideology that distinguishes between "East" and "West", which it essentialises. Both meanings of orientalism are mutually dependent. In this study, I am mainly interested in orientalism as ideology; oriental studies must nonetheless be considered too.

5.1.1. Historical Background: Exchanges between South Asia and Europe

From the eighteenth century onwards, an exchange took place between South Asia and Europe, involving European colonial aspirations, the trade of goods, and a rich interplay of religious and cultural ideas. However, when tracing back even further, we find that some European empires had already set sail for South Asia several centuries earlier, laying the groundwork for these later exchanges.

The first recorded interactions between European empires and South Asia date back to the time of Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE).[62] His invasion and subsequent conquest of today's Punjab (a northwestern region of today's India) lasted approximately from 327 to 325 BCE. The subsequent centuries were mainly characterised by commercial and imperial interests, with traders and conquerors arriving in South Asia from the Roman Empire, Greece, and Arabic territories.[63] When the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama (1460–1524) arrived in the South of today's India in 1498, a new era of interactions emerged. The Portuguese and Dutch were the first to establish flourishing trading bases, followed by Imperial Britain – which was to become the European empire predominantly colonising South Asia. On December 31, 1600, The Royal Charter of Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603) set sail, marking the first official interaction between South Asia and the British Empire. The East India Company, a group of London businessmen who had received trade rights from the Queen, was responsible for Britain's interactions with South Asia.[64] In 1757, the Battle of Plassey was a turning point, as the British Empire asserted its dominance over its European competitors and local Bengali troops. This victory allowed the English East India Company to monopolise European trade with South Asia and gain military control. These developments paved the way for the British Raj, the rule of the British Crown on the Indian subcontinent, which lasted from 1857/1858 (Sepoy Rebellion) until India's independence in 1947.

Due to the increased commercial activities of the East India Company, its representatives engaged with South Asian languages and culture. Moreover, Christian missionaries and an

[62] Unless otherwise indicated, the historical details of this chapter are based on Keay (1991; 2010) and Pletcher (2010).

[63] The expansion of Muslim empires drove a wedge between Europe and South Asia, complicating and at times even disrupting the fruitful exchange until the early modern period (Keay 2010).

[64] Apart from the British East India Company, also the Dutch East India Company (est. 1602) and the French East India Company (est. 1664) traded with South Asia. The source material on the East India Company is vast. For a neatly presented history, see Keay (1991). Carson (2012) discusses the East India Company's link to religion.

increasing number of European scholars expressed interest in South Asian languages. Consequently, educated South Asians also began to learn European languages. The French Capuchin priest Francis Ephrem de Nevers (c. 1607–1695) established the first English school in Madras (now Chennai) in 1642. Nevertheless, English-language education took considerable time to integrate into the Indian school system. Persian was India's official language during this period, and there was little demand for English education. However, with the East India Company's increasing success, English gradually evolved into India's *lingua franca* (Auddy 2019, 33). Intriguingly, despite being the language of India's colonial rule, English has garnered widespread acceptance among the local population over the centuries. Moreover, South Asians not only accepted English but also appropriated it during the process of decolonisation. Ranjan K. Auddy argues in his book *In Search of Indian English* (2019) that South Asians took ownership of the English language through its "Indianisation", resulting in the emergence of a distinct variation known as Indian English. In South Asia's multilingual context, English is just one of many languages, yet it has proven essential for international interactions and success and has been embraced in nationalistic endeavours (Hatcher 2001, 137). The command of English and South Asian languages proved a key condition for the emergence of oriental scholarship. The next chapter will mainly examine the colonial period and discuss how European scholars who expressed interest in South Asian languages, culture, and religion contributed to the production of knowledge, shaped the European imagination of South Asia, and fostered the growing exchange between South Asians and European intellectuals.

5.1.2. Approaching Orientalism as Science and Ideology

The British philologist William Jones (1746–1794) arrived in South Asia in 1784. Soon after his arrival, he was appointed the first President of the newly established Asiatic Society and started studying and translating Sanskrit texts. Several scholars suggest that Jones thereby initiated oriental scholarship (Partridge 2020, 17; Sugirtharajah 2003, 2).[65] Throughout the remaining eighteenth and the ensuing nineteenth centuries, an increasing number of European scholars studied and interpreted Asian languages, philosophies, and religions,

[65] Designations such as "Orient", "oriental people", and "oriental wisdom" are historical terms that have been widely problematised for their inherent biases. While acknowledging their problematic nature, I will refrain from using quotation marks in this study for the sake of readability.

subsuming their findings under the general heading of oriental knowledge. Against the backdrop of oriental scholarship, Partridge maintains that the term orientalism initially referred to the "disinterested, objective study of the Orient" (Partridge 2020, 16).

Aside from Jones, several other European scholars partook in shaping the narrative of the Orient, including the English Indologist Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1765–1837) and the German-British philologist and Indologist Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) (*ibid*., 16–19). While the former played a key role in translating Sanskrit religious texts, the latter enjoyed the reputation of being the foremost expert on Buddhism and Asian languages of the nineteenth century (Strube 2022, 59; Lopez Jr. 2020, 37).[66] However, most of these orientalists were only partially objective: their scholarship was frequently biased and served their investors' colonial or imperialistic agendas (King 1999, 41). Nevertheless, orientalists' remarkable interest in understanding South Asian culture often produced not only ideological perspectives but also many valuable insights.

While vaguely associated with countries situated in North Africa, the Middle East, and South and East Asia, the Orient is not so much a geographic designation as an idea and a discursive pattern (Said 1978, 177). Accordingly, the Orient varies depending on who addresses it. Initially, the "who" almost exclusively referred to European intellectuals – non-natives of the Orient in any case.[67] With substantial "Western hubris" (Partridge 2020, 17), orientalists represented the Orient to themselves (Baumann 2006, 19). However, as several historical examples demonstrate, European orientalists did not exclusively appropriate and represent the Orient. Indigenous people of the Orient did not passively submit themselves to oriental stereotypes but instead used, manipulated, and appropriated oriental attributions for their own advantage.[68] Hindu reformers of the so-called "Bengal Renaissance" posed a notable

[66] Despite never having travelled to Asia, the academy did not question Müller's authority on oriental matters. Often regarded as the father of the academic disciplines of South Asian studies and religious studies, Müller's edited fifty-volume set *Sacred Books of the East* (1879–1910) stands as one of the most significant contributions to oriental scholarship and consolidated his reputation. However, other (self-proclaimed) "authorities" on the Orient, such as the theosophists Henry Steel Olcott and Helena P. Blavatsky, disagreed with the academy's assessment and disparaged Müller's scholarship (Lopez Jr. 2020, 37–53).

[67] Most early orientalists originated from the United Kingdom, France, and other European imperial powers. However, non-European, e.g., Japanese and US-American, and non-imperial, e.g., German, orientalists also contributed to oriental discourses (King 1999, 85).

[68] It was not until 1978, with Edward Said's groundbreaking book *Orientalism*, that European oriental scholarship underwent critical examination. While Said's book is paramount in pioneering the problematisation of orientalism, it exhibits several limitations, as King (and postcolonial studies in general) extensively argued. Theoretical and methodological constraints aside, a significant critique pertains to Said's scant consideration of the perspective of the oriental people. Said inadvertently perpetuated orientalist

example of an Asian group that benefitted from orientalism. As will be discussed below, they employed the ascribed superiority of Hindu religions for their own anti-colonial and Hindu nationalist agenda (Baier 2016, 318–319; Das 1994, 143; King 1999, 86).

A central ingredient of orientalism as an ideology is the juxtaposition of the "East" and the "West", with the former referring to several Asian and North African countries, vaguely subsumed under the category of the Orient and the latter to (predominantly) European countries (Said 1978). Along these lines, Baier suggests that "Orientalism can be understood as an essentialist representation of the East as a stereotypical Other of the West through which the identities of both the West and the East are construed" (Baier 2016, 318). Orientalist discourses consolidated this binary framework and essentialised the nature of the respective "other". Partridge summarised the division between "East" and "West" with the following words: "Whereas the East tended to be represented as mystical, exotic, and frozen in religious history, its spiritualities and philosophies being more or less unchanged for millennia, and therefore enlightened and barbaric in equal measure, the West was understood to be technologically advanced and materialistic, detached from its spiritual roots" (Partridge 2020, 17).

Depending on personal and political interests, the assessment of narratives of the Orient differed significantly. Accordingly, some scholars distinguished between dismissive and affirmative approaches to the Orient. While the former is characterised by the antagonistic attitude of European orientalists towards an assumed "inferior" Orient, the latter considers the Orient to be Europe's superior other. Independently of their ideological underpinnings, both approaches essentialised, exoticised, and homogenised oriental philosophy, religion, and history (King 1999, 116–17; Fox 1992, 152; Partridge 2020, 28). Baier, on the contrary, suggests approaching orientalist discourse not by distinguishing different orientalisms but rather by highlighting what Gerd Bauman called "reverse mirror-imaging" (Baumann 2006, 19). According to Baumann, constraining orientalism to the dichotomy between the superior "West" and the inferior "East" proves inadequate. Rather, one must consider a more intricate grammar of identity and alterity.[69] He, therefore, underscores that negative reflections of the

frameworks by accentuating the passivity of locals without acknowledging their contributions to orientalist discourse (Baier 2016, 318–319; King 1999, 82–86; Clifford 1988, 260–276).

[69] Scholars of postcolonialism and social and cultural anthropology, e.g., Gerd Baumann (2006, 18–48), Thomas J. Csordas (2004, 163–176), Veena Das (1994, 133–143), and Thomas H. Eriksen (1995, 270–274), have critically addressed the dialectics between identity and alterity.

self and the other and their positive reversal define the dynamic relation between the identity of the self and the alterity of the other:

> What is at stake in orientalism is not merely a binary opposition, I argue, but a binary opposition subject to reversal. […] the grammar of orientalism is not limited to: "we are good, so they are bad" […], but [is] a very shrewd mirrored reversal of: "what is good in us is (still) bad in them, but what got twisted in us (still) remains straight in them". (*ibid*., 20)

In other words, While the above-mentioned "Western" hubristic attitude continues to play a role in Bauman's "Grammar of Orientalization", he underscores that it "entails also a sense of loss: 'we' are 'no longer' so spontaneous, luxuriant, or mystical" (*ibid*.).

Baier underscores that "within this logic of a reversed mirroring, different variations are possible, which emphasise either the positive or negative, but there is no need to postulate a 'standard Orientalism' complemented by a 'reversed,' 'affirmative' or 'Romantic' Orientalism" (Baier 2016, 319). In other words, the double reversed mirroring of the superior/inferior "West" and inferior/superior "East" represents the schema or grammar of ideological orientalism (and Occidentalism). This schema can be variably populated to favour or disfavour either of the two entities ("West" and "East"), drawing upon specific clichés, which are differently stressed. This results in an internally differentiated theosophical, Hindu-nationalist, Japanese, etc., orientalism (and occidentalism), or discourse. Despite being largely ignored by most studies of orientalism,[70] for the present investigation the theosophical discourse merits specific attention.[71]

5.1.3. The Theosophical Society

The nineteenth century was a rich playground for those who wished to immerse themselves in occult worldviews and practices. Several esoteric currents permeated the intellectual sphere of the Anglo-American, German- and French-speaking world (Baier 2009a; Godwin 1994; Hanegraaff 1996; Strube 2016). While neither the only, nor the first, nor the last, it is

[70] Rudbøg and Reenberg Sand underscore that "earlier general studies of Orientalism […] have either been ignorant about the Theosophical Society or dismissed its relation to the East as not worthy of notice. Edward Said's famous or infamous *Orientalism* (1978), for example, does not mention the Theosophical Society at all" (Rudbøg and Reenberg Sand 2020, 2, original emphasis).

[71] In the context of this study, the term "theosophy" exclusively denotes the Theosophical Society established by Blavatsky and Olcott. Conversely, the religious tradition known as Christian theosophy, commonly associated with the German mystic Jakob Boehme (1575–1624), is not relevant to this investigation.

beyond doubt that the Theosophical Society was the most influential player in this field during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[72] Indeed, it held "a crucial position as the place where all these [occult and esoteric] currents temporarily united, before diverging again" (Godwin 1994, xi). Much has been written about the Theosophical Society, its founders, Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, and its authoritative role in the world of occultism. It is therefore not necessary to explore the history of the Theosophical Society all over again. This notwithstanding, I would like to provide some key events in the Society's history and thus frame the subsequent discussion of theosophist interpretations of tantra and *kuṇḍalinī*.

The early history of the Theosophical Society aligns in many respects with the narrative of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891).[73] Born in Ekaterinoslav, Ukraine, she spent much of her formative years with her grandparents and developed an early interest in the occult. At a young age, she embarked on extensive voyages. In her writings, she claimed to have journeyed across the globe and received initiation from masters, adepts, or "mahatmas" in South Asia, Egypt, and Syria (Neff 1937, 38–188; Goodricke-Clarke 2004a, 1–6). The accuracy of her travel narratives remains uncertain, as there are no corroborating references beyond her own testimonies. Nevertheless, as noted by Partridge, there is ample evidence to suggest that she indeed "traveled extensively, demonstrated an impressive linguistic ability, and was a voracious and eclectic collector and interpreter of exotic ideas" (Partridge 2020, 21). Theosophy, as an orientalist discourse representing the "East", is thus already rooted in Blavatsky's travels during her youth (*ibid*., 17).

After years of travelling, Blavatsky eventually settled in the United States, where she crossed paths with Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), a successful New York lawyer interested in spiritualism.[74] In September 1875, Olcott proposed the formation of a society, leading the attendees to make the momentous decision to establish the Theosophical Society. The year 1875 thus marked a pivotal moment for Blavatsky, Olcott, and the broader history of

[72] Scholarly studies examining the Theosophical Society have steadily increased since the 1990s, with Godwin's *Theosophical Enlightenment* (1994) and Johnson's *The Masters Revealed* (1994) representing two early works. Hammer's "Theosophy" (2015) offers a concise yet informative overview, the edited volumes *Handbook of the Theosophical Current* (Hammer and Rothstein 2013) and *Imagining the East. The Early Theosophical Society* (Rudbøg and Reenberg Sand 2020) look at the Theosophical Society from various angles, and Rachel Dwyer (2016) considers theosophy's role in modern South Asia.

[73] It is crucial to emphasise that the bulk of biographical information available on Blavatksy, particularly pertaining to her life prior to the establishment of the Theosophical Society, originates from her own writings. Consequently, one must approach this information with a critical eye.

[74] During this period, spiritualism, occultism, and psychic research enjoyed significant popularity in many US-American cities (Albanese 2007, 12).

occultism in general (Baier 2009a, 1:292). The subsequent phase was marked by the members' persistent efforts to disseminate their objectives, primarily spearheaded by Blavatsky. This period witnessed the establishment of a branch society in London, collaboration with Hindu reform movements in South Asia, and overall growth and proliferation (Goodricke-Clarke 2004a, 10–11).[75]

In December 1878, Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott left the United States and travelled through London to South Asia.[76] Their arrival in Bombay (now Mumbai) in February 1879 marked a turning point in the development of the Theosophical Society. By 1882, the Theosophical Society had officially settled in Adyar, Madras (now Chennai), where its South Asian branch (The Theosophical Society Adyar) still maintains its headquarters (Strube 2022, 39).

It is beyond doubt that Olcott and Blavatsky regarded South Asia as a "cohesive culture with a single essential doctrine" (Partridge 2020, 16), which they framed as "Aryan wisdom" (Olcott 1895, 184).[77] Against this backdrop, the initial purpose of their journey to "wisdom land" (Carpenter, in Partridge 2020, 22) was the wish

> to receive initiation by those enigmatic adepts who had preserved through the ages the ancient "Aryan" science at the root of all true Tradition. In doing so, they were informed by orientalist perceptions of India as a locus of magic, occult (yogic) powers, and primitive beliefs–except they turned these notions on their head by viewing them in a favorable light, as remedies to the aberrant materialism of the West. (Strube 2022, 39)

Strube's observation resonates with Olcott's assertion in his *Old Diary Leaves* (1895), wherein he rationalises his and Blavatsky's initial desire to travel to the "East" based on their admiration for the people of South Asia: "Our two hearts drew us towards the Orient, our dreams were of India, our chief desire to get into relations with the Asiatic people" (Olcott 1895, 395).[78] The notion of "Asiatic people" evidently does not encompass the population of South Asia at large. Olcott solely referred to those educated South Asians believed to hold "Aryan wisdom".

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[75] After a relatively short period, the movement began declining due to various issues. Indeed, prior to their departure to South Asia, the Theosophical Society was practically on the brink of collapse. Blavatsky's 1877 publication *Isis Unveiled* and the Society's relocation to South Asia revitalised it (Baier 2009a, 1:297).

[76] Baier (2016), Strube (2022), and Rudbøg and Reenberg Sand's edited volume (2020) provide insightful examinations of the Theosophical Society in Colonial India.

[77] In his *Global Tantra* (2022), Strube thoroughly discusses the notion of "arya" as an essential ingredient of orientalism, Hindu revivalism, and Hindu nationalism.

[78] Other (less romantic) reasons for Olcott and Blavatsky's move to South Asia included allegations of fraud against Blavatsky, which harmed her reputation in the United States and Europe (K. P. Johnson 2020, 234).

Prior to their departure, Olcott and Blavatsky had established connections with prominent figures within the Hindu reform movement Arya Samaj, including Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1882), the movement's founder, and Hurrychund Chintamon (n.d.a.), who served as the president of its Bombay branch (Reenberg Sand 2020, 232). In her book *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan* (1883), Madame Blavatsky praised Dayananda and underscored his role in fostering their decision to embark on their journey to South Asia. Initially, therefore, she held Dayananda in high esteem. Eager to undergo initiation under his guidance, the theosophists enthusiastically embraced collaboration with his Arya Samaj.[79] The erudite members of the Arya Samaj, alongside other learned South Asians, reciprocated Blavatsky and Olcott's initial sentiment. The local population valued the theosophists' presumable aspiration to glean insights from South Asian cultures and their high regard for South Asian religious traditions. These genuine interests set them apart significantly from the attitudes of orientalists, missionaries, and colonial administrators (Strube 2022, 39).

However, soon after they arrived in South Asia, Olcott and Blavatsky's initial enthusiasm towards the "Asiatic people" and their perceived reservoir of "pure wisdom" underwent a notable shift. Their confidence in the authenticity of purported "Aryan adepts" began to wane. This change was particularly evident in their encounters with individuals who were hesitant to join the Theosophical Society or held differing perspectives on Hindu doctrines, contrary to theosophical interpretations. As it turned out, especially the members of the Arya Samaj did not conform to Blavatsky and Olcott's idealised image of the "Aryan adept". This realisation was underscored by Dayananda's refusal to join the Theosophical Society and, as hoped, to initiate theosophists into the "occult science of yoga". As Baier emphasised, Blavatsky and Olcott envisioned Dayananda playing the role of theosophy's instructor in yogic practises, thereby incorporating a practical dimension into the occult teachings of the Theosophical Society. However, as will be shown below, Dayananda pursued a divergent agenda. Conflicts arose in 1880, ultimately leading to the dissolution of their friendship and cooperation (Baier 2009a, 1:305–306; Partridge 2020, 27–28).[80]

[79] In May 1977, before their journey to South Asia, Blavatsky, Olcott, and Dayananda established a "link-society" (Olcott 1895, 398), the "Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of Aryavart". This shows how both parties initially trusted their theoretical alignment (Baier 2009a, 1:305).

[80] Reenberg Sand (2020) and Sarda (1946) thoroughly discuss the initial collaboration and ensuing hostility between Dayananda and the leaders of the Theosophical Society. Moreover, Olcott added an extra supplement to the July edition of *The Theosophist* (1882), where he reacted to Dayananda's accusations (Olcott 1882, 1–18).

Aside from their dissociation from the Arya Samaj, Olcott and Blavatsky's conviction regarding the pristine condition of "Aryan wisdom" equally waned. They increasingly perceived the religious doctrines of South Asia as being tainted by the influence of missionaries and orientalists. Consequently, theosophists not only sought to position themselves as mediators of South Asian "wisdom" but also subscribed to the prevailing orientalist narrative that the "West" possessed a superior understanding of the "East" (Partridge 2020, 28).

This hubristic attitude notwithstanding, the Theosophical Society encountered numerous hurdles in South Asia, with the learned population not readily embracing theosophical doctrines or its presumed authority. Instead, as Strube underscored, "they became deeply enmeshed in South Asian debates […]. It would be a mistake to assume that the Theosophists entered India and then 'exerted influence.' On the contrary, they were confronted by an overwhelming diversity of Indian interests" (Strube 2022, 39). This observation underscores once again how South Asian natives did not passively and willingly accept the hegemonical attitudes of their colonialists.

Before addressing the discourse revolving around tantra and *kuṇḍalinī* within early theosophical circles, it is necessary to contextualise the Arya Samaj and what Strube called the "overwhelming diversity of Indian interests".

5.1.4. Hindu Reform Movements and Controversies Revolving around Tantra

In the nineteenth century, several Hindu reform movements emerged throughout South Asia, with a significant concentration in Bengal, a region in the East of the Indian subcontinent. Bengal, "with its historically eclectic religious climate" (Sardella and Wong 2019, 2), served as a hub for Hindu reformers, Hindu nationalists, theosophists, and proponents of tantra (Strube 2022; Baier 2009a, 1:326).

The notion of "revival" permeates the discourse on Hindu reforms and the so-called "Hindu Renaissance". However, the concepts of "revival" and "renaissance" exhibit a problematic leaning and require careful consideration.[81] The main issue lies in the perception of a

[81] Since the 1970s, postcolonial, historical, and South Asian studies have increasingly rejected the concept of "Hindu Renaissance". Brian Hatcher argued that the term prioritises an educated English-speaking Bengali middle class, essentialises Hindu religion, and regards most developments against the backdrop of Hindu nationalists (Hatcher 2001, 137; Sardella and Wong 2019, 5–6; A. P. Sen 1993; Strube 2022, 13–14). However, as Sardella and Wong accurately argue, the paradigm of a "Hindu Renaissance" continues to hold sway particularly among scholars addressing religious, social, and political currents of Colonial India

dichotomy between "traditional" and "modern". Moreover, these concepts suggest a disrupted transmission of ideas envisioned as belonging to a uniform tradition. Essentially, it is misleading to assume "traditional" and "modern" as defined opposites and assess the replacement of the former by the latter as a homogeneous process devoid of any external factors (Strube 2023, 95).

The paradigm of the so-called "Hindu (or Bengal) Renaissance" aims to capture developments carried forward by Hindu reform movements from the 1880s onward. These developments included attempts to redefine Hinduism – a contested category in itself – by purging it of "immoral" and "superstitious" elements and retrieving its "essence". Hindu reformers accordingly speculated on a form of "genuine" Hinduism, commonly associated with the *Vedas*, whose essential elements have fallen victim to modernisation and must, therefore, be restored. While Hindu reformers disagreed on *what* precisely should be "revived", there were mutual anti-modern and anti-colonial consents.[82] Nineteenth-century Hindu revivalism thus evidently transcended the religious field and additionally navigated political and social identities (A. P. Sen 1993, 8–12; Strube 2023, 93–96).

The two primary reform movements of the nineteenth century, Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj, launched a rigorous critique of the current condition of Hindu traditions, which they perceived as steeped in superstition and characterised by superficial ritualism (Baier 2009a, 1:307). The Brahmo Samaj, founded by Ram Mohan Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore in 1828, was a notable impetus to religious, social, and political developments in Bengal during the (late) nineteenth century.[83] Its influence on Bengali intellectuals and their collaborators was profound (Kopf 1979). However, for the purpose of this study, the Arya Samaj succeeds the Brahmo Samaj in significance. Its importance lies in its interaction with the Theosophical Society and its role in triggering a reassessment of tantra by Bengali intellectuals.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj on April 7, 1875, only a few months before the establishment of the Theosophical Society in New York. Although Dayananda partially modelled his movement after the Brahmo Samaj, its "Vedic fundamentalism" (Godwin 1994, 321) and sharp criticism of Brahmanism and other religions disassociated

(Sardella and Wong 2019, 5). The notion of "reform" as opposed to "revival" is equally challenging. Strube addressed this topic in chapter five of *Global Tantra* (Strube 2022, 149–162).

[82] It is noteworthy that Hindu reformers, too, at times questioned the feasibility and reasonableness of the notion of "revival" (A. P. Sen 1993, 8–9).

[83] Kopf's *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (1979) provides the best examination of the political and religious agenda of the Brahmo Samaj, shedding light on their nationalist endeavours and perspectives on science and religion.

the Arya Samaj from its predecessor. Dayananda, who had studied with several yogis and religious teachers throughout his life, held an uncompromising opinion of "true" Hinduism as a universal construct solely based on Vedic scriptures.[84] This view resulted in hostile opinions and attacks against other religions and their alleged ignorance and superstition (Godwin 1994, 320–321; Sarda 1946, x).

Aside from Brahmanism, tantra represented another key target of Dayananda's criticism. Describing tantra as "the worst aberration of Indian traditions" (Strube 2022, 40), Dayananda positioned himself in an ongoing debate on the presumed immorality of tantra. A common narrative in nineteenth-century South Asia was the belief that tantra had significantly contributed to the decline of Hindu religions, allowing Muslim and British conquerors and colonialists to gain traction. Hence, Hindu intellectuals commonly agreed that "one of the most necessary tasks in the reassertion of a strong and pure 'Hinduism' would have to be the eradication of modern immorality, idolatry, and debilitating licentiousness, of which Tantra was the most notorious and embarrassing example" (Urban 2003, 46). This opinion was further shared by orientalists, such as Monier Williams (1819–1899), who condemned the tantras in his book *Hinduism* (1911), stating that "Tāntrism, or Śāktism, is Hindūism arrived at its last and worst stage of medieval development" (Williams 1911, 123).[85]

As Strube pointed out, "the role of Tantra in Indian history was the subject of ongoing controversies. These peaked just at the time when the Theosophists settled in Bombay (now Mumbai) and relocated their headquarters to Adyar […] at the end of 1882" (Strube 2022, 43). In other words, the debates revolving around tantra perfectly illustrate the diversity of South Asian interests that the Theosophical Society encountered upon their arrival. Owing to the theosophists' collaboration with Dayananda, they initially followed his assessments of the primitive and immoral nature of the tantras. However, during the 1880s, South Asian intellectuals, many of whom were members of the Theosophical Society, started to underscore the value of tantra. These contrasting voices propelled the examination of the topic. Theosophy's journal, *The Theosophist*, was the main venue for these contrasting explorations.[86] Established in 1879, it was internationally distributed and thus served as

[84] The exclusive Vedic origin of Hindu religions was propagated not only by Hindu reformers such as Dayananda but also by orientalists such as Müller (Strube 2022, 42).

[85] For an overview of non-South Asian perspectives on tantra, which took their beginning with William Jones's essay "On the Literature of the Hindus" (1790), see Urban (2003, 48–52).

[86] Theosophical periodicals played a significant role in disseminating theosophical concepts. Aside from *The Theosophist* (1879–present) further periodicals were inaugurated, such as *The Path* (1886–1896), *Lucifer* (1889–1897) and *The Lamp* (1894–1900) (McCann 2020, 181).

theosophy's main vehicle for exchanging opinions between European, US-American, and South Asian theosophists (Baier 2009a, 1:318). Between October 1879 and November 1880, Dayananda published segments of his autobiography in *The Theosophist*.[87] In the second part, featured in December 1979, he attacked the tantras, strongly rejecting them for their alleged impurity and falsity:

> But no sooner had I opened them, than my eye fell upon such an amount of incredible obscenities, mistranslations, misinterpretations of text and absurdity, that I felt perfectly horrified. […] By actually reading the whole contents of the *Tantrās* I fully assured myself of the craft and viciousness of the authors of this disgusting literature which is regarded as RELIGIOUS! (D. Saraswati 1879, 66–67, original emphasis)

While at the time of publication, the Theosophical Society still sympathised with Dayananda's criticism, his articles triggered a theosophical debate about the value of the tantras, which ultimately resulted in "the Theosophical Society [abandoning] the well-trodden path of 'Tantra-bashing'" (Baier 2016, 327). The next chapters will explore the consequences of this shift for *kuṇḍalinī*.

5.2. The First Wave of *Kuṇḍalinī*'s Scientification

Theosophy's interest in *kuṇḍalinī* commenced in the early 1880s. As mentioned, tantra enjoyed a questionable reputation during the nineteenth century as a fundamental cause of Hinduism's decay. However, Dayananda's open condemnation of the tantras in *The Theosophist* triggered a gradual reorientation in 1880. The debates on tantra also involved *kuṇḍalinī*, a key tenet of tantric texts and subtle-body concepts, which was thenceforth discussed along theosophical and biomedical lines. The "first wave" of *kuṇḍalinī*'s scientification commenced with its initial reference in *The Theosophist* in 1880 and concluded in 1891, the year of Blavatsky's passing, marking a watershed in Thesosophy's history. The following chapters will assess the significance of *kuṇḍalinī*'s reference in "The Dream of Ravan" and explore its integration into theosophical discourses.

[87] At Colonel Olcott's urging, Dayananda agreed to translate his autobiography from Hindi to English and publish it successively in *The Theosophist*. However, after Dayananda's break with the theosophists, he ceased working on this project. Therefore, only three parts of his autobiography were distributed in *The Theosophist* (Baier 2009a, 1:308–309).

5.2.1. Truth Seeker's Interest in "The Dream of Ravan" (1853–1854)

In January 1880, an anonymous European theosophist, using the pen name "Truth Seeker", contributed to *The Theosophist* with an article titled "Yoga Philosophy".[88] The value of Truth Seeker's article lies in its reference to the English publication "The Dream of Ravan" and its mention of *kuṇḍalinī*. The *Dublin University Magazine*, which published "The Dream of Ravan", was likely the first journal to mention *kuṇḍalinī* in a European language. However, owing to its limited reach, it is safe to suggest that the history of *kuṇḍalinī*'s international dissemination began with Truth Seeker's letter (Baier 2009a, 1:325).

"The Dream of Ravan. A Mystery" initially appeared as a series of four articles in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1853 and 1854.[89] The *Dublin University Magazine* was published monthly between 1833 and 1877 and featured contributions by leading poets, novelists, political thinkers, and social reformers of Great Britain. Being a literary journal that followed an "overlapping trail of romanticism and intellectualism" (Hall 1999, 5), "The Dream of Ravan" fitted right in. Revolving around narrations inspired by the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana*, the articles include several translated passages from Hindu texts and discuss Hindu philosophical concepts. Unfortunately, the author of "The Dream of Ravan" is unknown, but whoever wrote it was most likely a British orientalist, well versed in Sanskrit and other South Asian languages.[90] In 1895, The Theosophical Society published *The Dream of Ravan* as a reprint, comprising its four parts. George R. S. Mead (1863–1933), a prominent member of the Theosophical Society at the turn of the century, wrote its preface, praising the book for its value to students of theosophy and yoga. Another theosophical reprint was released in 1974. In her introduction to the second reprint, the theosophist Sophia Wadia claimed that

[88] Baier first mentioned Truth Seeker's article (2009a, 1:325–326); Strube later discussed it against the backdrop of global and local debates on tantra (2022, 44–45).

[89] Truth Seeker claimed that the four parts were published successively between October 1853 and January 1854. However, archival research into the issues of the *Dublin University Magazine* demonstrated that the fourth part was not published in January 1854 but in April 1854 (N.N. 1853a; 1853b; 1853c; 1854). There are a few other minor mistakes (or amendments) in Truth Seeker's quotes from "The Dream of Ravan", e.g., using "path" instead of "road" or "ether" instead of "æther", and so on (Truth Seeker 1880, 86). The theosophical reprint of 1895 used the original manuscripts of the *Dublin University Magazine*, omitting Truth Seeker's (un)intentional modifications (N.N. 1895).

[90] Owing to the author's anonymity, one can only guess whether a man or a woman composed the articles. According to Hall's examination of the *Dublin University Magazine*, both men and women contributed to the journal (Hall 1999). Therefore, I will use the gender-neutral pronoun "they" when referring to the author of "The Dream of Ravan".

Blavatsky was acquainted with the anonymous author of "The Dream of Ravan".[91] Wadia further claimed that the book's "main value consists in the theosophic and mystic lore" (Wadia, in N.N. 1974, iii). Since the initial articles were published over a decade before the formation of the Theosophical Society, the suggestion of any theosophical involvement must be rejected as delusive. Instead, the above suggestions indicate attempts to appropriate the work for the theosophical cause.

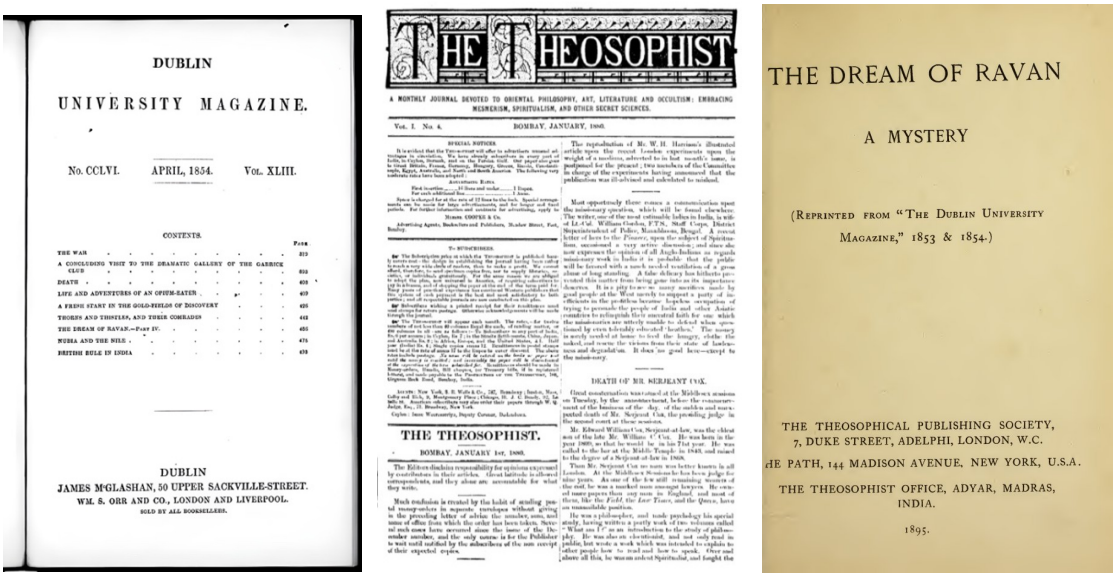

Figure 1: "The Dream of Ravan" (Part IV) across its three publication platforms (from left to right): Initial publication in April 1854 in the *Dublin University Magazine* (N.N. 1854), its partial republishing in January 1880 in *The Theosophist* (Truth Seeker 1880), and its publication as a book in 1895 by the Theosophical Society (N.N. 1895).

The most interesting portions of "The Dream of Ravan" are included in Part IV, initially published in April 1854 and partially republished in *The Theosophist* in 1880 (Figure 1).[92] Therein, the author details the spiritual experiences and practices of the fictional sage Maricha.[93] Living in a hermitage in Lanka (Ceylon, now Sri Lanka), Maricha is believed to

[91] Sophia Wadia's narrative was later reiterated in modified form by the US-American spiritual teachers Mark L. Prophet and Elizabeth C. Prophet, who suggested that Koot Hoomi, one of the two Mahatamas, had contributed to "The Dream of Ravan" while staying in England (Wadia, in N.N. 1974, iii; Prophet and Prophet 2003, 172).

[92] Further portions of Part IV of "The Dream of Ravan" were published in the January 1881 issue of *The Theosophist* under the title "Extracts from the 'Dream of Ravan'". Although it was not Truth Seeker who published the article but a person signing with "an English F.T.S." (F.T.S. signifies a member of the Theosophical Society), they are nevertheless likely the same person (English F.S.T 1881, 90–91).

[93] Maricha is a central figure of the Ramayana. He is described as an advanced spiritual master who helped Lanka's king Ravana kidnap the Hindu goddess Sita, which resulted in a war between Rama (an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu) and Ravana. For further context, see Goldman (2012).

have attained several siddhis and is committed to what the author renders as "Hindu transcendental wisdom" (N.N. 1853c, 678). In addition to his ascetic and yogic practices, at times he also "followed the path laid down by the more ancient and profounder school of Alandi,[94] and sought to attain, and sometimes deemed that he had attained, the condition of the illumined Yogi" (N.N. 1854, 463). To support the narration of Maricha's yogic practices, the author uses translated sections derived from the *Jñānēśvarī*, a thirteen-century commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* written in Old Marathi. They praise *Jñānēśvarī* as the "most mystic of all mystic books" (N.N. 1974, 189). According to Mallinson and Singleton, the *Jñānēśvarī* counts among the "earliest texts to teach haṭhayogic methods of raising Kuṇḍalinī" (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 183).[95] In particular, its sixth chapter addresses *kuṇḍalinī*'s ascent through the yogic body. Consequently, the mystical experience of the "illumined Yogi" (N.N. 1974, 189) depicted in these passages likely refers to the awakening of *kuṇḍalinī* in the yogic body. By including this passage in "Yoga Philosophy", Truth Seeker provided theosophists with the first description of *kuṇḍalinī*'s activation:

> When this path is beheld, then thirst and hunger are forgotten: night and day are undistinguished in this path. […] The bud of understanding is dissolved, the sense of smell no longer remains in the nostrils, but, together with the *Power*, retires into the middle chamber. Then with a discharge from above, the reservoir of moon fluid of immortality (contained in the brain) leaning over on one side, communicates into the mouth of the Power. Thereby the tubes (nerves) are filled with the fluid, it penetrates into all the members; and in every direction the vital breath dissolves thereinto. (Truth Seeker 1880, 86, original emphasis)

Truth Seeker further replicates a footnote from "The Dream of Ravan",[96] which intends to explain the meaning of "power", as used in the above quote: "This extraordinary power, who is termed elsewhere the World Mother – the casket of Supreme Spirit, is technically called Kundalini, which may be rendered serpentine, or annular. Somethings [*sic*] related of it would make one imagine it to be electricity personified" (*ibid*.).

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[94] Alandi was the abode and place of death of Jnanadeva (1275–1296), the composer of *Jñānēśvarī* (Baier 2009a, 1:326).

[95] Mallinson and Singleton use translations by the German Indologist Catharina Kiehnle (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 507). While there are earlier translations than those by Kiehnle, it is unlikely that the author of "The Dream of Ravan" accessed a translation of the *Jñānēśvarī*. Considering the early publication of "The Dream of Ravan", paired with scarce scholarship on early *haṭhayogic* texts, it is more likely that they translated the passages from the *Jñānēśvarī* themselves.

[96] Truth Seeker's version does not fully align with the original footnote in the *Dublin University Magazine*. However, the amendments are incidental.

The passage from "The Dream of Ravan" mentioning *kuṇḍalinī* demonstrates that the author was generally willing to align subtle components with scientific and medical terms and concepts, e.g., when they write: "The ways of the tubular vessel (nerves) are broken; the nine-fold property of wind (nervous æther) departs: on which account the functions of the body no longer exist" (N.N. 1854, 463). Considering that they maintain that wind (explained as "nervous æther") moves through tubes (signifying nerves), they evidently associated these medical terms with subtle physiology. The notion of *kuṇḍalinī* then again suggests that the author refers to the South Asian subtle body. Thus, when translated into yogic language, the tubes signify the *nāḍīs*, and the wind corresponds to *prāṇa*. This observation is further underpinned by the author's claim that the "moon fluid of immortality" was stored in the brain. The term "moon fluid" evidently refers to the South Asian concept of amrita (*ibid*.). The discourse of "scientific yoga" enjoyed increasing popularity among South Asian and European physicians, yogis, and theosophists from the 1880s onwards. However, at the time of the publication of "The Dream of Ravan" (1853 and 1854), such associations were still scarce. Due to the anonymity of the author of "The Dream of Ravan", assessing their inspirations poses a challenge. Two possible sources for "The Dream of Ravan" and its scientistic interpretation of *kuṇḍalinī* are N.C. Paul's *A Treatise on the Yoga Philosophy* (1851) and the reception of South Asian philosophy among German Romantic mesmerists.

N.C. Paul (1829–1880) was a Bengali physician who graduated from the Bengal Medical College in Calcutta in 1841 and expressed a strong interest in yoga.[97] His *A Treatise on the Yoga Philosophy* attempts to explain yogic phenomena through a biomedical lens (Paul 1851, iv). Despite causing somewhat of a stir among South Asian physiologists, Paul's book might have fallen into obscurity if it had not been for Madame Blavatsky, who came across it by chance (and initially thought it was composed by an English medical doctor). Owing to her great interest, *The Theosophist* reprinted portions of Paul's book, amended with Blavatsky's comments (Baier 2009a, 1:318; Helena P. Blavatsky 1892, 310). Singleton suggested that Paul's treatise likely pioneered the discourse on medical yoga and inspired subsequent translations of the yogic body in terms of physical anatomy (Singleton 2010, 52). This pioneering achievement notwithstanding, the book's actual impact before its republication in *The Theosophist* between 1880 and 1881 (and its subsequent republication

[97] N.C. Paul is also known as Navin Candra Pal in Hindi and Nobin Chander Paul in Anglicised Bengali (Kraler 2022, 251). Baier (2009a, 1:249–250), Kraler (2022, 124–126, 231–235), and Singleton (2010, 52–53) discussed Paul's impact on biomedical yoga discourses.

as a book in 1883) is questionable.[98] Thus, it is doubtful whether the author of "The Dream of Ravan" had access to Paul's book. However, even if they had consulted Paul's book, it would have only inspired them to approach the yogic body with a biomedical stance, in as much as topics such as *kuṇḍalinī*, electricity, and the alignment of subtle components with anatomical features do not play a role in Paul's treatise.

German mesmerism poses another potential inspiration for "The Dream of Ravan"'s scientistic interpretation of *kuṇḍalinī*. Carl Josef H. Windischmann (1775–1839), a German professor of philosophy and medicine (University of Bonn), was the most important Romantic author addressing South Asian philosophy through a mesmeric lens (Baier 2009a, 1:222).[99] In his monumental work *Die Philosophie im Fortgang der Weltgeschichte* (*Philosophy in the Course of World History*, 1827–1834), Windischmann dedicated substantial portions to South Asian philosophical concepts, as outlined in the *Upanishads*. Against the backdrop of mesmerism, he associated *prāṇa* with "animal-electrical or magnetic fluid" (Windischmann 1832, 1347)[100] and suggested its movement along the central channel (*suṣumnā*), which he assumed to correspond with the "Arteria vertebralis" (*ibid*., 1351).[101] Considering that electricity and other "imponderables" had served as an explanatory metaphor in mesmerism and earlier examinations of magic, Windischmann's correlation of *prāṇa* with electricity reflects the zeitgeist (Benz 1971; Feldt 1985).[102] However, what is indeed striking is his association of *suṣumnā* with the vertebral artery. Windischmann thereby anticipated what would become common sense in later theosophical

[98] In *Through the Caves and Jungles of Hindostan* (1892), Blavatsky pointed out that the book was almost out of stock and difficult to get: "I was told that the pamphlet of Dr. Paul was ordered to be burned 'as being offensive to the science of physiology and pathology.' At the time I visited India [in 1878] copies of it were very great rarities" (Helena P. Blavatsky 1892, 311).

[99] Baier demonstrated that Windischmann's interpretation of South Asian philosophy was based on Romantic mesmerism. For a thorough examination of German mesmerism and Carl Josef H. Windischmann in the light of meditation and yoga reception, refer to Baier's *Meditation und Moderne* (2009a, 1:179–252).

[100] Original quote in German: "bald animalisch-elektrisches, bald magnetisches Fluidum" (Windischmann 1832, 1347), paraphrased by M.T.

[101] The French orientalist Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1805) retranslated a Persian translation of the *Upanishads* into Latin, the *Oupnek'hat* (1801–1802). Therein exists an even earlier example of *prāṇa*'s association with mesmerism (Baier 2009a, 1:203–204).

[102] The natural sciences of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries discussed immeasurable factors such as heat, light, gravity, magnetism, and electricity as "imponderables" (Feldt 1985, 33). The relationship of these phenomena to each other and their attribution to an underlying agent was a topic of much debate and was particularly present in the mesmeristic discourse. Mesmer himself wavered in his descriptions of "his" fluid, questioning whether it was gravity, an invisible fire, magnetism, or rather electricity. Ultimately, he decided to name it animal magnetism due to its similarities to the known phenomenon of magnetism (Baier 2009a, 1:185).

texts: the explanation of subtle components with biomedical language (Baier 2009a, 1:239–243; Windischmann 1832, 1347–1351).

Windischmann's mesmeric interpretation of South Asian philosophy was too extensive and complex for a broad reception. For this reason, no comprehensive translation of Windischmann's *Die Philosophie im Fortgang der Weltgeschichte* was available to the English-speaking world (Baier 2009a, 1:243). Cursory portions of it were disseminated through English translations and publications of mesmerists, including Joseph Ennemoser's *The History of Magic* (1854)[103] and John Campbell Colquhoun's *An History of Magic, Witchcraft, and Animal Magnetism* (1851) (*ibid*., 1:253). While Ennemoser's work in particular would become a major inspiration for later theosophists,[104] it is unlikely that the author of "The Dream of Ravan" was aware of Ennemoser's work and the inherent reference to Windischmann's receptions of South Asian philosophy.[105]

While the lack of sources does not allow definitive conclusions, I suggest that "The Dream of Ravan" pioneered *kuṇḍalinī*'s reference to electricity and perhaps included the first anatomical explanation of components of the yogic subtle body in the English-speaking world.

Truth Seeker concludes the article by considering the passages from "The Dream of Ravan" against the backdrop of European occultism, such as expressed by the Welsh alchemist Thomas Vaughan (1621–1666) in his *Anima Magica Abscondita* (1650). Perhaps, as Strube suggested, Truth Seeker "attempted to make sense of what he[106] learned in European esoteric terms, while reaching out to 'the East' for its true meaning" (Strube 2022, 44). Accordingly, Truth Seeker unambiguously followed the orientalist stereotype of emphasising the spiritual superiority of the "East" over the "West" when posing the following inquiry: "We Western Theosophists earnestly desire information […] and turn to the East for Light" (Truth Seeker 1880, 87). However, this closing sentence could also simply indicate Truth Seeker's sense of courtesy and respect without an orientalist leaning.

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[103] Original title, *Geschichte der Magie*, published in 1844 in Leipzig.

[104] According to Baier, Ennemoser's *The History of Magic* became one of Blavatsky's key sources for her *Isis Unveiled* (1877) (Baier 2009a, 1:258). See also Baier's article "Mesmeric Yoga and the Development of Meditation within the Theosophical Society" (2012) for a discussion on mesmeric influences on theosophical views on mediation and yoga.

[105] Ennemoser's *The History of Magic* was published in 1854 – the same year as the fourth part of "The Dream of Ravan", where the author defines *kuṇḍalinī* as electricity. Further research is required to analyse mesmeric influence on "The Dream of Ravan" thoroughly.

[106] Truth Seeker's article provides no information on the author's sex.

The value of Truth Seeker's article is twofold. First, it introduced *kuṇḍalinī* into theosophical discourse revolving around tantra and yoga. Second, by reiterating *kuṇḍalinī*'s interpretations as proposed by the author of "The Dream of Ravan", Truth Seeker stimulated *kuṇḍalinī*'s association with natural science. Considering *kuṇḍalinī*'s increasing scientification in the waning nineteenth and throughout the twentieth centuries, its interpretation as "electricity personified" warrants closer examination.

5.2.2. The Interpretation of *Kuṇḍalinī* as Electricity

From the eighteenth century onwards, an increasing number of religious players employed electricity to explain their ideas. Notable examples include a circle of German Pietist theologians headed by Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782), who embraced electricity to define their understanding of God and His creation of the world. In this way, the "electrical theologians" (Benz 1971, 27)[107] aimed to bridge physics and religion and hoped that scientific laws would enable a redefinition of God's relation to the world and the individual. Their "electrical philosophy", which also referenced magic, anticipated nineteenth-century attempts to align occultism with physics and other branches of science (Baier 2009a, 1:184–188; Benz 1971).[108] In theosophy, the extension of the concept of "electricity" beyond the sphere of science played a role from at least 1877 when Blavatsky published her *Isis Unveiled*. As Goodrick-Clarke pointed out, Blavatsky's use of the term "electricity" in her writings was strongly inspired by mesmerism and the contemporary hype resulting from recent scientific developments, e.g., by Michael Faraday, Samuel Morse, and Thomas Edison (Goodricke-Clarke 2004b, 74–75). However, while Blavatsky linked the Sanskrit term akasha to "occult electricity" (Helena P. Blavatsky 1877, 1:xxvii), *kuṇḍalinī* had not yet found its way into theosophy. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the author of "The Dream of Ravan" used "electricity" in their attempt to understand *kuṇḍalinī*. Following Truth Seeker's article, "electricity" as a metaphor for *kuṇḍalinī* became prevalent in theosophical circles during the 1880s (and beyond). Notable examples include Blavatsky's *The Voice of the Silence* (1889) and Srishchandra Basu's *The Esoteric Philosophy of the Tantras: Shiva Samhita* (1887).

[107] German original: "Die elektrischen Theologen" (Benz 1971, 27), translated by M.T.

[108] Refer to Goodrick-Clarke for a broad overview of "electricity" as appropriated by esoteric circles (Goodricke-Clarke 2004b).

In *The Voice of the Silence*, Blavatsky used several designations to describe *kuṇḍalinī*'s electric characteristics. Aligning with the theosophical custom, she used physical terminology to explain the existence of nature's hidden forces and powers, with *kuṇḍalinī* denoting a paramount example. Accordingly, in *The Voice of the Silence*, she portrayed *kuṇḍalinī* as "an electric fiery occult or *Fohatic* power, the great pristine force, which underlies all organic and inorganic matter" (Helena P. Blavatsky 1889, 78, original emphasis).[109] The curious notion of "*Fohatic* power" reinforced Blavatsky's endeavour to "electrify" *kuṇḍalinī*. In the *Theosophical Glossary*, Blavatsky details her understanding of fohat: "A term used to represent the active (male) potency of the Sakti (female reproductive power) in nature. The essence of cosmic electricity. An occult Tibetan term for […] primordial light: and in the universe of manifestation the ever-present electrical energy and ceaseless destructive and formative power" (Helena P. Blavatsky 1918, 111). Blavatsky's association of *kuṇḍalinī* with fohat likely drew on an 1882 article in *The Theosophist* titled "The Aryan-Arhat Esoteric Tenets on the Sevenfold Principle in Man", by the South Asian theosophist T. Subba Row. There, Row writes: "Śakti, that mysterious energy or force […] is called by the Buddhist Arahats of Tibet – FO-HAT" (Row 1882, 94). As will be discussed below, other theosophists, e.g., Narayanaswami Aiyer, would adopt Blavatsky and Row's use of fohat to describe *kuṇḍalinī* as electricity.

Srishchandra Basu (1861–1918) was a Bengali Sanskrit scholar and, since 1881, a member of the Theosophical Society.[110] Additionally, he was devoted to the Arya and Brahmo Samaj and showed interest in Hindu reformism and revivalism (Bose 1932, 168; Strube 2022, 116).[111] His translation and interpretation of the *Śivasaṃhitā*, titled *The Esoteric Philosophy of the Tantras: Shiva Sanhita* (1887),[112] poses another key example of a text that explained *kuṇḍalinī* as electricity. As discussed in the previous chapter, the *Śivasaṃhitā* was composed

[109] This quote, along with other designations for *kuṇḍalinī* included in Blavatsky's *The Voice of the Silence*, demonstrates the influence of earlier publications in *The Theosophist*, first and foremost Truth Seeker's "Yoga Philosophy" and Baradakanta Majumdar's "Tantric Philosophy". Particularly the latter part of the quote, i.e., "the great pristine force, which underlies all organic and inorganic matter" (Helena P. Blavatsky 1889, 78), almost identically replicates Baradakanta's description of *kuṇḍalinī* in his "Tantric Philosophy", where he writes "this Kundalini appears to be the grand pristine force which underlies organic and inorganic matter (Majumdar 1880b, 173). Baradakanta will be discussed below.

[110] I mostly follow the Bengal custom of using the first name instead of the last name for protagonists from Bengal. N.C. Paul, e.g., whose name is anglicised, poses an exception.

[111] For a thorough discussion of the complex figure of Srishchandra Basu, see Strube (2022, 116–123).

[112] Srishchandra initially published his text serially in *The Arya* in 1884. In 1887, it was published as a book, with republications in 1893 and 1914. According to Mallinson, particularly his 1914 edition yielded significant influence among scholars and practitioners (Mallinson 2007, xi).

between the thirteenth and fifteenth century CE and comprised tantric and *haṭhayogic* elements.[113] Despite this eclectic character, Srishchandra's translation was celebrated as the first English translation of a tantric text (Bose 1932, 236). The *Śivasaṃhitā* addresses *kuṇḍalinī* at several points, primarily in chapters four and five. However, Srishchandra's association of *kuṇḍalinī* with electricity appears in chapter two, verse 23: "In [the (mul)adhar lotus] is the supreme goddess Kundali of the form of electricity, in a coil" (S. Basu 1893, 12).

Srishchandra's younger brother, Bamandas Basu (1867–1930), wrote a much-noticed and referenced article for *The Theosophist* titled "The Anatomy of the Tantras" (1888) to emphasise the biomedical significance of his brother's translation. Therein, he follows earlier attempts to explain subtle anatomy in terms of physical anatomy, e.g., associating the chakras with the plexuses of the body. Despite mentioning the chakras and the three principal *nāḍī*s, i.e., *suṣumnā*, *iḍā*, and *piṅgalā*, Bamandas omits reference to *kuṇḍalinī* (B. D. Basu 1888, 370–373).

John Woodroffe criticised Srishchandra (and perhaps theosophy as a whole) for using electricity as a metaphor for *kuṇḍalinī*: "The translation of Srīśh-Candra-Vasu […] said, that Kuṇḍalinī is 'of the form of electricity'. There is no warrant for this in the text, and Kuṇḍalinī is not, according to the Śāstra, mere electricity" (Woodroffe 1950, 153). James Mallinson's 2007 translation of the *Śivasaṃhitā* renders verse 23 of chapter two differently, replacing electricity with "the form of a streak of lightning" (Mallinson 2007, 27). Mallinson and Woodroffe thus rejected *kuṇḍalinī*'s association with electricity as distorted, as Srishchandra's translation suggests that the author of the *Śivasaṃhitā* possessed modern scientific insights.

In sum, the theosophical use of "electricity" as a metaphor for *kuṇḍalinī* can be traced back to Truth Seeker's article (1880) and became prevalent in theosophical discourse during the 1880s. Prior to their theosophical appropriation, "electricity" and other imponderables were discussed by scientists and mesmerists. The latter attributed imponderables to an underlying agent, thus anticipating the identification of electricity with *kuṇḍalinī*.

[113] The previous chapter examined the South Asian origin of the text.

5.2.3. *Kuṇḍalinī*'s Role in Theosophical Discourses between 1880 and 1891

The previous chapters demonstrated that Truth Seeker's article, which quoted portions from "The Dream of Ravan", introduced *kuṇḍalinī* to theosophical circles and presented the South Asian concept in the light of a concept from modern natural science. In the wake of Truth Seeker's contribution, *kuṇḍalinī* became intertwined with the theosophical discourse on tantra and gained increasing traction.[114]

Truth Seeker's inquiries, along with the earlier publication of Dayananda's autobiographical account, triggered an exchange between South Asian, European, and US-American theosophists, negotiating the value of tantra and its link to science. As mentioned above, theosophy initially shared Dayananda's negative opinion of tantra – the ultimate break happened in August 1880 (Baier 2009a, 1:329). Accordingly, Truth Seeker's "Yoga Philosophy" had not yet challenged Dayananda's opinions but instead underscored his authority on "Eastern wisdom". Nevertheless, reactions to Truth Seeker's article openly condemned Dayananda and Hindu reformism in general, propelling theosophy's shift in its views on tantra (Strube 2022, 40). Strube summarises these dynamics as "Bengali intervention" (*ibid*., 7), emphasising the key role of learned Bengalis in tantra's (and *kuṇḍalinī*'s) scientification. However, as Strube argued, the impact of the "Bengali intervention" was not restricted to theosophy but, as "a direct predecessor to the Avalon project, it also lies at the root of the transformation of academic perceptions of Tantra" (*ibid*.).[115] Another layer of the Bengali (and consequently theosophical) perception of tantra pertains to its redefinition as "Indian esotericism" (*ibid*.). Baradakanta Majumdar, the leading voice of the "Bengali intervention", compares tantrikas, i.e., practitioners of tantra, with Freemasons and Rosicrucians, and elsewhere refers to "Tantric Occultism" (Majumdar 1880a, 244; 1880b, 173). In the context of theosophy, tantra's identification with esotericism and occultism did not contradict but instead reinforced the belief in its scientific value.[116] As demonstrated above, natural science and concepts such as magnetism and electricity enjoyed

[114] Baier (2009a) and Strube (2022) have thoroughly discussed the theosophical debates of that period. While Baier has disclosed several sources and pioneered research on theosophy's early views on meditation and yoga, the value of Strube's scholarship lies in emphasising the Bengali involvement – what he calls the "Bengali intervention". Aside from the primary literature consulted, this chapter mainly rests on Baier and Strube's findings.

[115] The "Avalon project" designates the impactful publications by Sir John Woodroffe and his Bengali network that substantially contributed to his work. This will be addressed below.

[116] Compare the understanding of magic as an ancient science, which is only perceived as superstitious by those uninitiated (Strube 2022, 38–39).

great popularity among theosophists and other esoteric players, who used them to underpin their claims. Accordingly, among theosophists and the Bengali authors of *The Theosophist*, tantra was mainly "negotiated in light of its alleged scientific value" (Strube 2022, 41). These dynamics also pertained to *kuṇḍalinī* and furthered its scientification. Two theosophists who significantly helped *kuṇḍalinī* gain traction in theosophical circles were Baradakanta Majumdar and Narayanaswami Aiyer. Their contributions to *The Theosophists* in 1880 and 1891, respectively, provide valuable insights into its appropriation by theosophical writers.

Baradakanta Majumdar (n.d.a.) contributed four articles to *The Theosophist* between April and December 1880.[117] Except for the last, all of them reference *kuṇḍalinī*. His first article, titled "Tantric Philosophy", positioned *kuṇḍalinī* as a fundamental tenet of tantra, while interpreting it through a scientistic lens similarly to "The Dream of Ravan": "This Kundalini appears to be the grand pristine force which underlies organic and inorganic matter. Modern science also teaches us that heat, light, electricity, magnetism, &c., are but the modifications of one great force" (Majumdar 1880b, 173). In doing so, Baradakanta expanded upon the initial notion of electricity by incorporating other imponderables. Moreover, he presented two manifestations of *kuṇḍalinī*, "adhakundalini" and "paramakundalini", which he associated with "one great primeval force or power which created the universe" (*ibid*.). Additionally, by defending tantra as "an invaluable treasure, embracing besides religion and theology, law and medicine, cosmology, yoga, spiritualism, rules regarding the elementaries and almost all the branches of transcendental philosophy" (*ibid*.), Baradakanta suggested *kuṇḍalinī*'s influence beyond the spheres of religion and science. His July and October contributions to *The Theosophist* formed the two-part article, "A Glimpse of Tantrik Occultism". Therein, he referenced the *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa* and its *kuṇḍalinī* teachings. The articles include an intriguing portrayal of the tantric body comprising "occult nerves and forces" (Majumdar 1880a, 244), wherein he positioned *kuṇḍalinī* as "the great positive force" (*ibid*.). However, differing from "Tantric Philosophy", he now detailed *kuṇḍalinī*'s position and role in the tantric body, which he defined equally in religious and medical terminology. Baier and Strube underscored the pioneering importance of Baradakanta's article for the subsequent reception of *kuṇḍalinī*. Their assessment of Baradakanta's pioneering spirit stems from Arthur Avalon's groundbreaking 1918 publication, *The Serpent Power*, which further pursued Baradakanta's examination of the *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa* (Baier 2009a, 1:328; Strube 2022, 52). In sum, Baradakanta, who is best known as a fierce defender

[117] For a detailed discussion of Baradakanta Majumdar, refer to Strube (2022, 43–48).

of the tantras, introduced *kuṇḍalinī* as a key tenet of tantric philosophy and a central element of the tantric body. His articles praise *kuṇḍalinī* as a force or power that has an effect on several domains, including theology, physics, and cosmogony, and thus merits more attention than the footnote it received in "The Dream of Ravan".

Narayanaswami Aiyer (1854–1918) was an active member of the Theosophical Society of Kumbakonam, a town in Tamil Nadu.[118] In addition to contributing to *The Theosophist*, Aiyer translated some *Upanishads* for the Theosophical Society.[119] While Baradakanta had been involved in *kuṇḍalinī*'s earliest discussions among theosophists, Aiyer concluded the first wave of its theosophical reception. Two articles, published in the March 1891 issue of *The Theosophist*, are of foremost importance: "Yoga-Kundilini [*sic*] Upanishad of Krishna-Yajur-Veda"[120] and "Occult Physiology". Aside from emphasising the scientific character of *kuṇḍalinī* (which he rendered "kundilini"), he thoroughly illustrated its attributes, as outlined in the *Yoga-Kundalini Upanishad*.[121]

The "Yoga-Kundilini Upanishad" was co-published with a second member of the Kumbakonam Theosophical Society and is the first article of *The Theosophist* exclusively dedicated to *kuṇḍalinī*. Aiyer summarises the content of the *Yoga-Kundalini Upanishad* with the following words:

> In this Upanishad are stated the ways by which Kundilini [*sic*] (Sakti) is roused from the navel up to the middle of the eyebrows and then to Shasrara (the pineal gland): this being the most important work which an adept has to perform by which he is able to destroy at will his lunar form as stated in the "Voice of Silence", page 9. (Aiyer 1891b, 338)

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[118] Narayanaswami Aiyer's surname indicates his belonging to the Tamil Brahmin caste. In *The Theosophist*, his name is spelt "Narrainasawmy Iyer" (Aiyer 1891a, 349) and in *Thirty Minor Upanishads*, "K. Narayanasvami Aiyar" (Aiyer 1914).

[119] Aiyer's work was also respected beyond theosophical circles. This is evident from John Woodroffe's recommendation of Aiyer's *Upanishad* translations in his *The Serpent Power* (Woodroffe 1950, 263).

[120] Aiyer published only chapter one of the *Yoga-Kundalini Upanishad* in the March 1891 edition of *The Theosophist*. The remaining chapters, two and three, followed in the April 1891 edition.

[121] The *Yoga-Kundalini Upanishad* belongs to the *Krishna-Yajurveda*, which was probably composed during the fourteenth through fifteenth century CE. Aiyer published the translation of the "Yoga-Kundilini Upanishad" as part of his book *Thirty Minor Upanishads* in 1914 (Aiyer 1914, 260–272). Interestingly, he omitted theosophical explanations in *Thirty Minor Upanishads*, which he had initially used in his 1891 article. For instance, he forewent using "astral body", "nirvana", and "pineal gland" to describe subtle physiology and *kuṇḍalinī*'s movement therein. Moreover, he removed the reference to Blavatsky's *The Voice of the Silence* (Aiyer 1891b, 338–343; 1914, 260–266). As he seemed to remain loyal to the Theosophical Society, which published his *Thirty Minor Upanishads*, these modifications were perhaps a reaction to scandals revolving around Blavatsky.

In the quote, Aiyer depicts *kuṇḍalinī*'s abode as situated in the heart, which is not uncommon for early texts addressing *kuṇḍalinī* (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 178). However, it is remarkable that he refers to Blavatsky's *The Voice of the Silence* as an authoritative source that treats the goals of *kuṇḍalinī yoga*.[122] On the referenced page of *The Voice of the Silence*, Blavatsky instructs the reader to "let the fiery power retire into the inmost chamber, the chamber of the Heart and the abode of the World's Mother. Then from the heart that Power shall rise into the […] the place between thine eyes, when it becomes […] the voice which filleth all, thy Master's voice" (Helena P. Blavatsky 1889, 9). Aside from Aiyer's detailed examination of *kuṇḍalinī*, which aligned with Blavatsky's views, his loyalty to the theosophical cause is evident from his garnishing of his description of *kuṇḍalinī*'s movement with theosophical terms, including "magnetic breath" (which theosophists appropriated from mesmerism), "astral body", and "atomic consciousness" (Aiyer 1891b, 339, 342).

His article "Occult Physiology" is based on a lecture Aiyer delivered during the Annual Convention of the Theosophical Society at Adyar on December 29, 1890.[123] In contrast to his first article, in "Occult Physiology" Aiyer generally addresses "the mystical lore contained in the Upanishads" (Aiyer 1891a, 349). He defined the content of (some of) the Upanishads as occult while underpinning their "scientific character" (*ibid*.). His interpretations of the subtle body and its components followed this dual positioning. In an attempt to "reconcile his findings from the Yoga Upaniṣads with theosophical doctrine" (Kraler 2022, 129), he fused medical and theosophical language to outline the subtle (or astral) body and *kuṇḍalinī*'s role therein: "We find that electricity, in order that it may manifest itself […], wants some wire or medium; so pranas or magnetic currents require wires, which we call nadis, in order that they may manifest themselves in the astral body" (Aiyer 1891a, 352). Although Aiyer associated electricity with *prāṇa* rather than *kuṇḍalinī*, he nonetheless considered *kuṇḍalinī* through a scientistic lens: "Now *Kundilini* [*sic*] is the seat or origin of Prana. It contains the latent quality of magnetic oxygen which preserves the body even when the *prana* or breath is stopped" (Aiyer 1891a, 358, original emphasis).

[122] Although not referring to it, Aiyer perhaps also consulted Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), where she associates the pineal gland with the South Asian subtle body. However, unlike Aiyer, Blavatsky did not associate the pineal gland with the sahasrara chakra but with "the third eye", i.e., the ajna chakra. The pineal gland, as linked to the South Asian subtle body, continued to play a central role in theosophical writings, e.g. in Annie Besant's *A Study in Consciousness* (1904) and Charles W. Leadbeater's *The Chakras* (1927) (Besant 1947, 161; Leadbeater 1972, 41).

[123] Aiyer's lecture "Occult Physiology" should not be confused with Rudolf Steiner's unrelated lecture book, published under the same name in 1932.

Aiyer's assessment of *kuṇḍalinī* comprising oxygen is perhaps inspired by N. C. Paul, who frequently associated oxygen with yogic breath (Paul 1851, 88).

Another striking aspect of Aiyer's "Occult Physiology" pertains to his perception of *kuṇḍalinī* as a destructive, dangerous force, which "is able to create as well as undo the things of the world, that is it will either kill man or give him power if properly controlled" (Aiyer 1891a, 357). This quote is reminiscent of (almost identical to) Blavatsky's own wordings in her *The Voice of Silence*, where she uttered an urgent warning that "when aroused into action [*kuṇḍalinī*] can as easily kill as it can create" (Helena P. Blavatsky 1889, 77). Theosophical references to *kuṇḍalinī*'s pathological effects were relatively scarce.[124] Nonetheless, the theosophical departure from South Asian tantra and yoga sources, where *kuṇḍalinī* is predominantly portrayed as beneficial and salvatory, is striking and marks the beginning of *kuṇḍalinī*'s pathologisation.

In sum, Aiyer reinforced *kuṇḍalinī*'s scientification and underpinned theosophy's appropriation of the force. The latter is particularly evident from Aiyer's reference to the *Upanishads* and Blavatsky's writings, which he presented as two equally significant sources for understanding *kuṇḍalinī*.

5.3. The Second Wave of Kundalini's Scientification (1896–1933)

The first wave of *kuṇḍalinī*'s scientification was predominantly carried forward by South Asian theosophists, who contributed to *The Theosophist* between 1880 and 1891. The demarcation of the second wave is not as straightforward.[125] Owing to theosophical schisms following Blavatsky's death, the proliferation of theosophical writings, and the increased interest in South Asian philosophy, the landscape is much more complex than in the 1880s. Rather than attempting a comprehensive exploration of the "second wave" of kundalini's scientification, this chapter focuses on four authors and one publication project representative of this period: The South Asian monk Swami Vivekananda, the South Asian

[124] Aside from Aiyer and Blavatsky, the theosophists Charles W. Leadbeater and George S. Arundale (1878–1945) also mentioned *kuṇḍalinī*'s potential dangers in *The Inner Life* (1910) and *Kundalini. An Occult Experience* (1938), respectively (Leadbeater 1910, 461–478; Arundale 1938, 21–31). Perhaps theosophical assessments of *kuṇḍalinī*'s pathological effects were rooted in the movement's initial dislike of physical yoga exercises and *prāṇāyāma* (Kraler 2022, 123–124; Singleton 2010, 4). These early examples notwithstanding, it was not until the publication of Gopi Krishna's autobiography (1967) that *kuṇḍalinī*'s pathologisation gained traction.

[125] As mentioned in the Introduction of this study, I refrain from using diacritical marks for kundalini during its second and third phases of dissemination.

revolutionary and religious teacher Sri Aurobindo, the project Arthur Avalon (comprising the British judge Sir John Woodroffe and several Bengali intellectuals), the South Asian physiologist Vasant Rele, and the South Asian physicist and yogi Swami Kuvalayananda. These men significantly influenced subsequent perceptions of kundalini, as evidenced by their most fundamental publications on the topic. This results in a rough demarcation of the "second wave" from 1896, when Vivekananda published *Raja Yoga*, through 1933, with Kuvalayananda's publication of *Āsana*.

5.3.1. Swami Vivekananda's Experiential Kundalini

The Bengali Narendranath Datta (1863–1902), better known under his monastic name, Swami Vivekananda, was a representative of late nineteenth-century Hindu revivalism who promoted his distinct reading of Advaita Vedanta in the United States and Europe (Baier 2019). His eventful life and rich work are mostly associated with disseminating modern Hindu thought, advocating Hindu nationalism, and elaborating on modern yoga. The publication of Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* (1896) represented a watershed in kundalini's modern transmission and significantly contributed to its popularisation. Moreover, Vivekananda's interpretation of kundalini emphasised its ties with modern science and placed the concept at the core of different forms of yoga.[126]

5.3.1.1. Vivekananda's Religious and Political Influences

Vivekananda's British-style education and mentors significantly shaped his path. He attended the Scottish Church College in Kolkata, where he studied law but also further immersed himself in classical South Asian philosophy, religion, and arts.[127] In addition, he encountered modern European philosophy, such as German Idealism and evolutionary

[126] Baier (2009b, 2:474–485), De Michelis (2004, 149–180), Foxen (2020, 226–238), and Kraler (2022, 257–273) offer the best analyses of Vivekananda's views on yoga. All of these sources highlight kundalini's central role in Vivekananda's assessment of raja yoga.

[127] Vivekananda's Christian education expanded his horizons but also led to scepticism about his credentials as a Swami later in life. This is exemplified in K.S. MacDonald's book review (1898) of Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga.* MacDonald's refusal to acknowledge Vivekananda's designation as Swami and yogi, along with his accusation that Vivekananda was "a half-Christianized Sudra [a member of a low caste]" (MacDonald 1898, 402) reflects the challenges Vivekananda encountered in establishing authority to discuss religious matters from a Hindu perspective. Considering that Vivekananda was born into a family belonging to the kayastha caste, MacDonald's accusation was not only contemptuous but also wrong.

philosophy. Despite his Christian education, Vivekananda would become a harsh critic of the religion of the colonial rulers of South Asia. This criticism was largely based on Spencer's evolutionary philosophy and views on religion (Brown 2010, 220). In general, Vivekananda's education sparked his interest in the relationship between science and religion, with evolutionary philosophy, e.g., by Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), remaining a key inspiration throughout his writings (Baier 2019, 231; Brown 2010, 211–212).

Aside from the influences of his Christianised education, two individuals played a pivotal role in the shaping of Vivekananda's religious and political thought: the Bengali mystic Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (1836–1886), whom he met in 1881 and to whom he remained loyal until his death; and the Bengali reformer Keshabchandra Sen (1838–1884), leader of the Nava Vidhana Brahmo Samaj. Ramakrishna had a profound and lasting effect on Vivekananda's theological and philosophical work, while Keshabchandra influenced his political and ideological orientation (Baier 2019, 231–233).[128] The Brahmo Samaj's advocacy of using science to legitimise religious teachings resonated with Vivekananda's view that "modern science, including especially the notion of evolution, would help elucidate the ancient Hindu teachings" (Brown 2010, 209). This became a core tenet of Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantic teachings and writings throughout his life (Strube 2023, 94).

Vivekananda's philosophical and theological allegiance lay with Advaita Vedanta.[129] His lectures and writings significantly contributed to its modern interpretation, frequently subsumed under Neo-Vedanta or Neo-Advaita (King 1999, 135–136). Despite being celebrated for advocating religious tolerance and pluralism, Vivekananda's approach was marked by an "inclusivist vision concocted out of a sense of the superiority of the Advaita Vedānta" (Baier 2019, 255). This inclusivist stance towards other religions rested on Vivekananda's belief that all religions "belong to the same great universal truth" (Vivekananda 1991a, 2:366) – a truth that Vivekananda would naturally define within the framework of Advaita Vedanta. He wrote: "The Vedanta includes all sects. […] It is true that we have created a system of a religion in India which we believe to be the only rational religious system extant, but our belief in its rationality rests upon its all-inclusion of the searchers after God" (Vivekananda 1991b, 8:254). Vivekananda's strength lay in

[128] Ramakrishna and Sen met in 1987. While Sen introduced Ramakrishna to the Brahmo Samaj and socio-political ideas revolving around Hindu reformism, Ramakrishna, in turn, influenced Sen's views on religion. It is therefore difficult to separate Ramakrishna and Sen's impact on Vivekananda, both of whom equally assumed the roles of gurus for the latter (Baier 2019, 232; Killingley 2013, 19–20).

[129] Advaita Vedanta is a philosophical school founded by eight-century scholar Shankara, and emerged in the c. eighth century CE. For an introduction to Advaita Vedanta, see Flood (1996, 239–243).

successfully reconciling a broad range of contemporary religious and philosophical currents under Advaita Vedanta. Baier summarised Vivekananda's feat with the following words: "Before dying at a young age, Vivekananda […] succeeded in linking religious, philosophical and socio-political currents of his age which, at first glance, seem virtually impossible to reconcile. The result was a traditional-oriented reform Hinduism that claimed to be a universal religion while simultaneously promoting Indian nationalism" (Baier 2019, 254).

1893 proved a momentous year for Vivekananda. Equipped with his new monastic name, he embarked for the west. Upon his arrival, he attended the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, where he was delegated to represent Hinduism. In his celebrated address, he underscored the scientific nature of Advaita Vedanta, advocated universal religion, and criticised the activities of Christian missionaries in South Asia (Brown 2010, 209; 2012, 135).[130] Due to the affirmative response his lecture received, Vivekananda decided to extend his stay, thus laying the foundation for the ongoing transmission of modern interpretations of yoga. During the following years, he lived up to his (later ascribed) designation as a pioneer in disseminating Hindu thought in the United States and Europe. Some key events included the inception of the Vedanta Society in New York in 1894, which was the first Hindu institution that was established outside of South Asia and which accepted non-South Asian members; the organisation of the first yoga retreat held outside of South Asia in 1895; and lecture tours in England on South Asian philosophy and yoga (Baier 2019, 233–234).

It is vital to highlight that a complex blend of influences governed Vivekananda's activities overseas. These influential currents encompassed, on the one hand, the package that Vivekananda carried along from South Asia, including Hindu reformism, Hindu nationalism, orientalist stereotypes, and theosophical interpretations of the yogic body. On the other hand, prior to Vivekananda's lecture tours, US-American expressions of "metaphysical religions" (Albanese 2007), such as New Thought and Transcendentalism, had played an important role in reinterpreting and subsequently implementing Hindu philosophy into US-American awareness.[131] However, metaphysical religions did not only prepare certain fractions of US-American society for Asian religions, thus paving the way for Vivekananda's receptive

[130] Vivekananda's lecture did not receive unanimous approval. Reverend Joseph Cook of Boston and other Christian participants took offence at Vivekananda's concept of universal religion and were displeased with his criticism of Christian missionaries in South Asia (Williamson 2010, 34).

[131] For a thorough contextualisation of US-American religion and its encounter with South Asian religious traditions and representatives, see Chapters 6 and 20.

audience. They also further influenced Vivekananda's thought, particularly his views on religious universalism (Albanese 2007, 16–17; Baier 2009b, 2:467–472; Strube 2022, 97–98).

5.3.1.2. *Raja Yoga*: Kundalini's Popularisation as "Scientific" Concept

Raja Yoga (1896) stands as Vivekananda's most influential work, reflecting the convergence of his religious and political influences. Based on a lecture series delivered in New York during the winter of 1895–1896, the book made significant contributions to contemporary views on kundalini. Notably, it sought to elucidate it through a dual lens of religion and science, marking a continuation of the discourse that had emerged in the 1880s among South Asian and non-South Asian theosophists. However, by introducing practical teachings, Vivekananda departed from theosophy's theoretical considerations.

The book has two major parts: The first is based on his lecture series, and the second is a (very) free translation of Patanjali's *Yogasutra*, along with Vivekananda's comments. De Michelis points out that Vivekananda's modern reading of Patanjali's *Yogasutra* met the demand of US-American and European practitioners: "Its message was what many in cultic milieus worldwide had been waiting for: a flexible set of teachings that would meet their craving for exotic but nevertheless accessible and ideologically familiar forms of practical spirituality" (De Michelis 2004, 150).[132] This aligns with Baier's assessment that Vivekananda was seen as both familiar and exotic. His familiarity stemmed from the widespread view of yoga as an empirical science, as popularised by the Brahmo Samaj and Bengali theosophists. Conversely, Vivekananda's perceived exoticism was rooted in his "authenticity" as a South Asian monk, belonging to the tradition he was expounding (Baier 2009b, 2:475; Kraler 2022, 230).

Vivekananda introduces raja yoga as one type of four distinct forms of yoga: karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga, and jnana yoga.[133] Despite his emphasis that all four yogas required

[132] In addition to practitioners, some European scholars equally appreciated Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantic interpretation of Patanjali's *Yogasutra* and his "scientific" and psychological approach to yoga. William James, for example, considered Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* a handbook on Neo-Vedanta (Foxen 2020, 226).

[133] Raja yoga means "king yoga" or "the king of yoga". In South Asian texts, the term *rājayoga* began to occur in the twelfth century CE and was associated initially with a fourfold hierarchical typology comprising *mantrayoga*, *layayoga*, *haṭhayoga*, and *rājayoga*. In this context, *rājayoga* mainly was identified with yogic practices leading to *samādhi* or the state of *samādhi* itself (Birch 2013, 399–400; Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 6–7). Birch demonstrates in his article on the historical roots and modern interpretations of *rājayoga*

equal attention, there is no doubt that raja yoga occupied a unique position as the highest and most "scientific" form of yoga (Baier 2009b, 2:471–472; Birch 2013, 400).[134] For Vivekananda, raja yoga was a religious practice to govern the mind. Two techniques are key in this endeavour: pranayama and kundalini awakening.[135] While pranayama (yogic breath cultivation) stands at the beginning of the practice and can be seen as a technique to control body and mind, kundalini represents the main impetus for attaining samadhi, which Vivekananda identified with superconsciousness (Kraler 2022, 261–263; Vivekananda 1920, 53).[136] Accordingly, Kraler characterises Vivekananda's path to liberation "as *prāṇāyāma*-induced *kuṇḍalinī* arousal that leads to the superconscious state" (Kraler 2022, 263, original emphasis).

In *Raja Yoga*, two chapters, "The Psychic Prana" and "The Control of Psychic Prana", address kundalini (Vivekananda 1920, 47–61). Therein, Vivekananda follows the linguistic conventions introduced by theosophical discourses discussed in the previous chapter, such as referencing kundalini's movement as "electricity" (*ibid*., 47–48). Against the backdrop of Vivekananda's understanding of raja yoga as an "experiential science" (Kraler 2022, 260), kundalini serves as an "experiential tool" associated with psychology and empiricist epistemology. Vivekananda's contribution to kundalini's interpretation as an experiential, psychological force becomes particularly evident in the following quote:

> Now, if this coiled-up energy [kundalini] be roused and made active, […] a tremendous reaction will set in. When a minute portion of the energy of action travels along a nerve fibre and causes reaction from centres, the perception is either dream or imagination. But when the vast mass of this energy stored up by the power of long internal meditation

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that among modern yoga pioneers, including Swami Vivekananda, there was no consensus on *rājayoga*'s meaning, origin, and relation to *haṭhayoga* (Birch 2013).

[134] Vivekananda's assertion of raja yoga's superiority over other forms of yoga, especially *haṭhayoga*, can be traced back to Swami Dayananda's critical evaluation of *haṭhayoga*. This dismissive stance impacted the early theosophical discourse on yoga, which favoured raja yoga while rejecting *haṭhayoga* as black magic. Moreover, N. C. Paul's division between raja yoga and *haṭhayoga* likely influenced Vivekananda's views. Paul identified raja yoga with "eight stages" (Paul 1851, 29), i.e., the auxiliaries of ashtanga yoga, but did not however associate it with Patanjali's *Yogasutra* (Cantú 2023; Birch 2013, 418).

[135] For an in-depth analysis of Vivekananda's views on prana and pranayama, see Kraler (2022, 257–273).

[136] Scholars of modern yoga have traced the term "superconscious" or "superconsciousness" back to Swami Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga*, where he compares superconsciousness to the sublime state of samadhi (De Michelis 2004, 171). However, as Jacobs and Kraler show in their forthcoming article "Vivekananda's Superconsciousness and its Historical Roots", the German philosopher Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906) introduced the term in 1873. Thenceforward, theosophists, exponents of psychology, and early promoters of yoga applied the term. The article further discusses Vivekananda's understanding of superconsciousness (Jacobs and Kraler forthcoming).

> travels along the *Suśumnā*, and strikes the centres, the reaction is […] immensely more intense than the reaction of sense perception. It is super-sensuous perception, and the mind in that state is called superconscious. (Vivekananda 1920, 52–53)

Vivekananda's association of kundalini with superconsciousness (i.e., samadhi) likely traces back to Ramakrishna's teachings. In *The Gospels of Sri Ramakrishna* (1942), a translated version of Mahendranath Gupta's five-volume record of Ramakrishna's conversations with his disciples, one reads about Ramakrishna's views on kundalini: "Sometimes the Spiritual Current moves up [the Sushumnā nerve] like a snake. Going in a zigzag way, at last it reaches the head and I go into samadhi. A man's spiritual consciousness is not awakened unless his Kundalini is aroused" (Ramakrishna, in Nikhilananda 1942, 830). In addition to Ramakrishna's teachings, Vivekananda's witnessing of his guru's states of samadhi surely facilitated his own experiences on kundalini and superconsciousness. Therefore, it is likely that there existed an "experiential" connection between Vivekananda and Ramakrishna, which inspired Vivekananda to suggest practical teachings that involved the transmission of knowledge about kundalini's effect on the body and mind.

In "The Control of Psychic Prana", Vivekananda details pranayama and how it relates to kundalini's arousal. The practitioner should assume a seated, upright position (asana) and get accustomed to regular, controlled breathing. In the next step, one must practice alternating breathing through the left and right nostril, combined with visualisation of the corresponding "nerve current" (Vivekananda 1920, 57), i.e., the channels situated to the left (ida) and right (pingala) from the central channel (sushumna) (*ibid*., 55–57). Part of pranayama's visualisation and breathing technique involves the kindling of kundalini:

> Slowly fill the lungs with breath through the Ida, the left nostril, and at the same time concentrate the mind on the nerve current. You are, as it were, sending the nerve current down the spinal column, and striking violently on that last plexus, the basic lotus, which is triangular in form, the seat of the *Kuṇḍalinī*. Then hold the current there for some time. Imagine that you are slowly drawing that nerve current with the breath through the other side, then slowly throw it out through the right nostril. (*ibid*., 57, original emphasis)

Vivekananda underscores that this practice, particularly the "violent striking" on the muladhara chakra, might ultimately trigger kundalini's rise. As stated above, kundalini's movement might result in attaining superconsciousness. However, Vivekananda maintains

that even a preliminary practice positively affects the practitioner's physical and mental well-being:

> One day, if you practise hard the *Kuṇḍalinī* will be aroused. For those who practise once or twice a day, just a little calmness of the body and mind will come […]; only for those who can go on further with it will this *Kuṇḍalinī* be aroused, and the whole of this nature will begin to change, and the book of knowledge will be open. (*ibid*., 58, original emphasis)

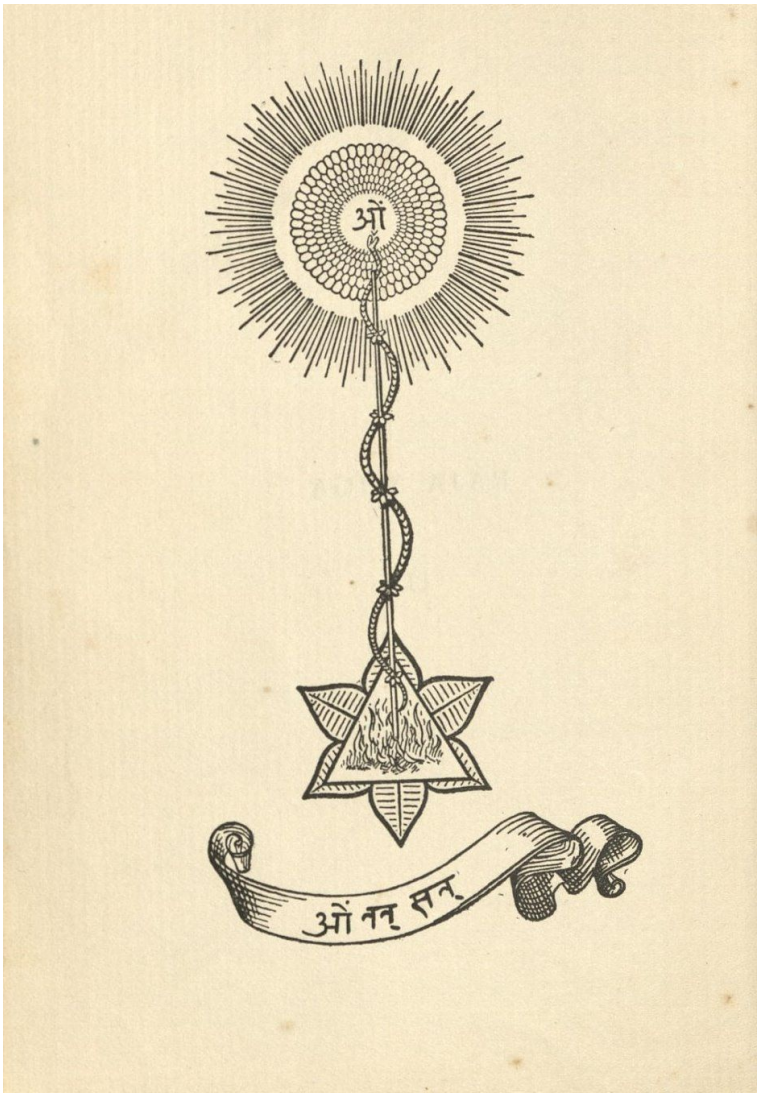

Figure 2: Book cover of Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga*, depicting kundalini's rise (Vivekananda 1920).

On the book cover of *Raja Yoga*, Vivekananda portrayed the successful awakening of kundalini (Figure 2). The image depicts kundalini as an ascending serpent emerging from a six-petalled lotus containing a burning triangle. The serpent's sinuous movement penetrates

small lotuses, representing the subtle body's chakras, ultimately reaching the thousand-petalled lotus at the pinnacle of the subtle body. Radiant rays of light adorn the image, symbolising the induction of superconsciousness upon kundalini's ascent to the highest chakra. In addition, Sanskrit inscriptions embellish the book cover. Beneath kundalini's abode, a banner displays the Sanskrit mantra "Om Tat Sat", frequently referenced by Vivekananda throughout the book. At the centre of the thousand-petalled lotus, another "Om" in Sanskrit script is featured. Vivekananda thereby firmly linked kundalini to Neo-Vedanta and yoga (Baier 2009b, 2:481–482; Leland 2016, 156).

Vivekananda regarded kundalini as the primary yogic vehicle for attaining epistemological insight, superconsciousness, and spiritual liberation. Against the backdrop of Vivekananda's promotion of Advaita Vedanta as a "scientific religion", he conceptualised kundalini as an empirical force, emphasising the importance of religious experience.

In his effort to align Hindu religious notions with modern scientific perspectives, he construed the concept of "Vedic science" as an alternative to natural science, suggesting that it could reach equivalent or superior conclusions.[137] In fact, Vivekananda and other adherents of Vedic science asserted that there was no difference between Hindu religious and scientific thought, except for science's later development and its omission of spiritual aspects.[138] These perceived shortcomings served to demonstrate the superiority of Vedic science over modern science (Baier 2019, 249; Brown 2010, 242; Nanda 2003, 66).

Such considerations echoed Hindu nationalists' assessment of Hindu religions as essentially complementing modern science. Nanda described Hindu nationalists' efforts to harmonise Hindu religions with modern science with the following words:

[137] Vivekananda's Vedic science was influenced by earlier conceptions by prominent members of the Brahmo Samaj, including Keshabchandra Sen and Akkhoy Kumar Dutt. Their propagated "scientific" empiricism influenced Vivekananda's scientistic-grounded elevation of yoga (Baier 2019, 246–247). Nanda suggested the term "Hindu scientism" (2010, 280) as a designation covering broader aspects of Hindu beliefs and their alleged resonance (and superiority) with modern science. For further information on Vivekananda's Vedic science and his and Hindu nationalists' general view on the relation between religion and science, refer to (Baier 2019; Brown 2010; Nanda 2003; 2016).

[138] The juxtaposition of Vedic science and modern natural science requires their comparability. However, as Brown emphasised, the Sanskrit term *vidyā*, which proponents of Vedic science commonly used as modern science's equivalent, rests on utterly different perspectives regarding scientific concepts, methods, and disciplines. While there is no general consensus on what modern science is or how its methodology must be performed, Vedic science and its link to the traditionalistic view of science as encompassing timeless and spiritual branches of knowledge makes their comparability challenging (Brown 2010, 244; Gieryn 1983, 781).

> Hindu nationalists are obsessed with science. […] They use the vocabulary of science to claim that the most sacred texts of Hinduism […] are, in fact, scientific treatises, expressing in a uniquely holistic and uniquely Hindu idiom, the findings of modern physics, biology, mathematics, and nearly all other branches of modern natural science. From the most orthodox priests, to the modern globe-trotting, English-speaking swamis, academics (many of them in American and Canadian universities), pamphleteers and journalists, down to ordinary men and women sympathetic to Hindu nationalist ideology, all proclaim that Hinduism is simply another name for scientific thinking. (Nanda 2003, 65)

Hindu nationalists' "obsession" with science left a lasting imprint on many spheres of South Asian society. Crucially, it also fostered the development of religious practice, including yogic experiences, from a subject of research into a research discipline (see Chapter 17.3.). In sum, Vivekananda's kundalini represents a "dormant potential" (De Michelis 2004, 170) that can be activated and controlled through meditation and breath-control techniques, enabling the practitioner to guide their spiritual evolution (*ibid*., 175). Thus, Vivekananda already shed light on kundalini's individual evolutionary potential and anticipated a perspective that Sri Aurobindo explored in more depth and that became especially popular during the late 1960s and 1970s.

5.3.2. Sri Aurobindo's Evolutive and Nationalised Kundalini

Aurobindo Ghose, renowned as Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950), was the third son of a wealthy Bengali family. He would become one of South Asia's most famous figures of the twentieth century, one whose legacy lives on until today. The US-American historian Peter Heehs, who extensively published on Aurobindo, described Aurobindo's exceptionality and complexity with the following words:

> He was, for a moment, the most important political leader in the country [Colonial India], the first to say clearly that the goal of the national movement was independence. But he was also a scholar, a poet, a philosopher, and above all, a yogi and spiritual leader. His diverse achievements at various times can make it seem as though he led four or five different lives in a single lifetime. (Heehs 2008, ix)

Key episodes (or lives, as Heehs puts it) in Aurobindo's biography encompass his early childhood in Bengal; his education in England from age seven until twenty-one; his return

to South Asia and subsequent entry into the state service; his deepening involvement in politics and revolutionary activities, leading to imprisonment from 1908 to 1909 in Calcutta; and ultimately his transformation into a Pondicherry-based yogi and philosopher where his following continued to expand until his passing in 1950 (Heehs 2008). The complexity of Aurobindo's life and philosophy defies a concise summary; thus, this chapter can only explore select aspects.[139] Of particular significance for the present study are Aurobindo's involvement in Hindu nationalism and his post-revolutionary life as a religious teacher.

5.3.2.1. Shakti in Aurobindo's Hindu Nationalism

According to Aurobindo, nationalism is inextricably linked with religion: "Nationalism is not a mere political programme; nationalism is a religion that has come from God; Nationalism [*sic*] is a creed which you shall have to live" (Ghose 1922, 10). The basis of Aurobindo's religious nationalism rests on his understanding of India's nation as a living entity of "spiritual greatness" (*ibid*., 13). Inspired by the poem "Bande Mataram" ("Hail to the Mother"), composed by the Bengali novelist Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894), Aurobindo depicted the Indian nation as a goddess and mother, emphasising the importance of her protection. Against the backdrop of Aurobindo's understanding of India as a divine mother, he contemplated her liberation – politically and religiously (Strube 2022, 196; Wolfers 2016, 525–528). For this study, the particularly fascinating aspect of envisioning India's liberation as a religious project concerns the awakening of shakti.

The fusion of Shaktism and nationalism traces back to the positive assessment of tantra among the radical wing of Indian nationalists. Bengali nationalists, including Shivachandra Bhattacharya Vidyarnava (Woodroffe's guru), Surendranath Bandyopadhyay (1848–1925), and Aurobindo strategically employed tantric symbols to reinforce nationalist assertions (Strube 2022, 191–193). They maintained that the notion of shakti, viewed as a force or power, assisted their resistance against Colonial rule and simultaneously underpinned the "revival" of a supposed "Aryan" tradition[140] and "true" Hindu religion: "Shakti, in that sense, was the literal *power* of national renewal" (*ibid*., 196, original emphasis).

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[139] While literature on Aurobindo is endless, it is difficult to find criticial examinations of his philosophy. Heehs' *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo* (2008) offers a great overview of Aurobindo's life, Alex Wolfers (Wolfers 2016; 2017) looks at the interconnectedness of politics and spirituality in Aurobindo's thought, and Wolfgang Gantke (2007) reads Aurobindo's philosophy from an intercultural perspective.

[140] The wish to revive an idealised Aryan tradition did not commence with Aurobindo. Representatives of Hindu revivalism and particularly the "Bengali intervention" had already pleaded for a "revival" of Aryan ways of life (Strube 2022, 161).

During Aurobindo's revolutionary episode, he published a pamphlet, *Bhawani Mandir* (1905), which introduced the idea that India was the sum of its inhabitants' shaktis. In fact, according to Aurobindo, India was essentially a shakti herself. In his *Bhawani Mandir*, he writes (quoted from Singh): "For what is a nation? What is our mother country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty *Shakti*, composed of all the *Shakties* [*sic*] of all the millions of units that make up the nation" (Ghose, in Singh 1962, 70–71, original emphasis).[141] In the context of Colonial India and Aurobindo's involvement in revolutionary discourses and activities, he emphasised how awakening India's shakti would ultimately result in India's liberation. Considering Aurobindo's belief in India's religious lead, the awakening of "Mother India" must consequently result in humanity's spiritual evolution (Strube 2022, 195–196).

Aurobindo's nationalism does not explicitly emphasise kundalini. Instead, he placed a decisive focus on shakti. Along with other Hindu nationalists, Aurobindo considered shakti a national "force that had to be awakened in order to free India from its oppressors" (*ibid*., 193). These "forceful" metaphors resemble kundalini's interpretation as "force", "power", and "mother" in theosophical discourses on tantric anatomy. In later texts, including Aurobindo's epic *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* (1916–1951)[142] and *Lights on Yoga* (1942), he describes kundalini in poetic and vitalist terms, respectively (Purani 1970, 542).

In *Lights on Yoga*, Aurobindo portrays kundalini as "Yoga-Shakti" (Ghose 1942, 17) and situates her in the tantric body. However, while acknowledging the tantric understanding of kundalini as a subtle force embedded in the subtle body, he underlines kundalini's link to the mind – the "Yogic mind-force" (*ibid*.) – thus adding a psychological layer to kundalini. Moreover, Aurobindo supplements this physio-psychological interpretation with an extra-physical understanding of kundalini, the "Divine Force" (*ibid*.). Unlike the kundalini of the physical body, this supreme version of kundalini transcends the constraints of the subtle and physical body, as it is located above the head: "[The Yoga-Shakti] is also above us, above our head as the Divine Force – not there coiled up, involved, asleep, but awake, scient, potent, extended and wide; it is there waiting for manifestation and to this Force we have to open ourselves–to the power of the Mother" (*ibid*.).

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[141] Karan Singh, who will be introduced in Chapter 17.1., devoted his doctoral dissertation to Aurobindo's nationalism. However, owing to his own involvement in South Asian nationalist politics under Indira Gandhi, where he became a significant proponent of Hindu nationalist discourse, his conclusions must be approached with a critical distance.

[142] Aurobindo worked over thirty years on his epic *Savitri* and revised it several times. Peter Heehs thoroughly discusses the value that Aurobindo attached to poetry (Heehs 1998).

These references from *Lights on Yoga* demonstrate how Aurobindo's later writings explicitly consider kundalini as "force" and "power" (*ibid*., 17, 83). Perhaps his later treatment of kundalini was a testament to the general understanding of kundalini as a force paired with the nationalist use of shakti (Pandit 1957, 14).[143] Therefore, despite Aurobindo's omission of kundalini from his political writings, the reception of Aurobindo's understanding of kundalini during the latter half of the twentieth century nonetheless referred to his alleged nationalised kundalini. A notable example of how Aurobindo's legacy shaped the view of kundalini as a national emblem was its incorporation into Hindu nationalist discourse during the latter half of the twentieth century.[144]

After Aurobindo's release from imprisonment in 1909, his focus shifted away from Indian politics and the struggle for independence from British rule, instead devoting himself to religious pursuits.[145] In 1910, Aurobindo relocated to the French enclave of Pondicherry on the eastern coast of India, laying the foundation for the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville, a village guided by the principles of his teachings and a social project aligning with the principles of life reform (Heehs 2008, 250).[146] During this last episode of his life, Aurobindo produced an extensive body of religious writings. His exploration of spiritual evolution[147] stands out as particularly influential, laying much of the foundation for kundalini's popular understanding as an evolutionary force.

[143] Madhav P. Pandit (1918–1993) worked closely with the Mother and wrote several books on Aurobindo's Integral thought. In his *Lights on the Tantra* (1957), he expounds on Aurobindo's views on shakti and kundalini.

[144] Chapter 17.2. discusses the Gandhi administration's interest in kundalini as a symbol of Hindu nationalism.

[145] Despite Aurobindo's shift from politics to religion, many of his later theories, including spiritual evolutionism and religious universalism, were deeply rooted in his earlier political beliefs. Chief among these was his conviction in Hindu nationalism, specifically his belief in South Asia's religious hegemony (Gantke 2007, 31–32).

[146] The French occultist and spiritual teacher Mirra Alfassa, renowned as "The Mother" (1878–1973), played a pivotal role in the establishment and leadership of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville. Collaborating closely with Aurobindo from 1920 until his passing, he regarded her as an equal in religious matters (Heehs 2008, 250). In contemporary Integral Yoga, Aurobindo and the Mother are equally revered. The Aurobindo Ashram "Auromére" in California serves as a prominent testament to their ongoing impact on practitioners of Integral Yoga.

[147] I follow Aurobindo's use of language, in which he referred to his strand of religious evolutionism as "spiritual evolution" (Ghose 1955, 6).

5.3.2.2. Aurobindo's Evolutive Kundalini

Aurobindo counts among South Asia's key interpreters of Darwinian thought and shaped subsequent evolutionary discourses in South Asia and beyond (Brown 2012, 77–78).[148] As a Hindu, his elaborate system intricately considered evolutionary processes through a Hindu lens while incorporating ideas from European science and theology, including teleological evolutionism (*ibid*., 154).[149] Prioritising consciousness over matter, the central message of his theory of evolution pertained to the gradual evolution from ordinary consciousness to what he called "supramental consciousness" or the "Supermind" (Ghose 1955, 10; 1–34). Thus, while Aurobindo acknowledged a physical strand of evolution, i.e., genetic mutation and heredity transmission through reproduction, he downplayed its value in favour of spiritual aspects of evolution (Brown 2012, 156–158).

Against the backdrop of "missing-links debates",[150] Aurobindo suggested that evolutionary developments are carried forward by a "Life-Principle" (Ghose 1950, 8). Along with European vitalists, Aurobindo opposed mechanistic-deterministic philosophical explanations by underlining the key role of non-materialistic agencies in evolutionary processes:

> The action of evolution must be other than has been supposed. For example, the evolution of Life in Matter must have been produced and governed not by a material principle, but by a Life-principle working in and upon the conditions of Matter and applying to it its own laws, impulses, necessities. (*ibid*., 7–8)

[148] The legacy of Aurobindo's evolutionism assumed one of its most sophisticated shapes in Ken Wilber's integral theory of consciousness. Based on the belief in a spectrum of consciousness, Wilber argued that human development occurs in stages, culminating in unity with God. Throughout his publications, Wilber frequently refers to Aurobindo as the key source for his use of "involution" and "evolution", and his understanding of the "God-consciousness" or supreme consciousness (Wilber 1996, xix; 1980, 11).

[149] Teleological evolutionism is closely tied with theistic evolutionism. By the end of the nineteenth century, European evolutionary philosophers tried to harmonise Darwinism with creation theology. Theistic evolutionists thus advocated the compatibility of the belief in God with modern science, including evolution. Therefore, they differ significantly from creationists, who rejected the idea of (Darwinian) evolutionism in favour of a literal reading of the Bible. In a teleological manner, theistic evolutionists interpreted evolutionary processes as based on God's divine plan. In other words, theistic evolutionists replaced (or complemented) natural selection with divine purpose (Brown 2012, 158; Numbers 1986, 391–392).

[150] Debates on "missing links" trace back to several fossil finds, which supposedly underpin missing links in human evolution. Critics of Darwin frequently claim "missing links", arguing for the necessity of an initial impetus, facilitating the change from one form of existence to the next (Brown 2012, 164–168).

By stressing the intervention of a divine agency, he aimed to reintroduce divine purpose to evolutionary discourses. The topic of purpose aligns Aurobindo with teleological assumptions of theistic evolutionism and process philosophy (Brown 2012, 158, 168).[151] According to Aurobindo, evolution is not confined to the progression of human bodies and the material world. Instead, it finds its greatest expression in the ascent of the mind, enabling the unfolding of the divinised man – Aurobindo's "Superman" (Ghose 1955, 12).[152] The ascents in question are accompanied (and facilitated) by descents of divine consciousness. Evolution is thus a sequence of ascents and descents of consciousness, an interplay between progress and regression, ultimately resulting in the gradual transformations of matter into spirit. However, the divinisation of matter does not constitute the end of the evolutionary process. Corresponding to the belief in samsara,[153] Aurobindo introduced the notion of eternally recurring cycles of evolution and involution: Prior to any evolutionary process, an involution occurs, followed by an evolution, an involution, and so on. The eternal cycle of evolution and involution resembles the ascents and descents of consciousness (Gantke 2007, 90; Ghose 1939, 1:90).[154]

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[151] Process philosophy is closely tied to the British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) and describes the processual nature of life, cognition, and action. Process philosophers in the tradition of Whitehead often considered the French philosopher Henri-Louis Bergson as another key process philosopher, despite his association with *Lebensphilosophie*. Whitehead advocated the dynamic nature of being, while Bergson considered evolution as a processual and creative rather than a selective process. Central to this argument was his hypothesis of *élan vital* (translated as "vital impetus" or "vital force"), facilitating variation and complexity during evolution (Bergson 1928, 92–102; Seibt 2023).

[152] There are intermediate grades between ordinary and supreme consciousness: higher mind, intuitive mind, and overmind (Brown 2012, 157). Aurobindo wrote much about the difference between mind, brain, and consciousness. To him, the mind was the seat of thought, whereas the brain functions as a communication tool. His psychology includes assumptions on the manifold links of the mental planes to the physical and the divine (Purani 1970, 387–439). In this study, I use mind and consciousness interchangeably when referring to Aurobindo's evolutionary ideas.

[153] The topic of reincarnation is central to Aurobindo's Integrative Evolutionism. Simply speaking, Hindu theories on reincarnation believe in the (eternal) transmigration of the soul from one life into the next. The sum of one's morally good and bad actions in this life determines how (and if) a person reincarnates in their next life. Aurobindo primarily advocated a positive attitude to reincarnation in as much as he emphasised that souls only transmigrate into higher planes of existence. Reincarnation thus constitutes another means of facilitating evolutionary processes, that is, for the ascent and ultimately divinisation of consciousness (Gantke 2007, 88; Ghose 1940, 2:714–715).

[154] The idea of spiritual involution and evolution traces back to Madame Blavatsky and her *The Secret Doctrine* (1888); Blavatsky was perhaps influenced by Hindu sources. She defined evolution as a cyclical process consisting of two major phases: the involution of Spirit into Matter and the evolution of organic matter, saturated by eternal consciousness (H. P. Blavatsky 1893, 1:696). Her cyclical understanding of evolution "was the cornerstone for the Advaitic Evolutionism of the mature Vivekananda" (Brown 2012, 133), who in turn influenced Aurobindo's theories.

Aurobindo's evolutionary ideas must be seen in the light of his Integral Yoga, a comprehensive philosophical and practical system. At its core is the principle of manifesting the divine or spirit on earth, facilitating the integration of matter and spirit. Unlike other paths solely focused on individual liberation, Integral Yoga emphasises the collective evolution of consciousness in this life: Aurobindo "came to view the liberation of Indians, and humanity at large, as something to be effected by a radical spiritual transformation through the practice of what he later called Integral Yoga" (Brown 2012, 156; Gantke 2007, 38–39).

Kundalini plays a central role in Aurobindo's "Integrative Evolutionism" (Brown 2012, 158). Especially his exposition of the ascent and descent of consciousness and the non-materialistic agencies in evolutionary processes gave way to kundalini's incorporation into his evolutionism:

> The awakening of the Kundalini power […] is felt as a descending or an ascending current […]. The descending current is the Energy from above coming down to touch the sleeping Power in the lowest nerve centre at the bottom of the spine; the ascending current is the release of energy going up from the awakened Kundalini. […] When the Kundalin meets the higher consciousness, as it ascends through the summit of the head, there is an opening to the higher superconscient reaches above the normal mind. It is by ascending through these in our consciousness and receiving a descent of their energies that it is possible ultimately to reach the supermind. (Ghose 2014, 30:420)

Thus, kundalini assumes the role of the potential impetus of the evolution of consciousness, whose movement resembles the evolutionary ascent and descent. Corresponding to Aurobindo's different levels of mental planes, e.g., ordinary mind and Supermind, kundalini assumes distinctive modes and roles in his philosophy, ultimately engendering the integration of spirit and matter (Ghose 1942, 17). Thus, kundalini's role was not restricted to the individual's spiritual evolution. Instead, as the evolutionary impetus of Aurobindo's integrative evolutionism, it must further contribute to the divinisation of the physical world as a whole. Brown describes this integrative aspect of Aurobindo's evolutionism in the following way:

> Aurobindo insists that the goal of spiritual evolution, what he calls the divinized Man, can only occur in a divinized, spiritualized world. Such a development involves an ongoing reformation of the lower levels of existence by the intervention of higher consciousness, resulting in a radical transformation of the physical and organic worlds, thereby integrating Spirit and Matter. (Brown 2012, 158)

Accordingly, Aurobindo's evolutive kundalini is a vehicle enabling evolved consciousness while simultaneously transforming the physical world. This adds a decisive political dimension to kundalini's evolutionary potential. As outlined above, Aurobindo's political thought included a nationalist framing of shakti. Her awakening would allow India to transform into an evolved and spiritually superior nation. Kundalini's role in Aurobindo's spiritual evolutionism is thus inextricably tied in with his ideas about shakti's role in Hindu nationalism.

To conclude, Aurobindo regarded kundalini as a psychological force, operating in the tantric body and triggering evolutionary processes. Moreover, by associating kundalini with his Hindu nationalist understanding of shakti, kundalini was further integrated into the political realm. Although Aurobindo's explorations of kundalini were scarce, he nonetheless inspired subsequent perspectives on kundalini on the part of Hindu nationalists and US-American transpersonal psychologists. There are many parallels between Aurobindo's and Vivekananda's perspectives on kundalini. The latter had made a strong impression on Aurobindo's views on yoga and consciousness (Heehs 2008, 84, 178). Despite Aurobindo's lack of reference, it is likely that Vivekananda's framing of kundalini as an evolutionary and psychological force stimulated Aurobindo's perspectives on the Yoga-Shakti.

5.3.3. Arthur Avalon's Serpent Power

Sir John G. Woodroffe (1865–1936) was a British judge and orientalist with a decisive interest in tantra. It has been long presumed that Woodroffe was the sole person behind Arthur Avalon's publication activities.[155] However, Strube has demonstrated that Arthur Avalon was a collaborative project involving three interrelated authors (among others): the Bengali tantric Pandit Shivachandra Bhattacharya Vidyarnava (1860–1913), the Bengali philosopher and nationalist educator Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay (1880–1973), and Woodroffe (Strube 2023, 90). Moreover, among these key collaborators, Woodroffe was *not* the mastermind behind Arthur Avalon. Instead, as Strube argued, when Woodroffe joined the team, "he entered a stage that had already been set" (Strube 2022, 213). The dynamics of the three collaborators were governed by the fact that Pramathanath and Woodroffe were

[155] Kathleen Taylor's study *Sir John Woodroffe, Tantra and Bengal: 'An Indian Soul in a European Body?'* (2001) pioneered critical scholarship on Woodroffe and his relationship to the project Arthur Avalon. Strube's *Global Tantra* (2022) demonstrates the influence of the preceding Bengali discourse on the project Arthur Avalon and further shows how it fostered a global discourse on South Asian religion.

Shivachandra's disciples, thus devoted to his tantric teachings.[156] In addition, Woodroffe's personal network, which included Shivachandra's discipleship, the colonial elite of Calcutta, and the Theosophical Society, shaped Avalon's publications and the ideas therein (*ibid*.). Accordingly, project Arthur Avalon "stood for a collaboration between learned South Asians, mainly Bengalis, who sought to present Tantra as the 'esoteric' core, not only of 'true dharma' but also of a universal religion of humanity" (Strube 2023, 90).

Among the most important publications of the Avalon team are the edited two-volume *Principles of Tantra* (1914/1916), *Shakti and Shakta* (1918), *The Serpent Power* (1918), and the series *The World as Power* (1922–1929).[157] All these books were initially published by the South Asian publishing house Ganesh and Co. in Madras (later by Dover Press in the United States). Remarkably, Ganesh and Co. considered publishing Avalon's books "as an act of religious devotion" and apparently barely profited from them. This demonstrates the reputation of the Arthur Avalon project in South Asia as an exponent of Hindu religion, culture, and identity (Taylor 2001, 214).

Owing to Avalon's commitment to the tantras and Shakta philosophy, kundalini naturally played a key role in their writings and translations. As discussed in the previous chapter, Baradakanta Majumdar was among the first to comment on kundalini in his contribution "Tantric Philosophy" (1880) in *The Theosophist* (Majumdar 1880b, 173–174). According to Strube, Baradakanta was another disciple of Shivachandra and a collaborator of Arthur Avalon (Strube 2022, 8). Unlike Baradakanta's early position statement on kundalini, Shivachandra was more cautious regarding the teachings of kundalini. In his central work, *Tantratattva*, which Arthur Avalon translated and published as *Principles of Tantra* (1914 and 1916) in two volumes, he underscored the unconditional necessity of initiation by a guru when approaching kundalini yoga. Strube argues that

> this is why Shivachandra only hinted at the practice of *ṣaṭ-cakra-bhed*, or Kundalini Yoga, explaining that […] it was too extensive and impossible to make the public understand the practice and that an explanation should properly be given by a guru. It was simply impossible to learn about it through writings, especially as no secrets should be revealed to all readers. (Strube 2022, 185, original emphasis)

[156] For a detailed account of Woodroffe's relationship with his guru, Shivachandra, see Taylor (2001, 99–107) and Strube (2022, 213–220).

[157] Woodroffe and Pramathanath co-authored most of the volumes of *The World as Power* series. These publications mainly aimed to reconcile "Western" science and Shakti philosophy, clearly preferring the latter as a superior way to comprehend the world (Strube 2022, 233).

Two years after the publication of the second volume of *Principles of Tantra*, Woodroffe published *Shakti and Shakta* (1918), and soon after, Arthur Avalon published *The Serpent Power* (1918).[158] Both publications referred to kundalini and reinforced its association with science and rational thinking: "Like all other matters in this Indian Shāstra the basis of this [Kundalini] Yoga is essentially rational" (Woodroffe 1928, 635). In *Shakti and Shakta*, Woodroffe mainly addresses the notion of shakti. In contrast, her manifestation as kundalini shakti is only discussed in a brief concluding chapter (*ibid*., 632–658). Therein, Woodroffe reasoned his examination of the topic with its current popularity and what he perceived as the overall ignorance about this vital topic of the tantras:

> All the world […] is beginning to speak of Kundalinī Shakti, "cette fameuse Kundalinī" as a French friend of mine calls Her. There is considerable talk about the Chakras and the Serpent Power but lack of understanding as to what they mean. This, as usual, is sought to be covered by an air of mystery. (*ibid*., 635)

Woodroffe echoes Shivachandra's opinion that the practical aspect of kundalini yoga necessitates a guru and cannot be gleaned solely from a book (*ibid*.).[159] Nevertheless, through *The Serpent Power*, the Avalon project attempted to unveil the "secrets" of kundalini yoga. As Taylor accurately emphasised, it was this "book above all others which introduced kundalini yoga to the Western world" (Taylor 2001, 134).

The Serpent Power features translations and commentaries of the Sanskrit texts *Ṣaṭ-Cakra-Nirūpaṇa* and the *Pādukā-Pañcaka*.[160] However, the preceding introductory chapters cover most of the book's content. Divided into seven sub-chapters and spanning over three hundred pages, they function almost as a book in their own right. Leland characterised it as "almost unreadable due to its compendiousness, density of language, and profusion of Sanskrit

[158] While *Shakti and Shakta* was published under the name John Woodroffe from its first edition in 1918, *The Serpent Power* was initially published under the name Arthur Avalon. However, in 1950 (fourth edition), it was republished under the name John Woodroffe. The name of the author does not necessarily indicate whether John Woodroffe drafted, e.g., *Shakti and Shakta* without external help (Taylor 2001, 309; Woodroffe 1928; 1950).

[159] Woodroffe underscored in *Shakti and Shakta* that he had never experienced kundalini himself. Thus, "I am not speaking as a Yogi in this method, which I am not; but as one who has read and studied the Shāstra on this matter, and has had the further advantage of some oral explanations" (Woodroffe 1928, 635). However, statements as such must be approached with caution. Woodroffe frequently asserted his role as an "outsider" or "neutral observer". Given his affiliation as Shivachandra's disciple, the assertion of neutrality and his status as an uninitiated observer are not tenable (Strube 2022, 215–216; Taylor 2001, 111–113).

[160] The translation of *Pādukā-Pañcaka* is much shorter (seventeen pages) than that of *Ṣaṭ-Cakra-Nirūpaṇa* (one hundred and eighty-two pages) and barely finds reference either in *The Serpent Power*'s introduction or in secondary literature discussing the book (Woodroffe 1950, 481–498; Strube 2022; Taylor 2001).

terms" (Leland 2016, 202). The undoubtedly complex text introduces the notion of kundalini shakti and its role in the subtle body, providing detailed explanations of the philosophy and practice of kundalini yoga. While kundalini assumes a central role in the introduction, other components of the subtle body are also elucidated, particularly the chakras, as presented in the *Ṣaṭ-Cakra-Nirūpaṇa*. This sixteenth-century text, composed by the Bengali Pandit Purnananda Giri, outlines a six-*cakra* system with an additional *cakra*, the *sahasrāra*. Given that *The Serpent Power* was the primary English source for South Asian subtle-body models throughout much of the twentieth century, it is reasonable to suggest that the "six-plus-one" system became the prevailing view of the subtle body in Europe and the United States (Leland 2016, 197–198; Strube 2023, 52).[161]

Taylor suggests that Woodroffe was the principal author of *The Serpent Power*'s introductory chapters, arguing that "they rely even more heavily than any other of the Avalon/Woodroffe books on secondary sources in English" (Taylor 2001, 215). These secondary sources encompass a range of disciplines, including natural science, South Asian and European philosophy, Hindu reformism,[162] and publications by his collaborators. Given the constraints of this study, it is not feasible to replicate the entire content and its numerous references to secondary literature. However, I will briefly discuss two aspects that contributed to the diverging interpretations of kundalini: A letter exchange between Woodroffe and Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay, and Woodroffe's reference to the theosophist Charles W. Leadbeater.

Pramathanath, introduced earlier as a key collaborator of Arthur Avalon, is frequently mentioned as a friend of Avalon (Woodroffe 1950, 297). In the introductory chapter, "Theoretical Bases of this Yoga", Woodroffe includes a lengthy letter exchange between him and Pramathanath regarding kundalini's static and dynamic conditions (*ibid*., 297–313). However, it is not the authors' philosophical ideas on this matter that warrant mention but rather what Taylor called Pramathanath's "pseudo-scientific theories about *kuṇḍalinī*" (Taylor 2001, 228, original emphasis). Taylor's observation pertains to Pramathanath's far-fetched comparisons of kundalini's manifestations with mathematics, chemics, and

[161] The popularity of *The Serpent Power* was especially boosted by Charles W. Leadbeater's *The Chakras* (1927). It provided a detailed theosophical introduction to the chakras and a comprehensible overview of *The Serpent Power* (Leadbeater 1972).

[162] Woodroffe drew from a pamphlet by Swami Dayananda. However, owing to Dayananda's rejection of kundalini yoga, this reference is somewhat surprising (Taylor 2001, 229; Woodroffe 1950, 255).

biology.[163] Unlike Woodroffe, he omits references to secondary sources. However, Woodroffe underpins Pramathanath's authority by appraising the latter's knowledge, stating, "this matter has been so well put by my friend and collaborator Professor Pramathanātha Mukhyopādhyāya that I cannot improve on his account, and therefore cite it in lieu of giving a further description of my own" (Woodroffe 1950, 297). Woodroffe had already summarised Pramathanath's scientistic reading of kundalini in *Shakti and Shakta* and extended his friend's views in *The Serpent Power*.[164] This demonstrates Woodroffe's ongoing attempt to rationalise kundalini and the tantras, as he had previously done in *Shakti and Shakta* (Woodroffe 1928, 635).

Against that backdrop, it is noteworthy that Woodroffe strongly rejected the equation of subtle with anatomical physiology. At the same time, he employed biomedical terminology to describe subtle components, such as using the term "Yoga-nerves" (Woodroffe 1950, 95) to refer to nadis – albeit reluctantly, as he emphasised: "The term 'nerve' is used for default of another equivalent. These Nādīs, called Yoga-Nādīs, are not, like the Nādīs of physiology, gross things, but subtle channels along which the life-force works in bodies" (*ibid*.). Thus, Woodroffe partially adhered to the N.C. Paul-inspired custom of explaining subtle physiology with biomedical language. This departure from earlier anatomical views on the subtle body and kundalini also sets the stage for his criticism of Vasant Rele's identification of kundalini with the vagus nerve – an episode that will be discussed below. Woodroffe's critique of theosophical perspectives on kundalini (and the subtle body as a whole) is prominently demonstrated through his examination of Leadbeater's work.

Charles W. Leadbeater (1847–1934) authored several influential books, including *The Inner Life* (1910) and *The Chakras* (1927), both of which played a significant role in the mutual reception of Leadbeater and Woodroffe. In *The Serpent Power*, Woodroffe explored Leadbeater's views on the "force centres" (chakras) and "serpent-fire" (kundalini), as outlined in his *The Inner Life*. Conversely, Leadbeater's *The Chakras*, published in 1927, frequently referenced Woodroffe's *The Serpent Power* (*ibid*., 6–19). These cross-references

[163] Refer to Strube's article "(Anti-)Colonialism, Religion and Science in Bengal from the Perspective of Global Religious History" for a thorough examination of the importance of science in Woodroffe and Pramathanath's views on tantra (Strube 2023, 105–106).

[164] *Shakti and Shakta*'s chapter "Kundalinī Shakti" served as a preliminary account of the introduction to *The Serpent Power*, evident from the fact that Woodroffe replicated large portions of it verbatim in the seventh chapter of *The Serpent Power*'s Introduction, titled "Theoretical Bases of this Yoga" (Woodroffe 1950, 257–315).

are noteworthy, given that *The Serpent Power* and *The Chakras* were the leading English-language sources for kundalini and the chakras, respectively.[165]

In the chapter "The Serpent-Fire", Leadbeater offered an interpretation of kundalini, which aligns with theosophical doctrine (Leadbeater 1910, 461–478). Accordingly, he associates kundalini with electricity and references Blavatsky's *The Voice of the Silence* when describing kundalini's ascent: "Its principal function in connection with occult development is that by being sent through the force-centres in the etheric body, […] it vivifies these centres and makes them available as gates of connection between the physical and astral bodies" (*ibid*., 468). Leadbeater emphasised the necessity of consulting a "Master" to experience kundalini. However, unlike Woodroffe's urging to rely on a South Asian guru versed in the tantric tradition, Leadbeater instead referred to theosophical Masters: "One day one of the Masters made a suggestion to me with regard to a certain kind of meditation which would evoke this force. Naturally I at once put the suggestion into practice, and in course of time was successful" (*ibid*., 470). Leadbeater thus maintained the existence of a meditative practice accessible exclusively to theosophists, which would evoke the movement of kundalini.[166] In addition, he expressed suspicion toward "Indian ascetics who teach this to their pupils. […] But I do not myself know of any such, nor should I have confidence in them unless they were specially recommended by some one [*sic*] whom I knew to be possessed of real knowledge" (*ibid*., 471). Woodroffe criticised Leadbeater's claims, dismissing them as erroneous and rejecting his hubristic attitude:

> [A well-known "Theosophical" author's] account does not profess to be a representation of the teaching of the Indian Yogis (whose competence for their own Yoga the author somewhat disparages), but that it is put forward as the Author's own original explanation (fortified, as he conceives, by certain portions of Indian teaching) of the personal experience which (he writes) he himself has had. (Woodroffe 1950, 6)

Strube suggested that Arthur Avalon's criticism stood in the tradition of the "Bengali intervention", aiming "to correct misconceptions among Theosophists rather than accepting the latter's teachings" (Strube 2022, 228). Therefore, Woodroffe's critique of Leadbeater was

[165] For further information on *The Chakras*' legacy for the public perception of the chakras and kundalini, in the European and US-American context, refer to Leland (2016, 201–210).

[166] In alignment with the warnings of Blavatsky and Aiyer (see above), Leadbeater discouraged students from aiming to awaken kundalini without the guidance of a competent, i.e., theosophical, teacher. He wrote: "No one should experiment with it, without definite instruction from a teacher who thoroughly understands the subject, for the dangers connected with it are very real and terribly serious" (Leadbeater 1910, 463).

not so much directed against the individual or his views but rather against theosophical interpretations of tantra and yoga in general.[167] What Leland termed the "duel of Leadbeater and Woodroffe" (Leland 2016, 197) essentially represented a negotiation regarding the authority of interpretation and knowledge transfer regarding kundalini and the chakras. Woodroffe advocated for the "traditional" tantric position, while Leadbeater promoted occult initiates. Both men appropriated kundalini for their own causes and believed that their position possessed the "true" knowledge about it. A parallel between the two was their use of the concepts of "power" and "electricity" in interpreting kundalini.[168] In any case, as a follow-up project of the "Bengali intervention", Arthur Avalon sought to reclaim tantra and yoga from theosophy and present it in the light of "traditional" tantra (Strube 2022, 228–229; Taylor 2001, 136).

A final remark is warranted on Arthur Avalon's enduring legacy in shaping the discourse around kundalini throughout the twentieth century. As previously noted, *The Serpent Power* played a pivotal role in subsequent discussions of kundalini and became a foundational text for any work addressing tantra, kundalini, and the chakras: "It has been quoted in nearly all subsequent secondary sources for decades, even by Indian yoga teachers and gurus themselves writing in English, who used it instead of going to the original texts" (Taylor 2001, 134). Some of the key episodes in the modern transformation of kundalini beyond its South Asian origins can be traced back to individuals engaging with *The Serpent Power*. Among the most notable examples is Carl G. Jung (1875–1961), whose 1932 "Kundalini Seminar", conducted alongside German Indologist J. Wilhelm Hauer (1881–1962), garnered significant attention within alternative religious and psychological circles in Europe and the United States (Shamdasani 2012; Leland 2016, 298–302). Additionally, the Italian far-right Traditionalist Julius Evola (1898–1974) found inspiration in *The Serpent Power* and *Shakti and Shakta*. This influence significantly shaped Evola's thought, serving as a basis for his book *Lo Yoga Della Potenza: Saggio sui Tantra* (1968, *The Yoga of Power: Tantra, Shakti, and the Secret Way*) (Leland 2016, 297; Taylor 2001, 135).

[167] Woodroffe extended his criticism to other members of the Theosophical Society, including the South Asian theosophist Srishchandra Basu (Woodroffe 1950, 15). This demonstrates that Woodroffe's criticism was not restricted to non-South Asians.

[168] In the Preface to the first edition of *Shakti and Shakta*, Woodroffe refers to Shakti as "Mother-Power". While Truth Seeker introduced the notion of "power" as a metaphor for kundalini, Woodroffe likely drew from the "Bengali intervention" and their discourse on Shakti as power or energy (Strube 2022, 231–237).

5.3.4. Vasant Rele's Mysterious Kundalini

Vasant Gangaram Rele (n.d.a.) was a South Asian theosophist and physiologist. He penned several books, including *Yoga Āsanas for Health and Vigour* (c. 1935), The *Vedic Gods. As Figures of Biology* (c. 1930), and *Bhagavad-Gita: An Exposition on the Basis of Psycho-Philosophy & Psycho-Analysis* (1928). His most notable work is *The Mysterious Kundalini: The Physical Basis of the "Kundali (Hatha) Yoga" In Terms of Western Anatomy and Physiology* (1927). In this book, Rele embarked on a scientistic quest to validate the existence of kundalini. While others had already hinted at kundalini's link to the physical body and the nervous system, Rele's merit was his detailed scrutiny and (at least at the outset) empirical approach. *The Mysterious Kundalini*, therefore, stands as the pioneering book that brought kundalini under the lens of empirical yoga research.

Rele initially presented the material at the Bombay Medical Union in July 1926, the aim of which was "to explain some of the Yogic phenomena in terms of Western anatomy and physiology" (Rele 1931, xiii). Encouraged by his colleagues, Rele decided to expand his paper into a comprehensive book "dedicated to those interested in the Science of Yoga" (*ibid*., v). His bibliography mentions *haṭhayogic* texts, e.g., the *Shiva Samhita*, the *Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika*, and the *Sat-Chakra-Nirupana*, Arthur Avalon's *The Serpent Power*, and Vivekanda's *Raja Yoga*, among a handful other sources (*ibid*., 82).[169] Intriguingly, he did not refer to N. C. Paul's *A Treatise on the Yoga Philosophy* (1851) nor to Narayanaswami Aiyer's *Kundalini-Yoga Upanishad* (1914), although both were central to his argument.

In line with earlier theosophical attempts to reconcile science and religion, Rele viewed his book as a contribution to elucidating their relationship. However, influenced by his scientific background and orientalist stereotypes prevalent in Colonial India, Rele exhibited a preference for "Western" science over "Eastern" religion. Despite using the designation "science of yoga", it is evident that Rele departed from the common theosophical assessments of "Eastern" religion as a superior science.[170] Essentially, by employing

[169] Owing to the lack of biographical details, it is challenging to assess Rele's ability to access Sanskrit texts. At one point, he mentions using a Sanskrit dictionary, and Singleton maintains that Rele worked with translations of Srishchandra Basu (Rele 1931, 38; Singleton 2010, 46). Rele does not refer to Srishchandra's translations in *The Mysterious Kundalini*. However, considering the far-reaching impact of Srishchandra and his brother Bamandas (who wrote the influential article "The Anatomy of the Tantras" (1888) and served as Srishchandra's publisher), it is unlikely that Rele was unaware of their work.

[170] The belief in the superiority of South Asian thought over "Western" science was a common thread among educated South Asians from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. Aside from theosophists, John Woodroffe represents a non-South Asian whose collaborations with learned Bengalis made him equally trust that "Western" science was inferior to South Asian traditions (Strube 2022, 234).

"Western" anatomy and physiology to explicate and demystify a South Asian religious concept, he perpetuated orientalist paradigms while emphasising the superiority of ("Western") science. This inclination is apparent throughout his treatise, notably in the book's Appendix, where Rele provides a glossary of "Sanskrit anatomical terms […] as mentioned in various Yoga-manuals […], with their Western equivalents" (*ibid*., 83).

With eighty-one pages, *The Mysterious Kundalini* is a rather slim account. Of its nine thematic chapters, four are solely dedicated to kundalini, discussing its location and functions in the physical body (chapter four), assessing its identification with the right vagus nerve – arguably the book's key argument (chapter five), and the awakening of kundalini by bandha (chapter seven) and mudra practices (chapter eight).

In the introduction of the book, Rele reports from a certain Deshbandu, a South Asian yogi, who was invited to perform his feats and skills in front of the Bombay Medical Union (Singleton 2010, 106). Rele was asked to judge Deshbandu's performance, which included "the stopping of the radial and the temporal pulse on both sides at will, and the stopping of the heartbeats for a few seconds. He also showed some rare feats of archery, such as the splitting of a hair and a thread by an arrow" (Rele 1931, xxi). The yogi claimed that he achieved these feats "by knowledge of Yogic Science and Prānāyāma" (*ibid*.). Following the public performance, Rele and a colleague undertook empirical tests with Deshbandu, aiming to adequately explain the witnessed phenomena "in terms of modern science with our present knowledge of anatomy and physiology" (*ibid*., xxvii).[171] Kundalini seemed to have not yet played a role during the examinations with Deshbandu, who apparently did not refer to it either. Nonetheless, these empirical tests stimulated Rele's research interest in yogis' control of the physical body and the nervous system. Ultimately, Rele suggested the "mysterious kundalini" as the *physiological* agent enabling phenomena such as Deshbandu's feats: "In the physical form she [kundalini] is lying dormant and coiled up like a serpent in an individual. When this is awakened by Yoga practices, the individual gains for himself the power of performing miracles" (*ibid*., 24).

This dual perception of kundalini as equally biomedical and religious permeates Rele's treatise. Accordingly, his underlying hypothesis revolves around the alignment of yogic/tantric and physical anatomy: "The fact remains that the anatomy of nerves given in the Tāntric manuals can stand comparison with our present knowledge [of the internal

[171] Rele's account anticipates similar empirical tests that Elmer and Alyce Green undertook during the 1970s. Chapter 21.2. discusses their biofeedback investigations with Swami Rama.

anatomy of the body]" (*ibid*., 20). Of course, biomedical interpretations of the subtle body did not originate in "Tāntric manuals" but instead were nineteenth-century innovations by figures such as the author of "The Dream of Ravan", Baradakanta Majumdar, and Bamandas Basu. Rele, in any case, accepted these interpretations as empirical facts. His innovative contribution to the medicalised understanding of subtle components lies in his assertion that kundalini corresponds to the right vagus nerve (Figure 3).

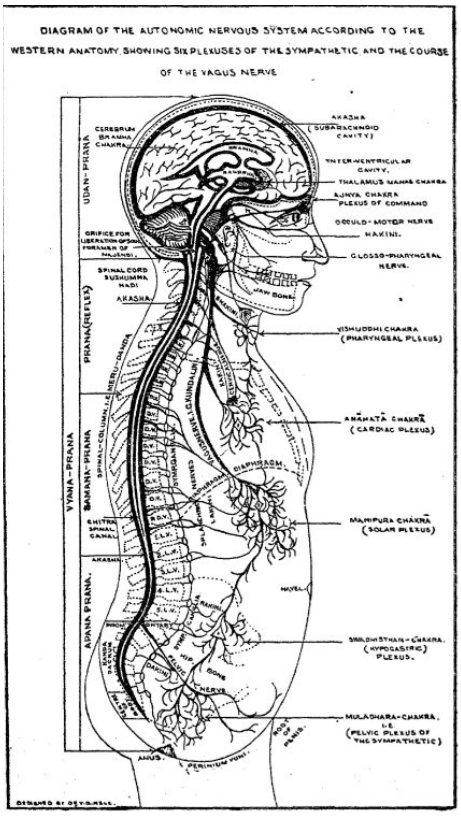

Figure 3: Anatomical map depicting kundalini's correspondence with the right vagus nerve (Rele 1931, xx).

The vagus nerve is the tenth cranial nerve and one of the human body's longest and most complex nerves. It originates in the brainstem and extends downward through the neck and into the abdomen, branching out to various organs. Functionally, the vagus nerve plays a vital role in regulating many essential bodily functions, including digestion and heart and respiratory rates. Rele's identification of the vagus nerve with kundalini primarily rests on the vagus nerve's location in the human body. Moreover, he aimed to underpin his argument by comprehensively comparing kundalini, as outlined in yogic texts, with the physiological functions attributed to the vagus nerve: "Normally the activities of the Vagus are automatic and unconscious. If, however, it is possible to bring it under control of the will, one could

then achieve everything that is said about the 'awakened *Kundalini*'" (*ibid*., 44, original emphasis). Rele proceeds by dividing the vagus nerve into three parts, associating them with the mouth, the body, and the tail of kundalini:

> The first portion [of the vagus nerve] […] is situated at the lower part of the fourth ventricle of the brain, and corresponds with the mouth of the sleeping *Kundalini*. The second portion, from below the base of the skull down to its connection with the solar plexus, is […] curved in shape and corresponds with the body of the *Kundalini*. The third and the last portion, […] connects the hypogastric (*Swādhishtāna*) and pelvic (*Mulādhara*) plexuses with the body of the *Kundalini* through the intermediary of the Solar plexus. This is said to be the tail of the *Kundalini*. (*ibid*., 46, original emphasis)

For Rele, this "evidence" was sufficient to prove kundalini's correspondence with the vagus nerve. However, considering that the vagus nerve comprises a right and left nerve, Rele felt compelled to specify kundalini's identification. He favoured the right over the left vagus nerve, claiming that the left "is not so plentifully supplied with efferent fibres as the right and plays only a very minor part in the formation of the solar plexus and of plexuses situated below" (*ibid*., 47).

The final chapters of *The Mysterious Kundalini* deal with the practice of bandhas and mudras, which Rele suggested as methods to "awaken" kundalini and thus stimulate the vagus nerve. According to Rele, these are suitable ways to control kundalini, and thereby the autonomic nervous system. Perhaps influenced by Vivekananda, Rele emphasised that pranayama significantly contributed to the attempt to control kundalini: "By the constant practice of Pranayama […], a Yogi establishes a conscious control over Kundalini which is then easily acted upon by the will" (*ibid*., 64). These instructions for activating and "easily" controlling kundalini represent a departure from descriptions found in tantric texts, *haṭhayoga* manuals, and modern experience reports. These texts typically underscore the rarity and challenge of activating kundalini, often dismissing the feasibility of control as improbable or highlighting the arduousness of such an endeavour. This example demonstrates how Rele's approach sought to demystify kundalini's esoteric nature and portray it as a physical mechanism governed by anatomical principles and easy to master.

Despite claiming empirical evidence and scientific scrutiny, Rele's account often appears speculative and arbitrary, largely due to the lack of proper references. Throughout his treatise, he blends yogic and medical terminology and evidently draws from the literature of both these domains. Additionally, Rele occasionally also relies on "the science of

Theosophy" (*ibid*., 77) without offering further explanations or sources. This makes it difficult for readers to evaluate whether his statements are based on scientific research, ancient yogic theories, or scientistic considerations on the part of theosophy. Moreover, his arguments frequently lack persuasiveness, especially regarding his equation of kundalini with the vagus nerve. Rele seemed to be aware of its weakness, as he used Deshbandu's performance to support his claim:

> A convincing proof of it [kundalini's identification with the vagus nerve] was given by Deshbandhu by his performances viz., the stopping of the movement of the heart and the arterial pulse of a particular part of the body, a reference to which has already been made in the opening paragraph of this book. These phenomena are mainly due to the stimulation of the Vagus – the "awakened Kundalini". (*ibid*., 49)[172]

What Rele deemed to be "convincing proof" ultimately failed to strengthen his argument; instead, it exacerbated its deficiencies by introducing an additional unsupported assumption. These shortcomings prompted corresponding responses. Swami Kuvalayananda, the key advocate of empirical yoga research at that time, dismissed Rele's conclusions as unscientific and speculative (see below) (Kuvalayananda 1931, 57–58).[173] Sir John Woodroffe, who contributed a foreword to the book, expressed ambivalence towards Rele's theory of the physiological basis of phenomena associated with kundalini yoga. On the one hand, he admired Rele's examination of the topic and acknowledged his competence: "Kundalini Yoga is of great scientific, parapsychic, and metaphysical interest and I am glad to provide an introduction to the present conscientious and valuable enquiry. […] the author, a competent man of science, has given to the subject the scientific attention which it has long required" (Woodroffe, in Rele 1931, ix–x). On the other hand, he rejected Rele's identification of kundalini with the vagus nerve: "As to this, I would say that Kundalini herself cannot be that [the vagus nerve] and for this reason. She is the Grand Potential. As such she cannot, in my view, be identified with any of the products which she becomes" (*ibid*., x). Despite his ambivalence, Woodroffe welcomed Rele's attempt to approach the

[172] Such phenomena were known since the nineteenth century as feats performed by fakirs. Physicians who examined these feats include the Scottish surgeon James Braid (1795–1860), who is best known for his hypnosis research, and the Bengali physician N.C. Paul (Baier 2009a, 1:248–249). However, while their biomedical interpretations predated Rele, they did not consider kundalini in their elucidations (Braid 1850; N. C. Paul 1851).

[173] The relationship between Rele and Kuvalayananda is uncertain. In *The Mysterious Kundalini,* Rele credited Kuvalayanada for supplying him with photographs to include in the book (Rele 1931, xiii). Aside from that, little information is available.

topic from a "scientific" perspective: "I am glad then to know that a man of the scientific attainments of the Author has taken the matter in hand and has thus encouraged others to follow or to criticise him" (*ibid*., xi).

As the subsequent chapters of the present study demonstrate, numerous individuals followed in Rele's footsteps. Although not all belonged to the scientific community, they all shared a common aspiration: to unravel the mysteries of kundalini by means of modern physical and medical sciences.

5.3.5. Swami Kuvalayananda's Empirical Yoga Research

Swami Kuvalayananda (b. Jagannath Ganesh Gune, 1883–1966) was a yogi, an educator, and a researcher.[174] He is best known for establishing the Kaivalyadhama Yoga Ashram, founding the *Yoga Mimamsa* Journal to distribute his yoga research results, and popularising views on medical hatha yoga.[175] The young Gune was strongly influenced by his professors at Baroda University, including Sri Aurobindo and Professor Rajratan Manikrao. Particularly the latter, a renowned wrestler and pioneer of physical education in South Asia, served as an inspiration for Gune's aim to "bring together science and spirituality by coordinating the spiritual aspects of Yoga with modern science" (Wakharkar, in Alter 2004, 82). This goal materialised in 1924 with the establishment of his Kaivalyadhama Yoga Ashram in Lonavala (near Mumbai), "a research center devoted exclusively to the study of Yoga in scientific terms" (Alter 2004, 84).[176] With the institutionalisation of his research, Gune also took on the name Swami Kuvalayananda.

Equipped with the most up-to-date technical apparatuses, Kaivalyadhama's laboratory undertook scientific experiments on the efficacy and physiological effects of yogic techniques and procedures.[177] The ashram's laboratory was divided into branches for research into electrophysiology, radiology, biochemical analysis, and more. During the

[174] Alter provides the best introductions to Swami Kuvalayananda and his medical approach to yoga research (Alter 2004, 73–108).

[175] It is important to note that Kuvalayananda did not pioneer medical research into yoga. Instead, N. C. Paul and S. C. Basu, both of whom were discussed above, set the agenda for a "scientific" orientation in yoga research. Moreover, during the 1920s and 1930s, when Kuvalayananda's medical research on hatha yoga flourished, Sri Yogendra equally made significant contributions to this field through his research projects (Singleton 2010, 50–53).

[176] Prior to conducting experiments at his laboratory at Kaivalyadhama Yoga Ashram, Gune had already measured the physiological effects of yogic procedures at the State Hospital, Baroda (Alter 2004, 83).

[177] Kaivalyadhama also accommodated a yogic hospital attending physical ailments with yogic practices and Ayurvedic treatments (Kraler 2022, 305).

experiments, Kuvalayananda and his scientific team primarily monitored changes in the research subjects' oxygen, blood pressure, and brain waves.[178] The main target of the early experiments was the subtle force prana, which he hoped to discover in the physical body, along with the potential physiological effects of pranayama (Kraler 2022, 305–308; Alter 2004, 85,91). Kuvalayananda sought to "reveal the basic Universal Truth manifest in Yoga by demystifying it through science. Thus, in his view, there had to be explanations for how and why yogic power could be achieved" (Alter 2004, 82).

The results of the experiments were published and distributed internationally through the ashram's journal, *Yoga Mimamsa,* which is still being published. Anticipated as a quarterly journal and located at the nexus of science and spirituality, it has not solely addressed specialists or South Asians but has rather aimed to reach a broader audience across disciplines and nations.[179] Moreover, its scope was not restricted to the scientific findings from the experiments conducted at Kaivalyadhama. Aside from its "scientific" section, it also included "semi-scientific", "popular", and "miscellaneous" segments. The journal's sections further corresponded to Kaivalyadhama's division into various research departments, including the Department of Scientific Research, the Department of Philosophico-Literary Research, and the Department of Therapeutic Research (Alter 2004, 85; Kraler 2022, 306).

A thorough exploration of Kuvalayananda's experimental undertakings or topics featured in *Yoga Mimamsa* clearly exceeds the scope of this study. What is vital to note is Kuvalayananda's understanding of yoga as "not just a philosophy, and not just physical culture, but rather a system of knowledge manifest in action – [a] physical philosophy" (Alter 2004, 86). His research into yoga accordingly encompassed yogic physiology and yogic philosophy. While he aimed to demystify the former through scientific experiments, yogic philosophy was to be disclosed through the publication, translation, and distribution of classical yogic texts. In other words, the Department of Philosophico-Literary Research strove to further the textual knowledge of yoga, while the Department of Scientific Research was dedicated to experimental empiricism (Alter 2004, 86; Kraler 2022, 306–307).[180]

[178] As discussed in Chapter 21.1., Hans Berger first recorded brainwaves in 1924 (Abhang et al. 2016, 20).

[179] The journal still exists and is published regularly by Kaivalyadhama.

[180] Kraler elucidated Kuvalayananda's twofold approach by analysing his experiments centered on pranayama while emphasising Kaivalyadhama's efforts in prana's historical and literal contextualisation (Kraler 2022, 305–324).

Moreover, Kuvalayananda positioned his research in two intersecting arenas: the notion of yoga was deeply rooted in his native tradition, and his interest in it was sparked by some of his mentors, who had a strong Hindu nationalist leaning. The scientific means with which he hoped to unravel yoga's underlying universal truth, on the other hand, were imported from outside South Asia, e.g., X-ray machines, blood-pressure gauges, electro-cardiograph devices, and a Haldane gas-analysis apparatus. Furthermore, the international distribution of Kuvalayananda's research results in *Yoga Mimamsa* exemplifies his transnational vision (Alter 2004, 77, 85).[181]

As already remarked, one of Kuvalayananda's key research interests centred on the empirical demonstration of prana and the effects of pranayama. As part of these studies, he also refers to kundalini, which he describes as "spiritual energy" (Kuvalayananda 1931, 96) or "spiritual force" (Kuvalayananda 1933, 145). In Kuvalayananda's books *Prāṇāyāma* (1931) and *Āsana* (1933), he discussed kundalini along with body postures (asanas) to ensure physical health as a prerequisite for spiritual attainment. Through a medical lens, he emphasises how training the spinal cord and the brain through yogic postures would not only warrant physical health but also avert psycho-physiological difficulties following kundalini's awakening:

> We have seen how Āsanas are peculiarly capable of training the spinal cord and the brain. These are the most important parts of the nervous system, and the spiritual force of Kuṇḍalinī when awakened works through them. If the brain or the spinal cord are not in a healthy condition and do not possess the strength necessary for sustaining the interaction of Kuṇḍalinī, a student of Yoga very often has to pass through a variety of troubles. (*ibid*.)[182]

A particular yogic exercise that Kuvalayananda frequently discussed in conjunction with kundalini was uddiyana-bandha. This exercise is practised while sitting or standing and involves the contraction of the front abdominal muscles while simultaneously raising the diaphragm. As Kuvalayananda stressed, practising uddiyana-bandha leads to health benefits and further "enables the spiritual force to rise up" (*ibid*., 51). This yogic exercise was thoroughly examined during empirical scientific studies at Kaivalyadhama's laboratory employing X-ray and other experimental means. "Hence", Kuvalayananda maintained, "we

[181] As Kraler and Baier have demonstrated, the journal prevailed among yoga authors and psychotherapists in the United States and Europe (Kraler 2022, 306; Baier 2009b, 2:654).

[182] As mentioned above, selected warnings of kundalini's downsides permeated the theosophical discourse. With Kuvalayananda, the first non-theosophist uttered his concern. Gopi Krishna's books promulgated kundalini's pathologisation, thus spreading this idea globally. However, Kuvalayananda (and scattered theosophical warnings) preceded Krishna's efforts.

are in a position to give a detailed scientific description of its technique" (*ibid*., 50). Kuvalayananda omits reference to whether kundalini's role in uddiyana-bandha was subject to investigation during these experiments. Elsewhere, however, he links physiological features of certain meditative poses with the rise of kundalini. One such characteristic physiological feature was "a richer blood supply for the pelvic region toning up the coccygeal and sacral nerves and helping the awakening of Kuṇḍalinī in co-ordination with other Yogic practices" (*ibid*., 147).

Kundalini awakening thus reoccurs in Kuvalayananda's writings and his experiments as a potential goal of yoga, defining physical health as a prerequisite for kundalini's sound awakening and movement. However, despite associating kundalini with physical and medical components of yoga, Kuvalyananda refrained from referring to kundalini in profane language. In his book *Prāṇāyāma*, he notes that "we have purposely avoided any modern anatomical terms here, simply because we cannot venture any speculative theory in connection with Kuṇḍalinī" (Kuvalayananda 1931, 96). This echoes Kuvalyananda's critical review of Rele's *The Mysterious Kundalini* (1927) and the attempt to interpret kundalini anatomically. In an article on pranayama, Kuvalyananda rejects all previous attempts to identify nadis with anatomical structures as unscientific – a standpoint that Arthur Avalon also advocated. Given the absence of clinical demonstrations, he criticises these attempts as speculative.[183] (Kuvalayananda 1928, 267–268) Rele's treatise served as Kuvalyananda's primal example:

> [Dr. Rele] has taken full advantage of his knowledge of modern anatomy and physiology, and some of his guess-work has every chance of standing the laboratory tests. […] But all his conclusions are based upon *mere speculation*. Dr. Rele has not tried a single experiment in the laboratory […]. As such, we are afraid, we cannot accept his conclusions as scientifically sound. Nay, we have serious doubts regarding the accuracy of many of his interpretations, and the whole book looks to be of doubtful scientific value. (*ibid*., 267, original emphasis)

Kuvalyananda thus attributed kundalini to the realm of spirituality and pointed out that it had previously eluded clinical research. Despite this attribution, he appeared not to dismiss the empirical demonstration of kundalini as impossible. On the contrary, he evidently

[183] Intriguingly, Kuvalayananda commended Bamandas' "The Anatomy of the Tantras" (1888) as a valuable effort to interpret Yogic anatomy scientifically. Despite labelling it as equally speculative as Rele's account, Kuvalayananda recommended Bamandas over Rele (Kuvalayananda 1931, 58).

considered it feasible to initiate research into kundalini similar to his clinical studies on prana.

Christopher Hills (1926–1997), a self-prescribed scientist-yogi with a PhD in religion and philosophy and a DSc in physics, provides interesting insights on this matter. In his book *Nuclear Evolution: Discovery of the Rainbow Body* (1977), Hills maintained that Kaivalyadhama, among other South Asian yogic hospitals and ashrams, had undertaken kundalini research for several years.[184] However, according to Hills, it was not Kuvalyananda but Sanjiv L. Vilnekar (1907–1967) who conducted it. Vilnekar was then the Joint Director of Research at Kaivalyadhama and co-authored with Kuvalyananda the book *Yogic Therapy: Basic Principles and Methods* (1963). Hills spent 1960 through 1962 in South Asia as an ascetic. During that period, he made the acquaintance of Vilnekar, whom Hills refers to as a friend, and who invited Hills to participate in some experiments (Hills to Krishna, July 25, 1977, LGK, box 6.8.5.; Hills 1977, 130).[185]

According to Hills, Vilnekar used technical devices for his kundalini research and compared his results with ancient yogic texts:

> A friend of mine, Dr. S. Vinekar, the Director of Research, demonstrated a map tracing of the kundalini path by using EEG and GSR equipment to record its electrical effects in 1961 at a conference of renowned yogis in Patna under the chairmanship of the then just retired ex-president of India Ragendra [*sic*] Prasad. The opening of the chakras and the path of the kundalini is described in many ancient texts and Dr. Vinekar merely checked these documented statements from an objective medical and bio-physical point of view. (Hills 1977, 130–131)

This passage from Hills' book explicitly asserts that Kaivalyadhama's laboratory conducted clinical investigations into kundalini. Unfortunately, no additional source material is available to confirm the accuracy of this information. His account carries significant weight due to Hills' attendance at the 1961 conference and subsequent involvement in "scientific

[184] The first edition of Hills' *Nuclear Evolution* was published in 1968 with a different subtitle: *Nuclear Evolution: The Guide to Cosmic Enlightenment*. Unlike the revised and much larger second edition, the first edition omits reference to kundalini (Hills 1968).

[185] Hills noted that Vinekar invited him to participate in a test at Kaivalyadhama's laboratory in 1960. During the experiment, Hills was placed in an airtight pit sealed inside a Faraday cage. While inducing a sleep-like meditation state (yoga-nidra), his brainwaves were measured via electrodes attached to the scalp. A similar test took place at Joe Kamiya's laboratory in San Francisco in 1968 (Kamiya 1968). However, Hills noted that Kaivalyadhama's laboratory held an advantage over Kamiya's due to its knowledge and utilisation of "the ancient texts", which allegedly would provide insights into the energies Hills claimed to be able to voluntarily produce (Hills 1977, 496–500).

yoga" projects and events. However, further research would be necessary to conclusively determine kundalini's role in Kaivalyadhama's clinical studies.

To conclude, Kuvalayananda's experiments conducted in his ashram laboratory advanced the medical perspectives on yoga and contributed to a broader international discourse on the scientific examination of yoga. His research encompassed philosophical-literary and clinical-scientific approaches. Kuvalayananda was convinced of kundalini as a religious phenomenon; however, he emerged as a critic of contemporary empirical kundalini research. Consequently, his clinical studies barely explored the notion of kundalini. Nevertheless, they strengthened earlier accounts, asserting kundalini's biomedical value, and served as vital preliminary investigations for later research endeavours.

5.4. Summary

The entangled realities of orientalism, occultism, and Hindu reformism were the driving forces behind negotiations of political and religious identities in Colonial India. In this context, debates on tantra and kundalini emerged, which were equally examined through religious and scientistic lenses. The Theosophical Society played a pivotal role in these discussions. While still in the process of defining itself, theosophy was influenced by orientalist stereotypes, Hindu reformist notions of "revival", and Bengali intellectuals' biomedical perspectives on the yogic body. Despite its evolving identity, theosophy undertook the crucial task of navigating ideas on the medicalisation of the yogic body and the re-evaluation of tantra as a significant Hindu tradition.

Within theosophical discourses, concepts of kundalini emerged in 1880 and were primarily discussed as a tantric notion explained through scientistic language taken from modern science and technology. Much of what I have termed the "first wave of *kuṇḍalinī*'s scientification" was prominently featured in *The Theosophist*. Owing to the journal's international distribution, this marked the beginning of *kuṇḍalinī*'s global popularisation. However, the initial decade of *kuṇḍalinī*'s scientification, i.e., between 1880 and 1891, was chiefly advanced by a select group of South Asian and non-South Asian theosophists. The "second wave" represented a shift away from an exclusively theosophical context, with *The Theosophist* no longer playing a significant role. Instead, men of science, who sought to demystify religious concepts, and charismatic religious teachers brought kundalini to the attention of a wider audience. Some of their key writings, e.g., Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* and Avalon's *The Serpent Power*, shaped the perspectives of generations of yoga practitioners

interested in kundalini. Each of the representatives of the "second wave" contributed significantly to attaching interpretative frameworks, including Hindu nationalism, spiritual evolutionism, the medicalisation of the subtle body, religious universalism, and the scientification of religion. This laid the groundwork for kundalini's growing popularisation and scientification.

The next phase of kundalini's dissemination inside and outside of South Asia was decisively accelerated by the endeavours of religious teachers advocating their belief systems in the United States and Europe. Part II will explore kundalini's transition to the "West" through the efforts of South Asian Swamis, who paved the way for its role in the latter half of the twentieth century.

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KUNDALINI IN LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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PART II

Kundalini on the "Swami Trail"

Theosophy's discovery of kundalini in the late nineteenth century introduced the South Asian concept to an international audience. This development gained fresh impetus in the twentieth century with the publication of Arthur Avalon's *The Serpent Power* (1918), among other minor publications. However, it was not until the latter half of the twentieth century that kundalini reached the pinnacle of its international dissemination. South Asian yoga and meditation teachers played a significant role in increasing recognition of kundalini. While many yoga and meditation teachers incorporated kundalini into their teachings, a select few made it the central focus. This part of the dissertation introduces two key representatives of South Asian teachers who developed distinct interpretations of kundalini: Swami Muktananda and Yogi Bhajan. They ventured out of South Asia to disseminate their distinct teachings and attract new students in the United States and Europe. As this study argues, these "travelling swamis" fostered the reception of kundalini beyond South Asia and stimulated an increased interest in this topic in the United States and Europe. With Siddha Yoga and Kundalini Yoga,[186] Muktananda and Yogi Bhajan developed guru-centred schools that advocated instant bliss through the experience of kundalini.[187] Their success was largely grounded in the mass distribution of their religious ideas and practices while strategically adhering to the logic of neoliberalism and what Lau called "New Age capitalism" (Lau 2000, 2).

Another teacher who furthered kundalini's transmission was Swami Lakshman Joo (1907–1991, b. Lakshman Raina). An esteemed teacher of Kashmir Shaivism with a remarkable national and international network, Lakshman Joo assumed a vital role in disseminating knowledge of kundalini in South Asia and beyond.[188] Despite never travelling outside South

[186] Throughout this study, I capitalise "kundalini yoga" when referring to Yogi Bhajan's distinct teachings.

[187] The South Asian category "*guru*" refers to teachers of religious knowledge, bearers of religious insights and liberation, and channels for divine grace. They encompass various roles, such as passing on knowledge, interpreting holy scripture, explaining religious rituals, guiding disciples towards liberation, or explaining the relevance of religious tradition for the modern world (W. J. Johnson 2010, 135).

[188] Key sources addressing Lakshman Joo's life and work include Bettina Bäumler and Sarla Kumar's edited volume *Saṁvidullāsaḥ. Manifestation of Divine Consciousness: Swami Lakshman Joo. Saint-Scholar of Kashmir Śaivism – A Centenary Tribute* (2011), John Hughes' edited volume *Self Realization in Kashmir Shaivism: The Teachings of Swami Lakshmanjoo* (1994), and Douglas Osto's chapter "Swami Lakshman Joo and His Legacy", in his book *Indian Tantric Traditions* (Osto 2020, 45–58). Lilian Silburn's *Kuṇḍalinī. The Energy of the Depths* (1988) is the most influential Lakshman Joo-inspired work, distributing knowledge

Asia, he attracted disciples from various countries, who stayed with him in his home in Kashmir to study with and learn from him. Many of his students have promoted and distributed his oral teachings, which primarily revolved around kundalini.[189] Thus, Lakshman Joo warrants his attribution as a "modern guru", contributing to the fascination of kundalini. This credit notwithstanding, Part II refrains from discussing Lakshman Joo's work, impact, and interpretation of kundalini in more detail. Two main reasons account for this choice: First, Lakshman Joo never developed his own school. Instead, he firmly rooted his teachings in the tradition of Kashmir Shaivism and saw himself standing in the tradition of Abhinavagupta. While interpreting Kashmir Shaiva ideas and translating key texts, he was not interested in appropriating these for personal advantage or the purpose of international fame. Second, he did not wish to share his teachings with a large crowd. Referring to the secret and dangerous quality of Kashmir Shaiva concepts, he underscored that he was only willing to share parts of his knowledge with selected students from South Asia and abroad (Nelson 1994, xxiv–xxv).

Therefore, while contributing to a growing awareness of kundalini in the latter half of the twentieth century, Lakshman Joo's approach differed significantly from that of modern gurus such as Swami Muktananda and Yogi Bhajan, as the following chapters will demonstrate. Before detailing Muktananda and Yogi Bhajan's perspectives on kundalini, I will provide background information detailing the social and legal developments in the United States that led to an increase in Asian immigration.

about kundalini. Moreover, Lakshman Joo's publication *Kashmir Shaivism: The Secret Supreme* (1991) is a good starting point for his scholarship.

[189] The most notable students of Lakshman Joo include the French scholars of Tantra Lilian Silburn (1908–1993) and André Padoux (1920–2017), Oxford Indologist Alexis Sanderson (b. 1948), English scholar of Tantrism Mark S.G. Dyczkowski (b. 1951), Austrian Indologist Bettina Bäumer (b. 1940), and the US-American poet Paul Reps (1895–1990).

6. Historical Background: South Asia and the United States

As outlined in the previous chapters, exchanges between South Asia and the Anglo-American world trace back to the early days of the East India Company, and intensified during the colonial rule of Great Britain. A notable legacy of British rule over South Asia is the English language. Despite being associated with the British Raj, it has garnered widespread acceptance among the local population over the centuries. This becomes evident from an episode in the early 1960s when, amidst various language debates, South Asians advocated against removing English from the Indian Constitution (Auddy 2019).[190] Thus, English as a colonial language shaped South Asia's social history and fostered cultural exchanges beyond its shores during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when South Asian intellectuals as well as yoga and meditation teachers travelled to Europe and the United States. These interactions correlated with increased immigration of (South) Asians to the Anglo-American world from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. However, the United States did not heartily welcome Asian immigrants.

Owing to economic reasons, an increasing resentment of Asian immigrants gained ground in US-American society at the beginning of the twentieth century. Initially, Japanese and Korean immigrants represented the significant targets of this Asian exclusion policy. More than 127,000 Japanese labourers entered the United States in the first decade of the twentieth century. This led not merely to the fear of labour competition but also to racial hostility towards Asians. On the grounds of this general mistrust of Asians, it was not long until South Asians experienced equal marginalisation and exclusion.[191] The anti-Asian movement was advocated by the "Asiatic Exclusion League". The former "Japanese and Korean Exclusion League" now portrayed South Asian immigrants as the new enemy stereotype. Employing lurid language and headlines, such as "'Hindu invasion' and a 'tide of turbans'" (G. R. Hess

[190] After Independence in 1947, Hindi was declared South Asia's official language. However, English was adopted as the associate official language for the following fifteen years. As the expiration date for English as Hindi's associate language approached, rebellions arose. Particularly in South Indian states, such as Tamil Nadu, where Hindi was not widely spoken, but also among nationalists throughout the country, people rioted. They justified their protests by fearing that the lack of English would diminish or threaten India's national integrity (Auddy 2019, 42).

[191] The first South Asian immigrants reached the United States in 1898. Most of them were specialised in agriculture, and their annual number until 1903 did not exceed thirty. In the following years until 1906, approximately 250 South Asian immigrants entered the United States. These small numbers rose in the subsequent years up to 1,710 immigrants per year. On the one hand, the increase was a result of the persecution and exclusion of South Asians living in Canada, and on the other hand, it was due to the demand for workers in California. This notwithstanding, in 1910 the number of South Asians residing in California was less than 6,000 (G. R. Hess 1969, 61–62).

1969, 62), the "Asiatic Exclusion League" discredited and discriminated against South Asians. The results were anti-South Asian riots throughout America and general anti-South Asian sentiments. Already in 1914, Congress Representative Denver S. Church called attention to the threat of "Hindus" and their religion.[192] He (among many) insisted that "Hindus" were alien to US-Americans and that assimilation was thus beyond possibility. Furthermore, aligning with orientalist stereotypes, he denigrated Hindu religions and culture as superstitious and primitive. Eventually, the 1924 "American Immigration Act" curtailed the migration flow of South Asians to the United States, as it suspended their eligibility for US-American naturalisation. The "Asiatic Exclusion League" celebrated the passing of the "American Immigration Act" as a significant achievement of their Asian exclusion policy.[193] These hostile resentments did not pass unnoticed in South Asia. While educated South Asians had held the United States in high esteem as a country of idealism and democracy, many were disillusioned. They sharply criticised the US-American racial discrimination against South Asian immigrants (*ibid*., 63–64, 67).

These developments resulted in little exchange for several decades, with the next major migration wave not happening until the 1960s. Even though President Truman had already signed a bill in 1946 that re-entitled South Asians to US-American citizenship, it was the "Immigration and Nationality Act" of 1965 that finally replaced the "American Immigration Act" of 1924 and re-encouraged South Asians to migrate to the United States. This legal replacement and the subsequent influx of South Asian immigrants coincided with the emergence of US-American counterculture (see Chapter 20.2.) and an increasing interest in Asian philosophies and religions (Williamson 2010, 27). Accordingly, aside from South Asian workers, yoga and meditation teachers equally benefitted from the eased immigration conditions. While not all South Asian yoga and meditation teachers sought citizenship, simplifications in immigration were an encouragement to embark on the "Swami Trail".[194]

The following two chapters will introduce two examples of South Asian teachers who travelled to the United States during that period hoping to disseminate their religious ideas, which revolved particularly around kundalini.

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[192] Regardless of their religion, US-Americans called South Asians "Hindus" (G. R. Hess 1969, 60).

[193] Other regulation attempts based on racial attributions preceded the 1924 "American Immigration Act", including the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 or the Gentlemen's Agreement Act of 1907 (M. Boyd 1974, 507).

[194] In his article "Swami Circuit", Philip Deslippe traced earlier expressions of what he termed "Early American Yoga" (Deslippe 2018, 5). He argues that yoga in the United States before the mid-twentieth century was rather seen as "mental and magical" (*ibid*., 7), instead of "physical and postural" (*ibid*.).

7. Swami Muktananda and his Interpretation of Shaktipat and Kundalini

Swami Muktananda (1908–1982) was the second guru of the Siddha Yoga Lineage and is a remarkable example of a travelling swami establishing an international meditation movement. For the present study, Muktananda constitutes a particularly interesting case study as kundalini was a key tenet of his teachings and significantly contributed to its twentieth-century dissemination among US-Americans, Europeans, South Asians, and others. Each of the modern gurus established their hallmark to emphasise their distinctiveness. In the case of Muktananda, it was the unique belief that he was a shaktipat guru: He maintained that he could bestow his disciples with divine grace, thereby awakening their kundalini. The Siddha Yoga movement is a paradigm for modern forms of religious institutionalisation, the international expansion of Hindu religions, and the enthusiasm for "authentic" South Asian teachings. Moreover, it aptly demonstrates how kundalini developed into the symbol of an era of (predominantly) non-South Asian religious seekers who pursued "spiritual liberation". Building on existing research, this chapter will offer an overview of Siddha Yoga and its teachings.[195] Despite kundalini's pivotal role in Siddha Yoga's teachings, it received little or no attention in existing studies.[196] Therefore, a special emphasis will be placed on Muktananda's views on kundalini, as outlined in his autobiography *Play of Consciousness* (1978), and its ties with shaktipat.

7.1. Siddha Yoga

Siddha Yoga is a guru-centred meditation movement that traces its origins to a small ashram at Ganeshpuri, a village in the West Indian state of Maharashtra. While Swami Muktananda

[195] Substantial research has been conducted on Muktananda and Siddha Yoga. The foremost sources used for this chapter include Hugh Urban's study on tantra and neo-tantra, where he discusses Muktananda's role as tantric guru (Urban 2003, 243–250), Lola Williamson's research on Siddha Yoga as part of her research into modern yoga movements in the United States (Williamson 2005, 147–167; 2010, 106–131), a contribution by Andrea Jain on the entrepreneurial implications of Siddha Yoga (Jain 2014, 190–209), and Douglas Osto's study into contemporary expressions of nondual Shaivism (Osto 2020, 59–79). Moreover, the edited volume *Meditation Revolution* (1997), in which six Siddha Yoga disciples reflect on its history and teachings, constitutes a pivotal resource for understanding the Siddha Yoga movement. However, as several scholars critically pointed out, the contributors to *Meditation Revolution* essentially assumed a hagiographical stance while claiming critical scholarship (Kripal 1999, 236–237; Urban 2003, 248). Therefore, *Meditation Revolution* warrants a critical distance, despite posing a valuable resource.

[196] Douglas R. Brooks and Constantina R. Bailly's co-written chapter "Kuṇḍalinī. Awakening the Divinity Within", included in the volume *Meditation Revolution*, constitutes a notable exception (Brooks and Bailly 1997, 445–495).

is the most prominent guru of Siddha Yoga, the movement's adherents unambiguously recognise Muktananda's guru, Bhagawan Nityananda (1897–1961), as its founding father.[197] Muktananda and other disciples lived a monastic life at Nityananda's Ganeshpuri ashram, committed to serving their guru, whom they considered a siddha (Jain 2014, 193). The notion of a "siddha" denotes a "perfectly realized practitioner" (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 277) who has achieved liberation while living (*jīvanmukti*). In line with this, Siddha Yoga disciples hold their gurus in high regard, viewing them as realised, God-like role models. Moreover, the belief prevails that the perfected guru can transmit the seed of perfection through shaktipat. Upon receiving shaktipat initiation, the disciple may achieve a perfected state, too, provided they adhere to their guru's recommended spiritual discipline. Accordingly, Williamson suggests that shaktipat and aligning the personal practice (sadhana) with the guru's instructions are the two foundational tenets of Siddha Yoga (Williamson 2005, 149).

Hagiographical and historical details about Nityananda and Muktananda's biographies frequently overlap, making an accurate assessment of their lives challenging.[198] Muktananda was likely born on May 16, 1908, into a wealthy Shaiva family who lived in a small south Indian town close to Mangalore, Karnataka. After making Nityananda's acquaintance in his teenage years, Muktananda decided to become a wandering ascetic and monk. He alternated between wandering South Asia and dwelling with religious teachers at their ashrams for the next two decades.[199] Ultimately, in the mid-1940s, he settled close to Ganeshpuri to become Nityananda's disciple (Durgananda 1997, 25–33).

Key episodes of Muktananda's discipleship were his receipt of shaktipat (1947), a subsequent nine-year period until he claimed self-realisation (1956), and ultimately the passing of lineage from Nityananda to Muktananda (1961) (*ibid*., 35–48). Muktananda's

[197] Muktananda's successor was his disciple Malti Shetty (b. 1955), known as Gurumayi, and also by her monastic name, Swami Chidvilasananda. Despite controversies regarding her sole succession (her brother was initially appointed as a co-successor), Gurumayi remains the head of Siddha Yoga. For further context to the legacy of Muktananda and Siddha Yoga, see Durgananda (1997, 122–161) and Osto (2020, 67–75).

[198] Most historical accounts regarding Siddha Yoga rely on Swami Durgananda's comprehensive essay *To See the World Full of Saints: The History of Siddha Yoga as a Contemporary Movement* (1997). A devoted disciple of Muktananda, Swami Durgananda, formerly (and again in later years) known as Sally Kempton (1943–2023), adopted her monastic name upon initiation by Muktananda. With a background in journalism, Durgananda contributed to various editing projects for Muktananda's writings and served as a principal teacher of Siddha Yoga for over two decades (Brooks et al. 1997, ii; Olsson forthcoming). When referring to biographical details of Muktananda, I primarily refer to Durgananda's work.

[199] Muktananda received formal initiation into the Sarasvati Order from Siddharudha Swami (1836–1929) while staying at his ashram in Hubli (Karnataka). There, he adopted his monastic name, Swami Muktananda (literally, "bliss of liberation") (Durgananda 1997, 28–29).

experience of receiving shaktipat and the transference of lineage equally shaped the development of Siddha Yoga. I will first discuss Muktananda's successful expansion of Siddha Yoga into an international movement before presenting his distinct interpretation of shaktipat.[200]

During the initial years as the lineage holder at the ashram in Ganeshpuri, Muktananda laid the groundwork for what would later become known as Siddha Yoga. Prior to this role, when traversing the path of a wandering ascetic, he had studied with various religious teachers and deepened his studies under Nityananda. By the time of his guru's passing, Muktananda had accumulated a comprehensive knowledge of tantric and yogic traditions and Advaita Vedanta philosophy. Another source of inspiration was Kashmir Shaivism. In his writings, Muktananda drew extensively from Kashmir Shaiva texts, notably referencing works such as the *Śivasūtra*, the *Vijñānabhairava*, and the *Pratyabhijña-hṛdaya* (Osto 2020, 65).[201] However, despite embedding Siddha Yoga in these South Asian religious and philosophical traditions, Muktananda did not view these texts and their teachings as the ultimate authority for his religious system. Instead, his over twenty publications and oral teachings constituted the Siddha Yoga canon without exclusively relying on a specific South Asian tradition. Brooks accordingly suggested that "it is fair to say that 'Siddha Yoga' has never meant anything else other than Swami Muktananda's lineage teachings" (Brooks 1997, xxvi; Osto 2020, 65–67).

During the 1960s, many European and US-American disciples visited and stayed at Muktananda's ashram in Ganeshpuri (Jain 2014, 197). One of his US-American disciples, Swami Rudrananda, also known as Rudi (b. Albert Rudolph, 1928–1973), encouraged Muktananda to teach in the United States. Thus, at the peak of US-American counterculture, accompanied by Rudi,[202] Muktananda left South Asia in 1970 and commenced the first of three "world tours".[203] Meeting the growing demand for yoga and meditation teachers in the United States, Muktananda actively and successfully promoted Siddha Yoga among US-

[200] The period following Muktananda's shaktipat experience will be addressed below as part of the examination of his perspective on kundalini.

[201] Muktananda's *Play of Consciousness* frequently references Kashmir Shaiva texts. Moreover, with *I Am that: The Science of Hamsa from the Vijnana Bhairava* (1978), he dedicated a book exclusively to the *Vijñānabhairava* (Osto 2020, 65; Muktananda 2000; 1978).

[202] After their shared trip, Rudi and Muktananda separated. Rudi developed his own teachings, framed as "Kundalini Yoga", encompassing elements of Kashmir Shaivism and shaktipat (Osto 2020, 70–71).

[203] During Muktananda's first trip in 1970, he travelled to the United States, Europe, Australia, and Singapore. His second (1974–1976) and third (1978–1981) were limited to the United States (Osto 2020, 64–65). For this reason, only Muktananda's first journey can be labelled a "world trip", whereas his latter two instead represented long-term stays in the United States.

American spiritual seekers. True to his vision of creating a global "meditation revolution", he introduced Siddha Yoga to US-American and, ultimately, international audiences (Durgananda 1997, 4). Within a few years of his first world tour, Siddha Yoga had developed into an international movement, with ashrams and communities thriving in urban areas in South Asia, the United States, Europe, Canada, and Australia (Jain 2014, 192; Williamson 2005, 149).

Jain convincingly argues that Muktananda's charismatic personality and entrepreneurial spirit were instrumental in Siddha Yoga's international success (Jain 2014, 196–203). In particular, his charisma and the prevailing claim of "the absolute purity of the guru as the exemplar of the highest morality" (Urban 2003, 245) were key factors that led to the disciples' unwavering commitment to Siddha Yoga. Indeed, from an early stage of his role as lineage holder and guru, Muktananda emphasised and marketed his person as representing the ideal of "human perfectibility" (Williamson 2005, 158) and a "paragon of virtue" (Jain 2014, 201).[204] Muktananda assured his followers that they would be able to attain perfection, too, if they received shaktipat and followed the Siddha path. In other words, Muktananda "consciously constructed a unique persona and set of tantric spiritual commodities that he packaged as *Siddha Yoga*" (*ibid*., 197, original emphasis).

Muktananda's belief system and entrepreneurial strategy centred on shaktipat (*śaktipāta* in Sanskrit original). This concept allowed him to consolidate his central position as the transmitter of divine grace and fostered the fast growth of his movement. Much of Siddha Yoga's success was grounded in what Williamson called "enthusiasm about *shaktipat*" (Williamson 2005, 150, original emphasis). Owing to its centrality to the Siddha path, it warrants closer examination.

7.2. Shaktipat

Medieval Kashmir Shaiva texts from the Trika and Kaula traditions count among the earliest references to *śaktipāta*, with Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka* (c. tenth century) representing its

[204] Like many other South Asian teachers who disseminated their ideas in the United States and Europe during the latter half of the twentieth century, Muktananda's claimed virtues were tainted by sexual scandals. For an analysis of the sexual accusations posed against Muktananda, see Caldwell (2001), Urban (2003, 243–250), and Jain (2014, 203–207). As Kripal and Urban critically observed, Muktananda's disciples largely denied these accusations or refrained from positioning themselves. This attitude becomes particularly evident in the edited volume *Meditation Revolution* (1997) (Kripal 1999, 236–237; Urban 2003, 248).

most notable exposition (Muller-Ortega 1997, 416; Sen Sharma 1990, 93).[205] Signifying the "descent of grace" or "descent of power", the texts describe *śaktipāta* as a form of religious experience that allows a spiritual aspirant to "awaken the latent knowledge of Divinity in him, and thus, open the way to his integral self-realisation" (Sen Sharma 1990, 100). In other words, by bestowing divine grace, the guru plants the seed of liberation into the disciple.

Kashmir Shaivism teaches different modes of transmitting divine grace. According to Sen Sharma, "it is transmitted through touch (*sparśa*), speech (*vānī*), vision (*darśana*) or mere thought. But it must be remembered that the mode of transmission does not produce any qualitative difference in the Divine Grace though it might have some connection with its intensity" (*ibid*., 98, original emphasis). Abhinavagupta classified nine kinds of *śaktipāta*, which differ in intensity. The notion of "intensity" does not affect to the quality of *śaktipāta*, but rather refers to the aspirant's receptivity. In other words, depending on the aspirant's advancement in religious practice and the maturation from impure matter (*mala*),[206] the divine grace bestowed upon them will be experienced with varying levels of intensity (*ibid*., 93–94). Muller-Ortega translates Abhinavagupta's division of *śaktipāta* into "mild", "medium", and "intense" (with additional sub-levels).[207] Like Sen Sharma, he underscores the unstrained nature of *śaktipāta*: "It is important to realize that these distinctions of experiential result do not subvert the notion that from the highest perspective there is really only one shaktipat […]. These grades of shaktipat classify the perceived 'experience' of shaktipat on the side of the receiver, so to speak" (Muller-Ortega 1997, 431).

Medieval texts largely agreed on the rarity and exclusivity of *śaktipāta*. Not only was a spiritually perfected guru (*siddha*) necessary to bestow the grace, but aspirants also had to undergo long preparations and diligent religious practice to be considered qualified for *śaktipāta* (Williamson 2005, 151; Muller-Ortega 1997, 437). Upon receiving initiation through *śaktipāta*, the aspirant undertakes a spiritual discipline (*sādhana*) appropriate to the

[205] Other primary texts addressing *śaktipāta* include the *Tirumantiram*, the *Yogavasistha*, and the *Kularṇava-Tantra*. Notably, references to *śaktipāta* were scarce and frequently veiled in metaphors in these texts (Muller-Ortega 1997, 416; Williamson 2005, 150). For an introduction to *śaktipāta* within Kashmir Shaivism, see Deba Brata Sen Sharma (1990), Paul Muller-Ortega (1997), and Christopher Wallis (2008). Chapter 4.2.1.2. introduces Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka*.

[206] In Kashmir Shaiva philosophy, the notion of "*mala*" refers to impurities or limitations that obscure the true nature of the individual soul. These impurities are considered to be the result of ignorance and attachment to worldly phenomena. They bind the soul to the cycle of birth and death. For a discussion of *mala* in reference to *śaktipāta*, see Muller-Ortega (1997, 433–437) and Sen Sharma (1990, 84–100).

[207] Muller-Ortega (1997, 431) speaks of twenty-seven levels of *śaktipāta*.

intensity of their *śaktipāta*.[208] Thus, in Kashmir Shaiva tradition, *śaktipāta* initiated the aspirant's path to self-realisation (Osto 2020, 39).

Under Muktananda's leadership, the interpretation of shaktipat changed significantly. It transformed from a rare occasion reserved for particularly worthy disciples who had undergone strenuous spiritual and physical practice to an easily accessible mass happening with no need for preparation. Indeed, when Siddha Yoga's international popularity grew, there was simply no time for preparatory practices.

In 1974, during Muktananda's second "world tour", he created the so-called "Intensive", a two-day event attended by several hundred people who wished to be initiated into Siddha Yoga.[209] These happenings allowed potential disciples to receive shaktipat from their guru in a convenient group setting: "The Intensive was a two-day retreat in which [hundreds of] people [were given *shaktipat* at the same time,] practiced meditation, chanted, and listened as Muktananda spoke about *kundalini* awakening and the path of practice or *sadhana* that they were to follow" (Williamson 2005, 152, original emphasis). As the movement grew, more and more Intensives were offered in different cities to meet the growing demand. Consequently, Muktananda authorised his closest disciples to lead them, arguing that shaktipat would still be effective without his physical presence – his will would also work through others, he assured them (Jain 2014, 200; Williamson 2005, 151–152).

This decentralised and uniform approach to shaktipat played a crucial role in Siddha Yoga's globalisation, offering a simplified and expedited version of the spiritual transmission process that resonated with the dynamics of the modern spiritual market and consumerist notions:

> The creation of the Intensives is a good example of the cross-fertilization of cultural idioms. […] An ancient Tantric tradition of initiation was made to fit into a Western format of a weekend course, complete with a fee. People who took an Intensive were guaranteed to have results at the end of the two days, which plays into the Western emphasis on instant gratification. (Williamson 2005, 152)

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[208] While being an initiation of some sort, *śaktipāta* must be distinguished from "*dīkṣā*," which signifies the ritualised initiation preparing an aspirant to enter a spiritual tradition and to perform its rituals (Williamson 2005, 166). Muller-Ortega suggests that *śaktipāta* is the very essence of *dīkṣā* (Muller-Ortega 1997, 407). For a detailed examination of *śaktipāta*, *dīkṣā*, and their distinct meanings for Kashmir Shaiva *sādhana*, see Sen Sharma (1990, 80–104).

[209] Siddha Yoga's Intensives exhibit notable parallels with events of the Christian charismatic movement. Kourie and Pretorius (2004) draw comparisons between kundalini awakenings and the "Toronto Blessing", a Christian revival movement distinguished by its physical and emotional expressions of worship.

Thus, receiving shaktipat became increasingly common and was equally accessible for everyone, independent of commitment and preliminary efforts. Jain and Williamson, therefore, speak of Siddha Yoga as a "democratic" movement, granting equal access to initiation, and thus to the divine (Jain 2014, 198; Williamson 2005, 152). Owing to the significant departure from the medieval idea of shaktipat, Muller-Ortega defined Muktananda's decision to make shaktipat universally available as a "significant historical shift" (Muller-Ortega 1997, 410).

Now, what role does kundalini play in Siddha Yoga's understanding of shaktipat? As demonstrated in more detail below, much of Siddha Yoga's teachings centre on kundalini. Accordingly, its interpretation of shaktipat is closely tied to the awakening of kundalini. Muktananda, in fact, equates the experience of shaktipat with this awakening. In his *Play of Consciousness*, he reflects on his personal experience after receiving shaktipat, leaving no doubt about kundalini's role:

> At this time, I understood nothing about the various experiences […] that had come to me on the first day. Only afterward did I learn that they were all part of a process pertaining to shaktipat. Shaktipat is simply another name for the full grace of the supreme Guru, the blessing of a Siddha, or *shāmbhava* initiation. People who have experienced it call it the awakening of the Kundalini. (Muktananda 2000, 93, original emphasis)

The notion of "people" in the above quote perhaps refers to some South Asian poets, whom Muktananda refers to on the same page: "Our saints, such as Jnaneshwar Maharaj, Saint Tukaram, and Janardan Swami, have described these experiences in their poetry but in veiled language" (*ibid*., 73). Elsewhere, he refers to the medieval Kashmir Shaiva texts *Shiva Sūtras* (c. ninth century), *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam* (c. eleventh century), and *Tantrāloka* (c. tenth century) (*ibid*., 117). Thus, Muktananda evidently suggested a historical basis for his claims concerning the relationship between shaktipat and the ascent of kundalini. However, it is difficult to assess whether these medieval texts explicitly included such a connection or if Muktananda's interpretation introduced this correlation.

Sen Sharma's thorough account of shaktipat and, more broadly, self-realisation does not mention kundalini on even a single occasion (Sen Sharma 1990, 67–113). Muller-Ortega's c. forty-page chapter on shaktipat only references Muktananda and his successor, Swami Chidvilasananda, when addressing the link of shaktipat with kundalini. His (biased) statements clearly follow the general Siddha Yoga opinion (Muller-Ortega 1997, 407–444).

Lola Williamson apparently equally trusts Siddha Yoga's proposed tie of shaktipat and kundalini when maintaining that "medieval texts of Kashmir Shaivism […] describe shaktipat as the 'descent of grace,' which awakens a type of spiritual energy called kundalini" (Williamson 2005, 150). Unfortunately, she does not offer any references for this observation. Christopher Wallis's detailed account article "The Descent of Power: Possession, Mysticism, and Initiation in the Śaiva Theology of Abhinavagupta" (2008) provides better context but remains equally vague when speculating that the link between shaktipat and kundalini originated in late Kaula texts: "Further research is needed to pinpoint when the identification of *śaktipāta* with the rousing of *kuṇḍalinī* came about: perhaps in late Kaula-influenced works and the texts of the Kubjikā tradition, where the doctrine of *kuṇḍalinī* was most fully developed" (Wallis 2008, 292, original emphasis).

While the present study cannot definitively conclude whether the equation of shaktipat and kundalini has a medieval origin, it is beyond doubt that Muktananda and Siddha Yoga popularised this belief. By associating shaktipat with kundalini, the activation of kundalini developed into an easily accessible, safe, and rapid means to experience the divine.[210] The "enthusiasm about shaktipat" thus kindled an "enthusiasm about kundalini".

7.3. Muktananda's Views on Kundalini

Kundalini constitutes a key tenet of Siddha Yoga. However, Siddha Yoga's kundalini diverges from its South Asian origins. In their chapter "Kuṇḍalinī. Awakening the Divinity Within" (1997), Brooks and Bailly maintain that while grounded in South Asian traditions, Siddha Yoga's understanding of kundalini is distinct:

> Selecting from the vast array of traditional resources that describe the phenomenon of Kuṇḍalinī, divine power, Swami Muktananda and Swami Chidvilasananda have cultivated an understanding that is remarkable both for its simplicity and its subtlety. They have distinguished their teaching without discounting or abandoning the wealth of the Indian classical and esoteric traditions and the myriad interpretations that inform this enormously complex subject. (Brooks and Bailly 1997, 445)

[210] In Siddha Yoga, the motif of descent facilitates kundalini's activation. In other words, kundalini's ascent as an effect of shaktipat requires a preceding descent of the divine kundalini (Chitshakti), as enabled by the guru (Muktananda 2000, 28). Siddha Yoga's ideas of the Chitshakti will be detailed below.

This chapter aims to scrutinise Muktananda's perspective of kundalini and determine to what extent and in what manner Siddha Yoga has "distinguished their teaching". In order to do so, I will discuss Muktananda's autobiographical narration of his kundalini experience(s) and highlight the conceptual conclusions he drew from his "way to spiritual realization" (Muktananda 2000, 117).

Muktananda's autobiographical account, *Play of Consciousness* (1978), assumes the status of canonical writing in Siddha Yoga. Therein, he offers a minutely detailed experience report of his kundalini experience, spanning several years. Perhaps the most essential message that Muktananda conveyed pertained to the difficulty, even danger, of dealing with the awakening of kundalini without the protection and guidance of a guru. As mentioned above, Muktananda asserts that the awakening of kundalini in a disciple's body is the result of receiving shaktipat from the guru: "A true Guru awakens […] the inner Shakti Kundalini through shaktipat" (*ibid*., 19). Accordingly, Muktananda's account of his kundalini experience begins on August 15, 1947, when Nityananda bestowed divine grace upon his devoted disciple (*ibid*., 73). As part of the initiation, Muktananda received his guru's sandals, symbolically transferring his power to Muktananda. Moreover, Muktananda perceived that by directly gazing into his eyes, Nityananda granted him a glimpse of his realised state. He described the moment of initiation with the following words:

> My Gurudev […] would wander through the world barefoot, never wearing sandals. But today he had worn sandals on his lotus feet, those feet that bestow the knowledge of yoga, that destroy our sins and are adored by gods and men. He had walked around, come before me, and raising his lotus feet, given me his sandals. My anguish had been lifted from me, my sins cut away, the cycle of birth and death ended, the curtain of ignorance removed. […] He had entered me with the divine ray, full of Chiti, that grants all powers. As I watched, I had felt a trembling in my body and tears in my eyes. Stunned, I had, for a moment, experienced stillness and great Joy. In this way, he gave me his divine initiation. (*ibid*., 76)

The notion of "chiti" (also *cit*) is noteworthy since it already implicates the awakening of kundalini. Frequently translated as "consciousness", definitions of chiti vary.[211] Sen Sharma

[211] Hindu philosophies have developed elaborate concepts of consciousness. The earliest Hindu texts that addressed the topic of consciousness are the *Upaniṣads*. These texts contain profound discussions on the nature of the self (*ātman*), and on consciousness as an essential feature of the self. The *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, for example, presents four states of consciousness associated with the self: waking consciousness, dreaming consciousness, dreamless sleep, and transcendent consciousness (Gupta 2003, 1–17). The philosophical school of Advaita Vedanta has played a vital role in disseminating Hindu ideas on consciousness, particularly

distinguishes between "Cit Śakti", signifying "divine śakti in the form of Pure Light" (Sen Sharma 1990, 182), and "Citi", meaning "pure light of Consciousness" (*ibid*.). In Kashmir Shaiva texts, the *cit śakti* represents the pure, nondual expression of divinity. As the undifferentiated form of Śiva, *cit śakti* represents the "Divine Ideal" (*ibid*., 29).[212] Muktananda offers varying definitions of chiti. In *Play of Consciousness*, e.g., he defines it as "the power of universal Consciousness; the creative aspect of God portrayed as the universal Mother" (Muktananda 2000, 314). He frequently identifies kundalini with chiti, for example, when he writes: "Another name for Kundalini is Chiti, universal Consciousness" (*ibid*., 14). Later, he would venerate kundalini as Chiti Kundalini or Chitshakti, elevating her to the supreme female deity of Siddha Yoga. Moreover, the realisation of Chitshakti became understood as aligning with the state of perfection (*ibid*., 28).

The above quote, therefore, hints at Nityananda's transference of chiti, and thus kundalini, to Muktananda. Elsewhere in *Play of Consciousness,* Muktananda finds clearer words, affirming that the guru "causes the sublime Chitshakti to descend into the disciple" (*ibid*., 28). This assertion resonates with Sen Sharma's description of the initial sensation following a disciple's initiation: "In the beginning, immediately after his initiation (*Dikṣā*) the *sādhaka* experiences in his *pure citta*, the reflecting medium of […] the Supreme expression of *Śakti* as Supreme Light" (Sen Sharma 1990, 120, original emphasis). Thus, by claiming that chiti had entered him through the will of his guru, Muktananda implied his initial kundalini experience during initiation.

Following his initiation, which Muktananda perceived as a joyful and unique experience, a nine-year period ensued, characterised by rigorous meditation practice, physical and mental trials, and moments of doubt. Durgananda defined this period as Muktananda's inner and outer purification in the wake of kundalini's awakening:

> This dramatic experience began a period of spontaneous inner and outer purification, the effect of *kuṇḍalinī-śakti* manifesting in the body of an aspirant who had prepared himself for this awakening by many years of yogic practice. *Kuṇḍalinī-mahāyoga*, as it is called – the spontaneous inner process that begins when *kuṇḍalinī* is aroused by a

through its emphasis on the phrase *sat-cit-ānanda* (existence, consciousness, bliss), which appears in the *Upaniṣads* and prominently in Sankara's Vedanta philosophy, defining the nature of *Brahman* (Maitra 2022, 192). See also Chapter 10.2.3.

[212] For an in-depth discussion of Kashmir Shaiva metaphysics, see Sen Sharma (1990, 15–41).

> siddha guru – was taking place within Swami Muktananda. (Durgananda 1997, 38, original emphasis)

In *Play of Consciousness*, Muktananda gives a detailed account of this strenuous and lengthy period. It was not only characterised by doubts and austerities but also filled with visions, spontaneous bodily movements,[213] and a sequence of alternating states of consciousness. Owing to the seminal importance of "Chitti" in Siddha Yoga, it is unsurprising that Muktananda dedicates substantial portions of his autobiography to the states of consciousness he underwent.[214] The descriptions of his states of consciousness align with the stages of his self-realisation. To depict these stages, he used metaphors of light and fire: "I kept seeing this divine flame, and as I contemplated it, other forms would appear within it, each form within the previous one: first the red aura, then the white flame, then the black light, and finally the Blue Pearl" (Muktananda 2000, 150). The "Blue Pearl" metaphor corresponds to Muktananda's understanding of the final realisation, when the Self dissolves in Chiti Shakti. While according to Muktananda, the seed of chiti was already planted during shaktipat, only the unfoldment of self-realisation allows full knowledge about chiti. He describes this "dawn of knowledge" (*ibid*., 204) with the following words:

> The rays of the red aura lit up the 72 million *nādīs* and all the particles of blood. Immediately afterward the white flame stood before me, followed by her support, the black light, and finally by my beloved Blue Pearl […]. As I gazed at the tiny Blue Pearl, I saw it expand, spreading its radiance in all directions, so that the whole sky and earth were illuminated by it. It was no longer a Pearl but had become shining, blazing, infinite Light – the Light that the writers of the scriptures and those who have realized the Truth have called the divine Light of Chiti. The Light pervaded everywhere in the form of the universe. I saw the earth being born and expanding from the Light of Consciousness. (*ibid*., 207, original emphasis)

[213] Muktananda refers to the bodily movements he experienced as "kriyas". However, in its original meaning, "*kriyā*" (derived from the Sanskrit root *kṛ*, signifying "to do") refers to "a set of required actions in a religious practice" (Saraogi 2020, 113) or simply "action". Therefore, Muktananda's understanding of kriyas as "spontaneous yogic movements" (Muktananda 2000, 118) must be considered a distinct Siddha Yoga definition.

[214] Muktananda's *Play of Consciousness* was written in 1969 and held the title *Chitshakti Vilas* (Durgananda 1997, 69). In the preface to his book, Muktananda underscores the significance of chiti for the book and the movement as a whole: "Everything In this book is the work of Chiti. It is Chiti's gift and Chiti's creation. Siddha Yoga belongs to goddess Chiti. The aim of this book is attainment of Chiti" (Muktananda 2000, xxviii).

It is crucial to emphasise that Muktananda distinguished two interrelated kundalini experiences.

First, he reported kundalini's initial rise, as triggered by Nityananda's bestowal of shaktipat upon him; and second, he interpreted his nine-year meditation practice as a long-term awakening process that resulted in his self-realisation. While the second awakening depended upon the first, only after successfully realising kundalini was he able to fully comprehend the initial awakening. These two interrelated awakening experiences correspond to Muktananda's dual perception of kundalini as the inner (microcosmic) and outer (macrocosmic) kundalini (Brooks and Bailly 1997, 454).

In the above quote, Muktananda refers to both aspects of kundalini: First, he describes his awareness of his subtle and physical body, and then he concludes with the realisation of cosmogony. In *Kundalini. The Secret of Life*, Muktananda defines chiti as "(1) divine conscious energy; (2) the active or creative aspect of God; the power which manifests the universe" (Muktananda 1979, 51). These two definitions of chiti correspond to Muktananda's perspectives of the inner and outer kundalini, which he identified with chiti. Muktananda taught that the outer kundalini corresponds to the creation of the universe, whereas the inner kundalini corresponds to one's own spiritual evolution towards the realisation of the divine within. In the wake of shaktipat, during the realisation of kundalini, the disciple relates to the creative force of kundalini and thereby re-enacts the creation. Thus, part of the realisation process includes the seminal insight that there is no difference between the inner and the outer kundalini (*ibid*., xxvi–xxvii). The realised disciple comprehends kundalini's nonduality and encompassing nature:

> O Goddess Chitshakti! O Mother! O Father! You are Shakti. You are Shiva. […] As long as they lack full knowledge of You, ignorant people project onto You various dualistic ideas such as Shiva-Shakti, world-illusion, bondage-liberation, indulgence-renunciation, spiritual-worldly. […] When You take the form of the Guru to bless the disciple and enter within him, he realizes through inner knowledge that the external world is also Your play. (*ibid*., xxvii)

Muktananda's teachings on kundalini's philosophical nondualist and mico- and macrocosmic dimensions do not significantly differ from kundalini's descriptions in tantric and yogic texts and Kashmir Shaiva philosophy (Brooks and Bailly 1997, 446; Silburn 1988). What truly distinguishes Siddha Yoga's ideas about kundalini is the primacy of shaktipat and the guru. For Siddha Yoga, the independent realisation of kundalini without a

guru and their grace is impossible and dangerous. However, the guru also holds ontological significance for the disciple's kundalini. Muktananda maintained that "the beloved Shri Kundalini […] is the very soul of my Gurudev" (Muktananda 2000, 103). In alignment with the inner and outer kundalini, Muktananda introduces the notion of the inner and outer guru, with the inner guru corresponding to kundalini. Thus, concentrating on one's kundalini is akin to focusing on the physical guru. Ultimately, for the disciple, the guru is not exclusively a separate person (the outer guru) but also resides within the disciple (the inner guru). Therefore, disciples are less concerned with mastering or controlling kundalini. Instead, the Siddha Yoga aspirant becomes a disciple of kundalini (Brooks and Bailly 1997, 450–453).
Muktananda's experience, as narrated in *Play of Consciousness*, has provided a blueprint for thousands of Siddha Yoga disciples. Williamson speaks of "institutional mysticism" (Williamson 2010, 162) when referring to the aspirants' expectations that they will experience something akin to Muktananda's experience. Along these lines, Siddha Yoga encouraged its members to publicly share their kundalini experience reports. This transformed the dissemination of personal accounts into public events where such experiences were openly communicated to a large audience (*ibid*., 156). Thus, a major shift in the perception and communication of kundalini awakenings took place under Muktananda's leadership.[215]

7.4. Summary

Muktananda's Siddha Yoga developed from a local religious community into an international urban movement. The movement achieved success across the United States, Europe, Australia, and South Asia by standardising shaktipat, allowing each member to partake in Muktananda's professed divinity. Shaktipat, a core aspect of Siddha Yoga, embodies several of its foundational elements: It underscores the unique role of the guru as the exclusive conduit of divine grace, emphasises the direct experience of inherent divinity, thereby affirming the movement's commitment to the primacy of experience, and places significant focus on awakening kundalini. Muktananda's experience report and the organisation of "Intensives" significantly contributed to the growing interest and awareness of kundalini,

[215] Muktananda's successor, Gurumayi, terminated this custom and no longer encouraged Siddha Yoga disciples to publicly talk about their kundalini awakenings. The process – at times described as frightening and disturbing – was not to be over-emphasised so as not to daunt potential disciples (Williamson 2005, 157).

particularly in the United States. Notably, his conceptualisation of kundalini aligns with Siddha Yoga's central tenets. He discussed kundalini equally as a deity and a guru, emphasising her association with consciousness, nonduality, and perfectibility. While acknowledging kundalini's microcosmic aspect as residing dormant within the subtle body, he also highlighted her macrocosmic dimension. Muktananda maintained that shaktipat and kundalini's awakening offered each aspirant a path to perfection and nonduality. Thereby, Muktananda hoped, Siddha Yoga would ultimately achieve the envisioned "meditation revolution".

8. Yogi Bhajan

Yogi Bhajan (1929–2004) serves as the second example of a South Asian yoga and meditation teacher disseminating knowledge about kundalini outside of South Asia.[216] Like other modern gurus travelling to the United States, Yogi Bhajan developed his own teachings, rooted in a hybrid practice and institutionalised in several globally active and successful organisations. Subsumed under the heading 3HO (Healthy Happy Holy Organisation), he launched and led businesses such as Kundalini Yoga, Yogi Tea, Peace Cereal, and Akal Security (Laue 2007).[217] What truly distinguished Yogi Bhajan from other teachers was the association of 3HO and Kundalini Yoga with Sikhism instead of Hindu religions. Despite severe criticism from leading Sikh representatives, he framed his ideas as essentially Sikh, including kundalini (Stoeber 2012, 352). This chapter will discuss Yogi Bhajan's claimed Sikh origins of his Kundalini Yoga, provide (selected) details on his views on kundalini, and consider his Kundalini Research Institute as an attempt to attest to kundalini's alleged scientific implications.

[216] Thorsten Laue's *Kundalini Yoga, Yogi Tee und das Wassermannzeitalter* (2007) is the earliest scholarly account addressing Yogi Bhajan's teachings and organisation. Laue published a second study on the 3HO (2012) based on his doctoral research. Both of his studies lack a necessary critical examination. Philip Deslippe is undeniably the leading scholar on Yogi Bhajan. In his article "From Maharaj to Mahan Tantric" (2012), he disclosed unknown details about Yogi Bhajan, his claimed lineage, and the history and origins of his distinct teachings of Kundalini Yoga. Published in the journal *Sikh Formations*, the same volume saw additional (if biased) articles on Yogi Bhajan, the most relevant being "3HO Kundalini Yoga and Sikh Dharma" (2012) by Michael Stoeber. In a recent follow-up article titled "Reappraising the Construction of Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga" (2024), Deslippe reflects on recent developments in Yogi Bhajan's enduring fellowship. Moreover, he discussed Rob Zabel's article "Bhajan's Yoga: The Roots and Context of Kundalini Yoga as Taught by Yogi Bhajan" (2021), commissioned by 3HO. While thoroughly researched, Zabel's sources are questionable. His decision to distribute the article through academia.edu instead of publishing it in a peer-reviewed journal added to its shortcomings. Aside from these scattered studies, Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga received little attention among scholars of yoga studies and religious studies, e.g., there is no reference to it in Singleton's *Yoga Body* (2010), in Singleton and Goldberg's edited volume *Gurus of Modern Yoga* (2014), or in Williamson's *Transcendent in America* (2010).

[217] Strictly speaking, 3HO is only the educational wing of Yogi Bhajan's much larger movement. Nonetheless, it is frequently used as an umbrella term comprising the different businesses and organisations created by Yogi Bhajan and his fellowship (Deslippe 2012, 383; Stoeber 2012, 351). I will follow this custom and use 3HO when referring to Yogi Bhajan's heterogeneous movement.

8.1. 3HO and Kundalini Yoga

Yogi Bhajan was born Harbhajan Singh Puri in a region of the Punjab in present-day Pakistan (then India) into a wealthy Sikh family.[218] During the turmoil of Partition, his family fled to New Delhi, the new capital of the newly formed nation. After graduating from the Punjab University of Chandigarh with a degree in Economics in 1950, Yogi Bhajan married Bhai Sahiba Inderjit Kaur Khalsa (n.d.a.), with whom he raised three children. Over the next eighteen years, Yogi Bhajan worked as a customs officer at Delhi's Palam Airport (now Indira Gandhi International Airport), a job that brought him into contact with foreigners travelling to South Asia. Inspired by these encounters, he considered launching an import-export business in North America dealing with South Asian goods (Bhajan 2003b, 59; Laue 2007, 10–11; Deslippe 2012, 371).

Yogi Bhajan put this idea into practice in 1968 and emigrated to the United States.[219] After spending some months in Toronto, Canada, he accepted an invitation to California, where he realised that yoga was much more profitable than selling goods to countercultural hippies (Deslippe 2012, 376). Consequently, on January 5, 1969, Yogi Bhajan delivered his first talk to a US-American audience and established the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organisation (3HO) in the same year (Laue 2007, 12). His discipleship and 3HO had grown significantly within two years, with the first Kundalini Yoga ashram opening in 1972. According to Stoeber, 3HO's success increased steadily during the following years: "By 1997, there were 110 3HO Kundalini Yoga centers throughout North America and Europe, and there were over 200 in 28 countries by 1995. In 2011, there were 157 teacher trainers and 1382 [*sic*] teachers in North America listed on the [International Kundalini Yoga Teachers] Association website" (Stoeber 2012, 351).

These developments motivated Yogi Bhajan to push for the registration of "Sikh Dharma" (also "Sikh Dharma Brotherhood") as an official religion in the United States, an endeavour that was achieved in 1973 (*ibid*., 351).[220] The point of departure for 3HO's religious self-

[218] Several layers of hagiographical embellishments, amendments, and omissions make assessing biographical details about Yogi Bhajan difficult. Whenever possible, I will rely on Deslippe's study. Additional information is drawn from Laue's *Kundalini Yoga* (2007) and the 3HO publication *The Aquarian Teacher* (2003b), a manual for Kundalini Yoga teachers.

[219] The US-American cities of Los Angeles (California) and Espanola (New Mexico) developed into 3HO's headquarters and Yogi Bhajan's homes.

[220] Sikh Dharma must be distinguished from Sikhism. Considering its ties to 3HO, it can be defined as a new religious movement instead. Despite Sikh Dharma serving as 3HO's religious underpinning, not every member converted to it (Stoeber 2012, 351).

definition as “Sikh Dharma” and several other significant changes was a three-month trip to South Asia in late 1970 and early 1971.[221] During this trip, Yogi Bhajan and approximately eighty students visited Maharaj Virsa Singh (n.d.a.), who had been venerated as a Sikh saint and Yogi Bhajan’s guru within 3HO (see below). However, the trip turned into a disaster. After Yogi Bhajan’s break with Virsa Singh, the itinerary and intention of the trip utterly changed. Things got worse when Yogi Bhajan was arrested on charges of fraud, which resulted in the near-prevention of his leaving the country at the end of the trip (Deslippe 2012, 376–379).

All in all, it was a tumultuous trip which could have easily facilitated 3HO’s decay. Instead, it marked a turning point in its development and, ultimately, assisted Yogi Bhajan’s fundamental success as a religious leader. Upon their return to the United States, Yogi Bhajan completely reframed 3HO, redefining its lineage and reinforcing its ties to Sikhism. First and foremost, he consolidated his power within 3HO by announcing the bestowal of a questionable title: the “Mahan Tantric”. Yogi Bhajan claimed that only one person at a time held this title, deriving his exalted position from his claimed lineage(s).

A critical aspect of Yogi Bhajan’s early biography concerns his claim of having studied with various teachers. This list comprises his grandfather Bhai Fateh Singh (n.d.a.), Maharaj Virsa Singh, Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari (1924–1994), Sant Hazara Singh (n.d.a.), and Guru Ram Das (1534–1581). However, as Deslippe disclosed, Yogi Bhajan did not maintain a consistent stance regarding these teacher figures (*ibid*., 371). During the first years of 3HO, he either highlighted Virsa Singh or Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari as his main guru. While the former was, as already stated, an esteemed South Asian Sikh teacher venerated as a saint, the latter was a hatha yoga teacher whose prominent students included the former and the then current Indian Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) and Indira Gandhi (1917–1984). Aligning with Yogi Bhajan’s framing of 3HO as primarily Sikh, he downplayed the role of Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari among his disciples. To the public, in contrast, Yogi Bhajan would exclusively link his teachings to the esteemed yoga teacher. Probably Yogi Bhajan speculated that Brahmachari’s fame and professional credentials would make him look more professional and noteworthy himself (*ibid*., 375).

After the break with Virsa Singh in 1971, neither Virsa Singh nor Brahmachari continued to play any further role in 3HO. Instead, Yogi Bhajan referred to Guru Ram Das and Sant

[221] Refer to Deslippe for a thorough discussion of 3HO’s three-month trip to South Asia, including its itinerary, key events, involved protagonists, and consequences (Deslippe 2012, 376–379).

Hazara Singh as his sole gurus (*ibid*., 379). This served several purposes. His reference to Guru Ram Das, who, Yogi Bhajan claimed, appeared before him during meditation, positioned the fourth Sikh guru "as the patron saint of 3HO, further link[ing] […] Kundalini Yoga to the Sikh tradition, and put[ting] distance between Yogi Bhajan and his previously claimed devotion to Maharaj Virsa Singh" (*ibid*., 378). Sant Hazara Singh was then once again glorified as Yogi Bhajan's teacher of Kundalini Yoga, who had held the title "Mahan Tantric". In *The Aquarian Teacher*, 3HO offers its official statement:

> At any one time, there can be only one living Mahan Tantric. While alive, Sant Hazara Singh was the Mahan Tantric. When Yogi Bhajan was studying with Sant Hazara Singh, there had been one other student named Lama Lilan Po. When Santji passed on, the power of the Mahan Tantric was transferred to Lama Lilan Po. In 1971, when Lama Lilan Po died, this mantle of authority was bestowed upon Yogi Bhajan, giving him the power and responsibility of the Mahan Tantric. (Bhajan 2003b, 62)[222]

Both Sant Hazara Singh and the title "Mahan Tantric" lack historical evidence. Nevertheless, they are relevant to the construction of Kundalini Yoga.[223] A key narrative of 3HO was Yogi Bhajan's mastery of Kundalini Yoga at a young age: "Under the watchful eye of Sant Hazara Singh, Yogi Bhajan perfected the disciplines of Kundalini and Tantric Yogas. By the remarkably young age of sixteen,[224] he was acknowledged by his teacher to have attained mastery of Kundalini Yoga" (*ibid*., 61). The narratives of Yogi Bhajan being the "Mahan Tantric" and a master of Kundalini Yoga from a young age accounted for his authoritative status, laying the foundation for 3HO's success.

The system of Kundalini Yoga constituted the core of 3HO and was its most visible feature. While Yogi Bhajan underscored the ancient character of this yoga (*ibid*., 196), Deslippe has provided convincing evidence that it was a hybrid practice introduced by Yogi Bhajan during

[222] While Yogi Bhajan is credited as the author of *The Aquarian Teacher*, it is more likely that his disciples compiled oral teachings and amended these with quotes and lectures by Yogi Bhajan. This is evident from several passages where Yogi Bhajan is referred to in the third person. Owing to the lack of explicit references to authorship, I will use "Yogi Bhajan" and "3HO" synonymously when using material from *The Aquarian Teacher*.

[223] Unless otherwise marked, all details of the historical roots of Kundalini Yoga are derived from Deslippe (2012, 369–382).

[224] Sometimes, 3HO claimed Yogi Bhajan's mastery at the age of sixteen; on other occasions, he is referred to as eighteen. Then again, it is claimed that he started studying only after his adolescence (Deslippe 2012, 380).

the 1960s.[225] Particularly the teachings of Maharaj Virsa Singh and Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari fed into Kundalini Yoga:

> When placed alongside the teachings of Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari and Maharaj Virsa Singh, it becomes strikingly apparent that at least in its earliest years, Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga was not a distinct practice, but essentially a combination of yogic mechanics learned from the former and the Sikh-derived mantras and chanting from the latter. (Deslippe 2012, 374)

The key pillars of Kundalini Yoga's practice are kriyas, pranayama, asanas, and mantras – fusing hatha yogic and Sikh elements (Stoeber 2012, 352–356; Bhajan 2003b). Kundalini, as will be shown in the next chapter, bridged these two traditions in Yogi Bhajan's hybrid teachings.

While Kundalini Yoga refers to a distinct physical practice exclusively taught by 3HO, it also denotes a lifestyle upheld by its members. In the context of Kundalini Yoga, "member" means teacher. Accordingly, a central goal of Kundalini Yoga was its ever-expanding faculty. Shortly after attending a Kundalini Yoga class, students were thus already encouraged to teach classes themselves. Although 3HO emphasised that Kundalini Yoga required no initiation, several passages from *The Aquarian Teacher* suggest that entering the role of a teacher was an initiation in its own right (G. S. Khalsa 2009, 332).

The Aquarian Teacher underscores that "Kundalini Yoga is […] a lineage of transmission, and you, as a teacher of that, are beholden to the integrity of it and to its long history" (Bhajan 2003b, 24). In other words, once operating as Kundalini Yoga teachers, they represented the lineage, thus bearing a responsibility. Becoming a teacher further involved adhering to lengthy explanations about the "Identity of a Teacher" and the elaborated "Code of Ethics" as developed by the 3HO International Kundalini Yoga Teachers Association and the Kundalini Research Institute (KRI) (*ibid*., 264–277). In addition, most Kundalini Yoga teachers adopted a new "spiritual" name, covered their hair with a cloth or turban, and exclusively wore white clothes. While 3HO underscores the voluntary nature of these codes, their observance is implicit, as the following quote demonstrates:

> Why do we wear white? […] It doesn't make any difference. Other colors are not bad. But white has all the seven colors in it, so big deal. It's a science and art for improving yourself. We always tie our hair up. That's for the energy. It's a very selfish act. You can

[225] As Deslippe demonstrated, 3HO claimed the ancient origin of Kundalini Yoga and suggested 26,000 BC as its approximate date of emergence (Deslippe 2012, 383).

> tie them up, put them down, you can shave them off, who cares? There's nothing you cannot do in your life. If you don't want to do something, don't do it. What you want to do, go ahead. It all comes down to one thing: a saint has a profile, and it will be proven by the saint himself. (*ibid*., 277)

The notion of individual responsibility, as expressed in this quote, did not correspond to "free choice". While emphasising that nobody was obliged to follow 3HO's "suggestions", group identity was a key pillar of the organisation, imposing pressure to conform on its members. Thus, instead of openly imposing rules, 3HO emphasised the narrative of "self-initiation" and freedom of choice: "You have to initiate yourself. If I ask you to take a name and then become a Teacher, then it is initiation. […] It's not the rule […]. When you are ready, you will ask yourself" (*ibid*., 277).

8.2. Yogi Bhajan's Views on Kundalini

In *The Aquarian Teacher*, much space is dedicated to the practice and philosophy of Kundalini Yoga and 3HO's definition of yoga and the South Asian subtle body. The notion of kundalini, in contrast, is only detailed in scattered references throughout the text, along with two reprints of lectures by Yogi Bhajan, "Kundalini Yoga. Awakening the Soul" (1969) and "Prana, Apana, Nadis & Kundalini" (1980).[226] These references suggest that Yogi Bhajan oscillated between presenting kundalini in a "traditional" light while simultaneously advocating a unique perspective and introducing innovative vocabulary.[227] Moreover, *The Aquarian Teacher* manifests that the use of the term "kundalini", a key tenet of 3HO's system, was imprecise, characterised by inconsistency and contradictions. I will demonstrate these flaws, along with a presentation of 3HO's general views on the nature of kundalini, with the help of several quotes from *The Aquarian Teacher*.[228]

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[226] Secondary literature on Yogi Bhajan barely looks at his definition and use of kundalini. For instance, Stoeber simply refers to kundalini in the context of 3HO as "spiritual energy" (Stoeber 2012, 353), and Deslippe mentions the notion of kundalini only once, calling it a "mythical and dangerous […] energy" (Deslippe 2012, 376). Deslippe does not specify if this is his interpretation or his description of Yogi Bhajan's view – the latter, in any case, emphasised that kundalini was *not* dangerous (Bhajan 2003b, 177).

[227] Yogi Bhajan's use of language mixes yogic with anatomical, New Age, and distinct 3HO terminologies. No study has thus far analysed this eclectic approach, which is echoed in his language. Moreover, this research gap extends to other modern gurus, including Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (Osho), whose linguistic strategies resembled Yogi Bhajan's and are equally understudied (Urban 2015; forthcoming).

[228] Due to the frequent shifts in Yogi Bhajan's teachings, capturing the role of kundalini within 3HO is challenging. This chapter is too brief to offer an in-depth analysis of Yogi Bhajan's early views of kundalini

The following 1969 quote from Yogi Bhajan's 1969 lecture, "Kundalini Yoga. Awakening the Soul", provides a good starting point for analysing kundalini within 3HO: "Kundalini, the soul's nerve, which is coiled in three and a half circles on *muladhara*. (*Kundal* means 'the curl of the hair of the beloved.' It does not mean snake or serpent)" (Bhajan 2003a, 21, original emphasis). Despite its brevity, this quote is a rich resource with several aspects that warrant attention.

First, Yogi Bhajan uses the notion of "soul nerve" as a metaphor for kundalini. In 3HO, the soul's liberation is considered a distinct goal (Stoeber 2012, 356). Accordingly, practitioners of Kundalini Yoga aspired to attain liberation through kundalini's movement. In the same 1969 lecture, Yogi Bhajan offers a more nuanced explanation: "Kundalini is known as the nerve of the soul. This is to be awakened; your soul is to be awakened. When the soul gets awakened, what else can remain?" (Bhajan 2003a, 21). *The Aquarian Teacher* does not specify Yogi Bhajan's soteriological views regarding kundalini. This notwithstanding, these two quotes suggest that he described the awakening of kundalini along the lines of the concept of *jīvanmukti*, i.e., the attainment of liberation while living (Bhajan 2003b, 19; Stoeber 2012, 356).

Second, Yogi Bhajan associated kundalini's coiled shape with "the hair of the beloved". While not specifying who the addressed "beloved" person was, Yogi Bhajan likely referred to Guru Ram Das or Sant Hazara Singh, venerated as his sole gurus after 1971. Kundalini's association with Yogi Bhajan's guru implies its high position within 3HO. The notion of "hair" is the clearest expression of Yogi Bhajan's attempt to situate kundalini in the Sikh tradition. Within Sikhism, kesh, i.e., the uncut hair or the practice of allowing one's hair to grow, represents one of the five Sikh symbols. Linking kundalini to hair is thus another indicator of its high value in 3HO. However, Yogi Bhajan not only employed hair as a metaphor for the valuation of kundalini, but further used it to explain its movement, as the following quote shows:

> You can practice with any length hair, but the hair was the first technique to raise the kundalini energy. When the hair is at its natural full length and coiled over the anterior fontanel for men or the posterior fontanel for women, it draws pranic energy into the spine. The force of this downward positive energy causes the Kundalini energy to rise

in contrast to later perspectives. Therefore, while acknowledging that 3HO's early views might differ, this chapter will limit its scope to the first edition of *The Aquarian Teacher* (2003).

> for balance. This is why you always find grace and calmness in a person with uncut hair from birth if they keep it well. (Bhajan 2003b, 178)

By claiming that "the hair was the first technique to raise the kundalini energy", Yogi Bhajan not only associated kundalini with a key symbol of Sikh belief but further underscored his claim of the ancient nature of Kundalini Yoga as a Sikh practice to raise kundalini. Moreover, his assertion that hair, when kept uncut and coiled on the top of the head, "draws pranic energy into the spine" attaches a certain power to hair, capable of controlling subtle and physical mechanisms. Thus, on the one hand, Yogi Bhajan used (the guru's) hair as a metaphor for kundalini's quality and rise, and on the other hand, he presented hair as an impetus, potentially triggering the rise of kundalini.

Third, Yogi Bhajan claims that kundalini "does not mean snake or serpent". In doing so, he departed from a custom prevalent among his predecessors and contemporaries. By prioritising "curled hair" over "curled serpent", he attempted to distinguish his teachings from those of other modern kundalini gurus. However, this stance was not consistently maintained. Two examples in *The Aquarian Teacher* attest to this inconsistency. In Chapter 3, he introduces what 3HO considered the twenty-two forms of yoga. Kundalini Yoga, which 3HO arguably appropriated as its central form of practice, is described with the following words: "Kundalini Yoga […] is a Raj Yoga. Once called the science of the serpent power (*kundalini-shakti*), which is fundamental to the tantric tradition, including Hatha Yoga. In Eastern symbology, the serpent represents energy, essence, awareness, rejuvenation and the play of the spirit" (*ibid*., 35, original emphasis). Unlike Yogi Bhajan's claim that kundalini "does not mean snake or serpent", this quote associates Kundalini Yoga with "the science of the serpent power", acknowledging "serpent" as a metaphor for kundalini. This observation is supported by Yogi Bhajan's use of "awareness": While in this quote awareness is equated with the symbol of the serpent, elsewhere Yogi Bhajan maintains that "kundalini means awareness" (*ibid*., 17).

Regarding the location of kundalini in the subtle body, 3HO did not maintain a consistent stance either. In a quote from Yogi Bhajan's 1969 lecture, he writes: "We call this energy, in the old science, kundalini, which has been blocked in *muladhara*, the lowest of all chakras, or lotuses" (Bhajan 2003a, 21, original emphasis). This quote does not offer much new information. It barely deviates from the customary perspective on kundalini since Arthur Avalon. However, when comparing this quote with later statements, it becomes evident that 3HO shifted the location of kundalini from the lowest to the third chakra. For instance,

Chapter 14 of *The Aquarian Teacher* states: "There is a very powerful psychic power under the Navel Point. It sits there like a cobra snake and when it wakes up, it travels through the six centers of the body and awakens them with its touch" (Bhajan 2003b, 181). Comparing the two quotes, kundalini has transformed from an "energy" to a "powerful psychic power" that is not "blocked in *muladhara*" but instead located "under the Navel Point" – not to mention the "banned" serpent metaphor. While several traditions emphasise the navel area for their practices, Yogi Bhajan's "Navel Point" has a distinct meaning. According to 3HO, it corresponds to manipura, the third chakra of the subtle body, and serves a specific purpose: "the Navel Point is not just a 'point'. It is a center of energy transformation in the body" (Bhajan 2003a, 180, 185). Here, with the help of Kundalini Yoga exercises, various energy streams conflate, transform, and, ultimately, trigger the movement of kundalini.[229] In a way, the "Navel Point" represents the "trans-shipment point" of various energy streams, and thus exceeds 3HO's general definition of chakras as mere "energy centers" or "energy vortices" (Bhajan 2003b, 184). Yogi Bhajan's association of kundalini with the "Navel Point" instead of the root chakra exhibited another layer of inconsistency: on the one hand, he claimed that kundalini (described as a cobra snake) was situated *under* the Navel Point. However, elsewhere in *The Aquarian Teacher*, he insisted that the "energy of kundalini releases from the navel center" (*ibid*., 178), i.e., suggesting that it is located at or in the "Navel Point".

Yogi Bhajan held equally inconsistent opinions regarding kundalini's movement. In the above quote, he described kundalini's journey as straightforward, stating that upon activation, "it travels through the six centers of the body". He continued this passage by writing, "when it touches the Seventh Center, the person knows all. When it intermingles with the aura, it delightfully enlightens the arcline and makes everything work out for the person" (*ibid*., 181). While garnered with 3HO vocabulary and embedded in an eight-chakra model, the journey of kundalini through the subtle body, as described in this quote, aligns with accounts found in medieval tantric and yogic texts.[230] This means that the movement

[229] In the *Kundalini Yoga Manual* (1980), for instance, Yogi Bhajan refers to a specific exercise, "Kriya for Generating Navel Tapa", which supports the transformation of energies and thus kundalini's movement (Bhajan 1980, 7).

[230] According to 3HO, the human being comprises ten bodies: the physical body, three mental bodies, and six energy bodies. The arcline is an energy body or energy field extending from ear to ear across the forehead, believed to act as a protective shield and enhance intuition. Women are thought to have an additional arcline across the chest. Another energy body is the subtle body comprising eight chakras. In addition to the seven chakras of the "six-plus-one" system, the "aura" or "magnetic field" of the human body is introduced as Kundalini Yoga's eighth chakra. Elsewhere, Yogi Bhajan links the aura to the energy bodies of 3HO's ten-body model. Refer to Chapter 4.2., for an overview of medieval texts addressing *kuṇḍalinī*'s role and movement in the subtle body.

of kundalini is primarily associated with its ascents along the central channel, which might lead to the attainment of special abilities or liberation once it has reached the highest chakra – in this case, the aura. Perhaps Yogi Bhajan's statement, "when it intermingles with the aura, it delightfully enlightens the arcline and makes everything work out for the person", refers to these yogic goals.

Elsewhere in *The Aquarian Teacher*, Yogi Bhajan emphasises that kundalini's movement is not limited to its ascent but rather performs a full cycle. In this version, "the energy of kundalini releases from the navel center, then rises to the top of the head. When it descends to complete its cycle of energy, the chakras open fully" (*ibid*., 178). Yogi Bhajan even warns of the consequences if kundalini does not descend: "It does no good at all to fill a person with energy that he cannot integrate" (*ibid*.).

Regardless of his emphasised version of kundalini's movement, Yogi Bhajan underscored its simplicity and safety. Referring to his own experience, he assured his disciples that "it was so easy. […] In twenty, thirty days, if you honestly practice it about one hour, two hours each day, you can be through with it" (Bhajan 2003a, 21). For these reasons, he rejected the concept of shaktipat as unnecessary, indirectly condemning Swami Muktananda and his Siddha Yoga:

> The kundalini can be stimulated directly by a teacher. But that teacher is not much of a teacher! The students should be prepared, then given a technology to raise it themselves. Why should they wait at the feet of that teacher like puppies? They should go through the experience, then share the techniques with others. (Bhajan 2003b, 178)

In a similar vein, he attacked individuals such as Gopi Krishna and Christina and Stanislav "Stan" Grof,[231] who emphasised the potentially hazardous effects of kundalini: "Many people are confused by the writings on kundalini because it has become popular to think that there are 'kundalini emergencies'. Most of these so-called emergencies are actually imbalances of the Prana" (*ibid*., 174).[232]

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[231] Substantial portions of this thesis (especially Part III) will address Gopi Krishna and his autobiographical account *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967), in which he framed kundalini as a potential danger. Stan and Christina Grof and the Spiritual Emergency Network (SEN) will be discussed in Chapter 23.3.

[232] Yogi Bhajan's strategy to denounce his competitors also extended to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. The 3HO journal *Science and Consciousness* featured a Kundalini Yoga exercise called "A Transcendental Meditation: Maha Shakti Chalnee Indra Mudra". The accompanying comment states: "This is a real transcendental meditation as it was originally taught centuries ago. If the many teachers who have come to the USA to initiate students into secret mantras claiming to be transcendental meditations, […] then we would be able to research the science of consciousness much more effectively" (G. S. Khalsa 1974, 57).

Considering the cultural setting in which Yogi Bhajan's 3HO was operating, i.e., California during the 1960s, it is not further surprising that he garnered his descriptions with ideas stemming from New Age and consciousness culture (see Chapter 20). This is most evident from assessing Kundalini Yoga as an essential facilitator of the so-called "Aquarian Age" – a key concept in New Age belief (Bhajan 2003b, 4; Hanegraaff 1996, 11). Against this backdrop, kundalini assumed the role of "consciousness" (Bhajan 2003b, 178) or "awareness" (*ibid*., 17), with Kundalini Yoga constituting the suitable "technology" (*ibid*.) to enhance consciousness or awareness and thus prepare humanity for the dawning "Aquarian Age".

Another key feature of Yogi Bhajan's approach to kundalini was his alleged wish to attest to its "potential" (*ibid*.) through "scientific" research. For this purpose, he followed the prevailing trend of the institutionalised investigation of kundalini and established the Kundalini Research Institute.[233]

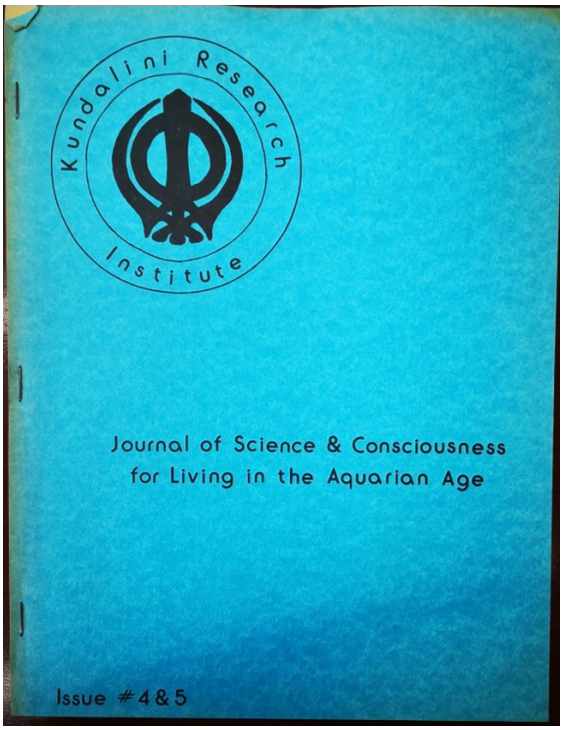
8.3. The Kundalini Research Institute

In his 1969 lecture, Yogi Bhajan referred to kundalini as "a scientific thing which has nothing to do with mystics or something which I can't explain" (Bhajan 2003a, 22). To underpin his claim, he established the Kundalini Research Institute (KRI) in Pomona, California, in 1972 (KRI 2024).[234] KRI published several journals, including *Journal of Science and Consciousness for Living in the Aquarian Age* and *Kundalini Quarterly* (Figure 4). In contrast to *Beads of Truth*,[235] the "official voice of Yogi Bhajan's organization and approach to kundalini yoga" (J. W. White 1990a, 470), *Kundalini Quarterly* primarily published research-related articles on kundalini and was considered the "official voice of the research arm of Yogi Bhajan's 3H0 Foundation" (*ibid*.).

[233] Gopi Krishna was a pioneer in establishing research centres exclusively dedicated to the "scientific" study of kundalini. Several others followed his example but mostly studied kundalini along with various other phenomena. This will be addressed throughout this thesis, especially in Chapter 13 and in Part V.

[234] Sometimes, Claremont, California, is mentioned as the headquarters of Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Research Institute (KRI). It is unclear if KRI moved to Claremont, if there were two centres – one in Pomona and one in Claremont – or if these locations were used interchangeably, given that Pomona and Claremont are only approximately 7 kilometres (4.4 miles) apart. Later, KRI opened an additional branch in Boston, Massachusetts (J. W. White 1990a, 474).

[235] *Beads of Truth* was published between 1971 and 1991 (KRI 2024).



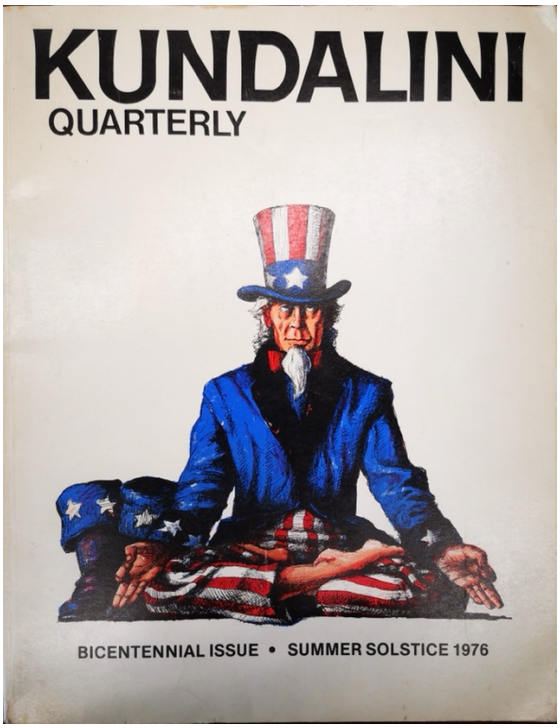


Figure 4: Journals distributed by the Kundalini Research Institute (KRI), *Journal of Science and Consciousness for Living in the Aquarian Age* (left figure) and *Kundalini Quarterly* (right figure) (ARC, Mss 1, Special Research Collections, UCSB; printed with permission of the Special Research Collections, UCSB).

Yogi Bhajan founded KRI together with Muhia Singh Sahib Gurucharan Singh Khalsa (formerly Michael Fowlis, n.d.a.).[236] As KRI's first director, Khalsa oversaw the research activities in 3HO. In his own words, Khalsa described KRI as "a nonprofit organization to ensure authenticity of technique, provide the highest quality of teachers and instruction, and promote applications and research" (G. S. Khalsa 2009, 325). In a letter to John White, Khalsa (who signed with Fowlis, his non-spiritual name) mentioned research collaborations with universities and hospitals, indicating KRI's interest in empirical yoga research (Fowlis

[236] Scattered information from an online blog post, from several letters of the Gopi Krishna legacy, and from a biographical section in *Kundalini Rising* (2009) suggests that M. S. S. Gurucharan Singh Khalsa was called Michael Fowlis (n.d.a.) before entering 3HO and receiving his spiritual name from Yogi Bhajan in the early 1970s (Fowlis to White, December 14, 1974, LGK, box 6.10.6.; *Kundalini Rising. Exploring the Energy of Awakening* 2009; G. F. S. Khalsa, n.d.). After meeting Yogi Bhajan in Claremont, where Fowlis was a graduate student in mathematics, he became a devoted student of Kundalini Yoga. Thenceforth, he contributed to 3HO with numerous articles and assumed a leading role at KRI. In his article "From Maharaj to Mahan Tantric", Deslippe introduces Gurucharan Singh Khalsa as a "Punjabi-born and London-based journalist" (Deslippe 2012, 384). However, Deslippe does not offer a source for this claim and does not specify whether he refers to a different person since M. S. S. Gurucharan Singh Khalsa was certainly based in the United States and not of Punjabi origin (*Kundalini Rising. Exploring the Energy of Awakening* 2009, 353).

to White, December 14, 1974, LGK, box 6.10.6.).[237] Over the years, however, a significant shift seemed to have occurred to a more business-oriented emphasis. This becomes particularly evident from *The Aquarian Teacher*, which introduced key pillars of KRI's activities, including the following:

> » Create global recognition and access to the Teachings of Yogi Bhajan through product development and the Library of teachings.
> » Uphold the purity, integrity and accuracy of the Teachings of Yogi Bhajan through KRI Review and the KRI Seal of Approval.
> » Offer support for authors to create and translate products based on the Teachings of Yogi Bhajan. (Bhajan 2003b, 304)

This quote indicates that by 2003, the interest in kundalini research had faded at KRI. Instead, Kundalini Yoga was at the centre of interest, which, as already demonstrated above, was not necessarily centred on the notion of kundalini. In other words, KRI increasingly attempted to strengthen the credibility of Kundalini Yoga by disseminating its teachings and underscoring its "scientific" value. In this respect, Yogi Bhajan's KRI differed significantly from the approaches of Gopi Krishna and other protagonists discussed in this study, who were primarily interested in unravelling kundalini's nature.

The self-framing of South Asian teachers in Europe and the United States as scientists and their teachings as scientific religion consolidated orientalist stereotypes and discourses along the lines of Baumann's "reverse mirror-imaging" (Baumann 2006). Madame Blavatsky's 1888 assessment that "the Hindû initiated Yogî knows really ten times more than the greatest European physicist" (H. P. Blavatsky 1893, 1:562) gave way to South Asian swamis imitating the scientific methods and means of "Western" science. While yoga and meditation teachers had previously followed this trajectory, the cultural context during the "long Sixties" was particularly receptive to it.[238] Yogi Bhajan captured the prevailing scientification of the religious sphere and strategically instrumentalised Kundalini Yoga as "science" and its teachers as "scientists".

[237] Kundalini's link to empirical yoga research is discussed throughout this study, for instance in Chapters 5.3.5 and 22.1.2.

[238] Chapter 20.2 will discuss the concept of the "long Sixties", which encompassed the preceding and succeeding decades of the 1960s.

8.4. Summary

Yogi Bhajan's 3HO was, first and foremost, a transnational business, training Kundalini Yoga teachers, distributing products, and organising international events. Considering yogic "megabusinesses", such as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation and Osho's Rajneesh movement, Yogi Bhajan's entrepreneurial spirit was not an isolated case. Accordingly, by embracing transnational capitalism and neoliberalism, the 3HO followed a common orientation among modern gurus (Carrette and King 2004; Lau 2000; Urban 2015). What distinguished Yogi Bhajan from other modern gurus operating from the United States was his distinct profile, fusing yoga, Sikhism, and New Age, and his purported emphasis on kundalini. However, as this chapter demonstrated, despite calling his key practice "Kundalini Yoga", Yogi Bhajan did not offer a decisive definition of kundalini. Instead, his use of kundalini was neither unequivocal nor consistent. Broadly speaking, he followed a dual trajectory: While reiterating "traditional" South Asian views on kundalini as a fundamental tenet of the subtle body, he introduced innovative elements corresponding to the zeitgeist to assert his unique stance. Moreover, in order to distinguish his teachings from those of competing yoga and meditation teachers, he attached kundalini to Sikh dharma, accentuated by the metaphor of the "guru's hair". It is, therefore, not surprising that Yogi Bhajan omitted any reference to kundalini as a goddess, which would rather affirm its embedment in Hindu religions. Finally, as a response to the prevailing trend of considering religion and religious experience in the light of science, 3HO stressed its interest in kundalini research. It thus opened a research centre and distributed research results in a designated journal. However, all things considered, the research was chiefly intended to accentuate the alleged scientifically proven benefits of Kundalini Yoga while fostering 3HO's entrepreneurial success.

PART III

Gopi Krishna and the Global Project of Kundalini Research

"I felt in the fraction of a second: This man is a genius. […] His presence was good for me, and I could feel within me the traces of his simple and good emanations for as long as a month afterwards" (Weizsäcker 1972, 2). With these words, the renowned German physicist and philosopher Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker described his first encounter with the Kashmiri Pandit Gopi Krishna (1903–1984), who left a lasting impression on Weizsäcker and many others who crossed his path. Part III will thoroughly introduce this fascinating figure – this study's key protagonist.

Krishna's life can be effectively divided into three distinct periods: The first period is marked by his early years and his role as a householder, during which he balanced family responsibilities, professional work, and meditation practice. The second period began in 1937 when Krishna had an experience which he later interpreted as the activation of kundalini. This phase was characterised by his quest for meaning and several episodes of psychological and physical crises. The third period, spanning the last two decades of his life, commenced with the publication process of Krishna's second book, *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967). Although most of Krishna's written work centres on his experiences during the second period, the present study is predominantly interested in the third period, which is distinguished by his international collaborations and research initiatives.

Part III is divided into five chapters. Chapter 9 sheds light on Gopi Krishna's life. This chapter is not intended as a biographical sketch *sensu stricto* but rather as an approach to the main protagonist of this study. Krishna's "kundalini experience" marks the most decisive event of his life. Therefore, Chapter 10 will detail his experience and discuss his interpretation. Chapter 11 provides an overview of Krishna's writings, discussing key tenets of his thought. The remaining chapters are dedicated to his international career as a promoter of kundalini research. Chapter 12 traces Krishna's increasing impact through his travel, networking, and writing activities, and Chapter 13 elaborates on the institutionalisation of his research projects and the growth of his international network. Krishna's contribution to kundalini research was innovative and seminal, as the chapters of Part III will demonstrate.

9. Gopi Krishna. Life and Work

Gopi Krishna Shivpuri was born in 1903 in Gairoo, a small Kashmiri village, as the son of Pandit Ganga Ram Shivpuri (n.d.a.) and CongMaal Shivpuri (n.d.a.).[239] He spent the first years of his life mainly in Srinagar, then the capital of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, and in the Punjabi capital Lahore.[240] On several occasions, Krishna described his childhood as a pleasant period of his life, despite having lived in considerable poverty (Krishna 1967, 20). His father and mother were firm Hindu believers and raised their children in a religious atmosphere. In particular his father, who frequently invited yogis and saints to his house, left a lasting impression on Krishna. Accordingly, he described his father as a man "with a deep mystical vein in him, […] always on the look-out for Yogis and ascetics reputed to possess occult powers" (Krishna 1997, 17–18). At times, Krishna even attributed psychic abilities to his father, recollecting him in a hagiographic manner. After the early death of Krishna's elder brother, his father increasingly refrained from mundane tasks and worldly activities. His extreme asceticism further resulted in a lack of vitality and health issues. Later in his life, Krishna interpreted his father's crisis as an uncontrolled activation of kundalini: "He was clearly passing through the upward and downward phases of a now active kundalini sending streams of impure prana (vital energy) into the brain" (Krishna 1993, 19). Thenceforth, his much younger mother carried all the responsibility of the household and set all her expectations on her only son (*ibid*., 8–24).

Throughout his youth, Krishna spent much energy on intellectual pursuits and read any available book related to mind control, development of personality, yoga, occultism, and spiritualism, and was furthermore well versed in Hindu scriptures, such as the *Bhagavad Gita*. Besides these intellectual examinations, Krishna also started practising yoga at the age of seventeen (Krishna 1967, 14–19).[241] Thus, while he emphasised no affiliation with any

[239] Most biographical information is derived from Teri Degler's biography of Gopi Krishna (2023). In addition, Krishna shared information about substantial portions of his life in his autobiography *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Mechanism in Man* (1968), which exists in several revised editions and translations, including Leslie Shepard's edited and published *Living with Kundalini. The Autobiography of Gopi Krishna* (1993).

[240] Today, the most northwestern region of South Asia is known as the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The unsteady history of this region has led to numerous religious and ethnic conflicts. Schofield (2003) and Singh (1985) detail this region's religious and political challenges.

[241] Krishna described his daily practice as yoga or as meditation (Krishna 1997, 23). Therefore, I use meditation and yoga interchangeably when referring to his practice.

specific yogic school, he acquired significant knowledge about yoga and associated topics from an early age.[242]

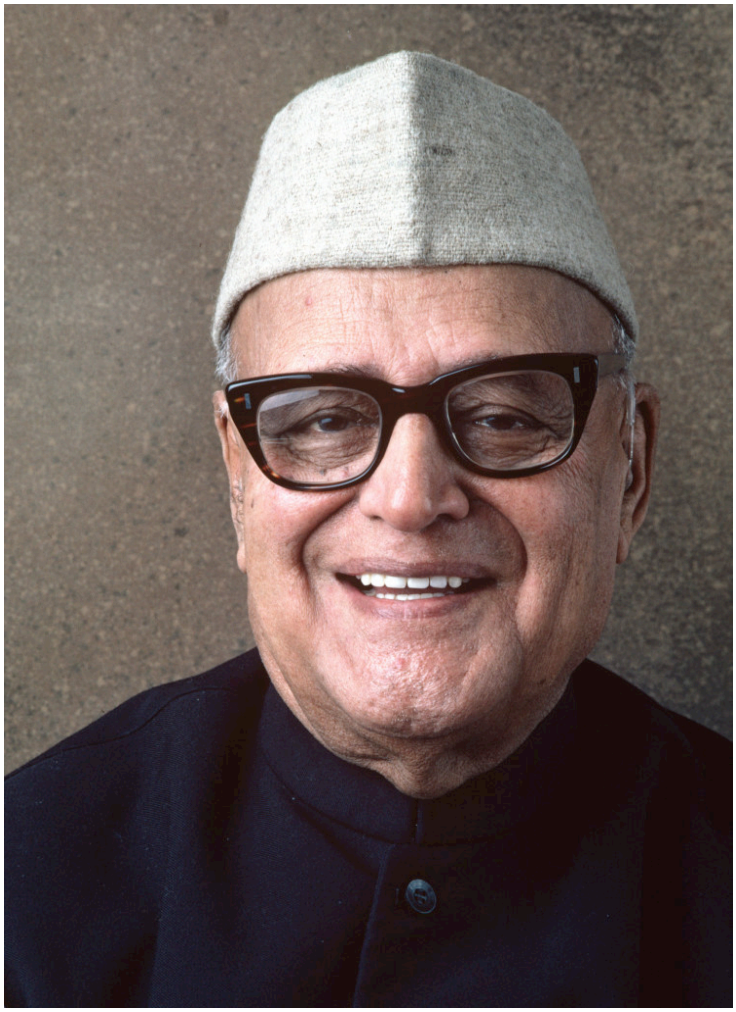


Figure 5: Gopi Krishna (photo credit: unknown; printed with permission of Michael Bradford).

From the age of twenty, in 1923, until his retirement in 1948, Krishna served as a government clerk, first under the Director of Engineering and subsequently in the Education Directorate of Srinagar and Jammu. According to his description, he was a diligent employee, but his interest in yoga outweighed his interest in his career (Krishna 1970, 26). Degler underscored that Krishna cherished his employment because it was not demanding, allowing him enough time to focus on his meditation practice (Degler 2023, 22).

[242] In his autobiography, Krishna frequently refers to hatha yoga. This notwithstanding, he emphasised that no authoritative school or teacher had influenced or directed his practice (Krishna 1997, 92–93).

In 1926, Gopi Krishna married Roop Wati (n.d.a.),[243] a daughter of a Brahmin family of Baramulla, Kashmir, with whom he had three children: daughter Ragya (Ragina) Shivpuri (b. 1929), son Jagdish Chander Shivpuri (b. 1934), and son Nirmal Chander Shivpuri (b. 1939). Krishna spent the rest of his life with his wife, whom most people called Bhabi, and whom Krishna considered as "heaven-sent" (Degler 2023, 28) and "the saving grace in his life" (Degler 2023, 28; LGK, box 1). Despite Krishna's lengthy absences later in his life due to extensive travels (see below), Krishna's family remained a strong pillar, evident from affective notions in his published works but even more from his written correspondence with his family while dwelling overseas (Krishna 1985, 1; LGK, n.d.).

In Krishna's native area, he was renowned and respected for his engagement in social justice. As a reaction to what Krishna considered society's unjust and inhuman attitude towards women and individuals belonging to lower castes, he strove for social reforms: "The idea of introducing some measure of reform into the social customs of our society, especially those imposing certain disabilities on our womanhood, occurred to me time after time with a persistence that finally obliged me to translate it into action" (Krishna 1993, 280). In 1946, along with some friends and colleagues, Krishna founded the reform movement Samaj Sudhar Samiti. Some of their key tenets included advocating for widows' right to remarry, the abolition of dowries and child marriages, the support for interfaith and love marriages – both rare at the time – and providing financial aid to widows, orphans, war-displaced individuals, and underpaid state employees. Moreover, Samiti aimed at preserving and reconstructing pilgrimage sites in Kashmir (LGK, box 1).[244] A component of Samiti's services included a compound where widows and orphans could live safely and learn weaving to support themselves (Bradford and Degler 2022, 20). The group met considerable resistance (see Chapter 17.2.) and yet continued their espousal of social justice (Krishna 1993, 280–282). Nevertheless, most of Krishna's immediate Kashmiri environment cherished and respected his commitment. Weizsäcker likewise expressed his respect for Krishna's courage to oppose outmoded religious customs: "Gopi Krishna is indeed an outstanding local leader deserving of our respect and affection" (Weizsäcker 1972, 3). In 1976 (or perhaps slightly later), Gopi Krishna handed his leading position over to the long-

[243] Gopi Krishna's wife is mostly referred to as "Bhabi" – a title of respect for married women.

[244] The reference to pilgrimage sites indicates that Samiti was not solely a social justice initiative. Although no further data is available, Samiti likely sought to preserve Hindu pilgrimage sites. This objective not only imbues the movement with a religious significance but also with political implications, particularly in the context of the Hindu-Muslim conflicts in Kashmir (see Chapter 17.2.).

time staff of Samiti, maintaining an advisory role within the organisation until he died in 1984 (Kobelt, LGK, box 6).

Perhaps the most momentous year of his life was 1937, when Krishna went through a profound psycho-physiological experience that he deemed mystical. As detailed below, one day, during his daily meditation practice, he sensed irritations in the lower part of his back, which increased to the point that he endured physical suffering and underwent what he described as an out-of-body experience (Krishna 1997, 12–13). Later in life, he would interpret this episode as the awakening of kundalini (Krishna 1967, 94). As Krishna outlined in his autobiographical accounts, the subsequent decades of his life were characterised by silent suffering, confusion, and desperation. While living up to his mundane roles as a government clerk, husband, father, and leading member of Samiti, from the inside, he described being restless, oscillating between certainty and doubts regarding the divine origin and nature of his experience. Moreover, for the next twenty years, Krishna described undergoing periods of severe maladies, which he attributed to the activation of kundalini (Krishna 1967; 1993).

These sufferings notwithstanding, retrospectively Krishna related any positive development of his life to what he considered "fabulous Kundalini in action" (Krishna 1967, 94). A notable example was his reflection on his role as a social justice agent. In *Living with Kundalini* (1993), Krishna wrote that

> it is only now, when other changes have occurred and are still occurring, that I feel confident in asserting that this change from a passive observer of the customs prevailing in my society to that of an active reformer was the first result of the transformative process set afoot by my experience in the year 1937. Without knowing it, my personality had undergone a minor change. (Krishna 1993, 283)

This quote demonstrates the central role that Krishna's experience assumed in his life. He interpreted subsequent events in the light of what he perceived as his active kundalini.

Another significant episode of his life occurred in 1949 when Krishna claimed to have "received" lines of inspired verse. In his autobiography, he described what he considered a divine revelation with the following words:

> We [Krishna and his companion] walked leisurely, […] when suddenly while crossing the Tawi Bridge [in Jammu] I felt a mood of deep absorption settling upon me until I almost lost touch with my surroundings. I no longer heard the voice of my companion; she seemed to have receded into the distance, though walking by my side. Near me, in

> a blaze of brilliant light, I suddenly felt what seemed to be a mighty conscious presence, sprung from nowhere, encompassing me and overshadowing all the objects around, from which two lines of a beautiful verse in Kashmiri[245] poured out to float before my vision, like luminous writing in the air, disappearing as suddenly as they had come. (Krishna 1967, 241)

To Krishna, this incident provided the first "tangible evidence" of kundalini's presence in his organism, allowing him to enter a "supersensible realm" (Krishna 1993, 297). Krishna's biographer, Teri Degler – who was also a supporter of Krishna – interpreted this episode in a hagiographical manner, calling it "the first unmistakable example of the siddhis associated with kundalini awakening: as the Tantric texts say, poetry drips like honey off the awakened yogi's tongue" (Degler 2023, 55).

Despite Degler's emphasis on "siddhis", i.e., paranormal powers or abilities (see below), for Krishna, the primary significance of "receiving" the lines of verse lay in the potential to offer what he regarded as "tangible proof" of kundalini's presence within his organism: "Until that hour all I had experienced of the super-conscious was purely subjective, neither demonstrable to nor verifiable by others. But now for the first time I had before me a tangible proof of the change that had occurred in me unintelligible to and independently of my surface consciousness" (Krishna 1967, 242). As argued throughout this study, a central goal of Krishna's international career was to find and disseminate empirical evidence for kundalini's existence. It is plausible to view 1949 as the starting point for this endeavour.

According to Krishna, since the incident on Tawi Bridge, he had received further divinely inspired verses in different languages, which he ultimately published in a small book called *From the Unseen* (1952) (*ibid*., 254–257). It was a matter of sheer chance that the Jungian psychologist James Hillman (1926–2011) and the artist Frederik J. "Tontyn" Hopman (1914–2016) came across the book: "We were all living in Kashmir [in the summer of 1952] and had come upon the work of Gopi Krishna at a local fair where a pamphlet of his poetry with a brief account of his experiences was distributed by one of his followers[246]" (Hillman,

[245] Krishna translated these two lines of Kashmiri verse into English: "O, you doubter, who is depressed, don't lose hope. Stretch your hand to the Divine. Leave all your burden on Him and don't nurse this fear in your heart" (Krishna, in Degler 2023, 55).

[246] Little information about Krishna's early fellowship is available. In *Kundalini*, Krishna wrote that "the strange news [about his writing in previously unknown languages] travelled through the town. And crowds of people called at my residence, attracted by the rumours of the miraculous development in me" (Krishna 1967, 259). More research is required to disclose information on Krishna's fellowship during that period of his life.

in Krishna 1967, 43).[247] After having read the multilingual poetry collection, Hillman and Hopman, along with Hillman's wife-to-be, Kate (n.d.a.) and the journalist Gerald Hanley (n.d.a.) – all of whom stayed in Kashmir that summer – decided to visit its author (Russell 2013, 1:132).[248] Hillman recalled that he "went on the visit out of curiosity, skeptically, critically, expecting a mountebank, ready to argue, disprove, and latter perhaps laugh" (Hillman, in Krishna 1967, 43).

Despite their initial scepticism, Hillman and Hopman became Krishna's first non-South Asian supporters who assisted and monitored the publication of his autobiography, *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967) (see Chapter 11.2.). While *From the Unseen* only hinted at kundalini, in *Kundalini*,[249] Krishna disclosed his experience and first-hand knowledge of what he perceived as the activation of kundalini. According to him, it was the first time he had publicly talked about his 1937 experience: "[I was] observing my own state for at least thirty years. For thirty years, I said nothing because I wanted to confirm that my experience was a real experience and not a delusion" (Krishna, in Unknown 2013).

The publication of *Kundalini* initiated his international career, which lasted from 1967 through 1984. During that period, he drafted seventeen books, established an international network of research centres (Kundalini Research Foundations, KRF), undertook eight overseas voyages, followed invitations to speak at international conferences, taught at higher-educational institutes, and collaborated with intellectuals, scientists, and politicians in Europe, North America, and South Asia.[250] Throughout Krishna's international career, he oscillated between producing written material and travelling and lecturing about kundalini and the significance of his experience. As his close supporters Michael Bradford and Teri

[247] Two other versions exist of how Hillman and Hopman came across *From the Unseen*. One version portrays Hopman as the initiator, telling Hillman that there "was a man who could speak all kinds of languages, and that these simply came to him. He said, 'Let's go look for him in the bazaar, and you can see what it's all about'" (Hillman, in Russell 2013, 1:129). In the second version, not Hillman but Hopman had initially heard about Krishna: "There is a guy in the bazaar, who writes poetry in languages he never knew. He is a Kashmiri Brahmin. I have an appointment with him. Do you care to come along?" (*ibid*., 132).

[248] Hillman travelled to South Asia with his partner Kate to write a novel. They settled in Kashmir for a few months as they had heard about its beauty. Hopman, on the other hand, had been living in Kashmir with his wife and children for twelve years until 1947. He remained in Asia and frequently returned to Kashmir – where he met James Hillman in 1952. Gerald Hanley was an Irish journalist who lived in Srinagar at the time (Adhirara 2018; Russell 2013, 1:121, 124, 128).

[249] Part III will use the abbreviated title, *Kundalini*, when referring to *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967).

[250] Krishna's activities, achievements, and disappointments are well-documented in his vast correspondence (LGK, n.d.) and will be discussed in-depth in the subsequent chapters.

Degler emphasised, Gopi Krishna favoured writing over lecturing, believing that the former had a more enduring impact on future generations (Bradford and Degler 2022).

The remaining fifteen years of his life were characterised by Krishna's goal of carrying kundalini research forward. Through publication activities and public talks, he sought a broader audience to share his conviction that kundalini was "a specific psycho-physiological mechanism in the body of man [which] is responsible for the evolutionary process in the human race" (Krishna 1972c, ii).[251] A landmark publication in that regard was Krishna's book *Die Biologische Basis der religiösen Erfahrung* (1971), with an introduction by the German physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker.[252] Other (selected) highlights – all of which will be discussed in depth throughout this study – include Krishna's collaboration with the Indian government (Chapter 17.3.), the co-establishment of a German research foundation with Weizsäcker (Chapter 15.3.1.), and his invitation to speak at the UN in 1983 (Chapter 12.8.). However, despite the help of an international network of supporters who advocated his views and his own unwavering efforts, most of Krishna's projects of kundalini research either failed or never got underway.

As documented in various letters from Krishna's legacy and confirmed by my conversation with Degler and Bradford, Krishna's extensive travels and efforts to promote his cause considerably impacted his health. Despite taking lengthy breaks after strenuous journeys, his recovery was often slow and taxing. Ultimately, he never fully recovered from his last trip (Bradford and Degler 2022). Gopi Krishna returned to South Asia from his eighth and final trip in 1983. Surrounded by his family in their family house in Srinagar, Gopi Krishna died at the age of 84 on July 31, 1984, after a short but severe spell of pneumonia (Degler 2023, 296–297).

Despite Krishna's advocacy for scientific research, he distrusted medical treatment. Not on a general basis, to be sure, but he affirmed that medication was useless for an organism that was administered by the movement of kundalini (*ibid*., 296). Accordingly, when the doctors

[251] The term "psycho-physiology" (also rendered psychophysiology) was probably coined by Samuel Adams (1839). According to Kraler, his concept denoted "a reciprocal relationship between the body and mind" (Kraler 2022, 143). Unlike many of his contemporaries, Adams explained religious phenomena not through a mesmeric lens but by considering the "brain and the nervous system as physiological mediators between the body and the mind" (*ibid*.). Interestingly, Gopi Krishna equally pled for the brain and the nervous system to assume this role – only, however, upon the activation of kundalini (Krishna 1967, 51) – an observation that will be revisited below in Chapter 10.2. Kraler comprehensively analyses Adams' concept and "psycho-physical culture" in relation to modern yoga practices (Kraler 2022, 142–147).

[252] In 1972, the book was translated into English and published as *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* (1972). Chapter 15.3.2. discusses the book and its importance for Krishna's career in more detail.

prescribed antibiotics shortly before his death, Degler interpreted the worsening of his condition along these lines: “As Gopi Krishna had said earlier in life, medication did not necessarily work in the body of someone who had gone through a profound transformative process in the same way it did in the average person. In this case, the prescription caused a negative reaction” (*ibid*.). It is pointless to contemplate whether additional use of medication and Krishna’s hospitalisation, both of which the doctors strongly recommended, would have led to an improvement in his health. However, it is striking how this last episode of his life demonstrates his ambiguous approach to science. On the one hand, he promoted scientific research and actively positioned “his own claims in relation to […] scientific terminology, […] theories, [and] references” (Hammer 2004, 206). At the same time, his belief in kundalini’s primacy in the human organism was at odds with scientific theories. This scientistic approach will be examined in more detail in the following chapters, dedicated to Krishna’s momentous 1937 experience and his search for meaning.

10. Krishna's Interpretation of his Experience

Following Gopi Krishna's extraordinary experience in 1937, he sought meaning. During the three decades between his experience and the publication of his autobiographical account in 1967, he developed an interpretative model of his experience and a distinct understanding of kundalini. Some of his ideas relate to pre-existing theories; others are highly innovative. In any case, Gopi Krishna's interpretation of kundalini carries significant weight as it represents the theoretical basis for his project of kundalini research – and thus, as this study claims, for other late twentieth-century approaches to kundalini. This chapter details Krishna's experience and interpretation of kundalini, revealing the essence of what he aimed to disseminate.

10.1. Krishna's Experience and his Search for Meaning

On an early December morning in 1937, Gopi Krishna sat in his usual cross-legged meditation posture, breathing slowly and rhythmically, focusing on the crown of his head, as was his daily routine.[253] After years of meditation, he was able to remain seated without discomfort, consciously observing his position in the room, his posture, his breath, and his steady mind. On that fateful morning, however, his meditation practice took an unexpected turn. A physical sensation at the lower part of the back caught the meditator's attention, led to physical and mental irritations, and culminated in what Krishna perceived as an out-of-body experience. Many years later, Gopi Krishna would describe that extraordinary event with the following words:

> I suddenly felt a strange sensation below the base of my spine […]. The sensation was so extraordinary and so pleasing that my attention was forcefully drawn towards it. […] Suddenly, with a roar like that of a waterfall, I felt a stream of liquid light entering my brain through the spinal cord. […] The illumination grew brighter and brighter, the roaring louder, I experienced a rocking sensation and then felt myself slipping out of my body, entirely enveloped in a halo of light. (Krishna 1967, 8–9)

[253] Krishna addresses his experience throughout his writings. However, his autobiographical publication, *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967) – republished in several revised editions – provides the most comprehensive account. Descriptions of his experience in later publications and interviews barely differ from his 1967 statements. Consequently, this chapter primarily draws from Krishna's original first-person report, supplemented with scattered references to other publications and Degler's account as needed.

This experience marked a turning point in Krishna's life. It led not only to an altered perception of reality but also to years of trauma. What Krishna perceived as a "transformative process […] at work in me" (*ibid*., 188) spanned a period of more than twenty-five years. In the course of time, Krishna interpreted this extraordinary experience as the activation of an energy stream traditionally associated with kundalini (*ibid*., 94–109). However, his search for meaning took considerable time and energy.

Krishna employed the term "experience" in a dual sense: it denotes both a breakthrough event that occurred on an early December morning in 1937 and a prolonged process spanning several decades. While he considered the breakthrough experience to be of greater significance, he devoted substantial attention to what Baier refers to as the "process of cognitive clarification" (Baier forthcoming, 253). For Krishna, this clarification process was "an essential part of the experience itself, not something separate or posterior" (*ibid*.). Consequently, he does not distinctly separate these two aspects of experience. Moreover, Krishna understands "experience" in the sense of a "transformative experience", meaning experiences "that change what it is like for you to live your life, and perhaps even change what it is like to *be* you, deeply and fundamentally" (L. A. Paul 2014, 3, original emphasis). Throughout his clarification process, Krishna employed various strategies, including literature research, consultations with relatives and yogis, and introspective exploration.

In the immediate aftermath of his experience, he did not reveal his altered state or internal transformation to anyone and blamed himself "for having delved into the supernatural without first acquiring a fuller knowledge of the subject" (Krishna 1967, 62). Despite having read many books on meditation, yoga, and associated topics, Krishna claimed previous ignorance about kundalini. He merely recalled that he had come across some "books on Yoga, both of the East and the West" (*ibid*., 41), which dealt with "a vital mechanism called Kundalini" (*ibid*., 11).[254] However, not only had this been long ago, but these books, Krishna maintained, were more concerned with "the development of psychic powers" (*ibid*., 41).

Krishna evidently referred to books that associated paranormal powers with the opening of the chakras. However, he seemingly rejected "psychic powers", which he associated with "tricks and deception" (*ibid*.). He emphasised that the target of his practice, in contrast,

[254] Neither Krishna nor Degler provide any information on the books that Krishna initially consulted. There are some indications that he may have read Swami Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* (1896) and Arthur Avalon's *The Serpent Power* (1918), but further research is required to determine his primary and secondary sources. In any case, Krishna's access to relevant literature was certainly limited, considering Kashmir's spatial and temporal context in the 1930s.

> was far higher and nobler than what in the most attractive form I could expect, from the acquirement of the much covetted [*sic*] super-normal gifts. I longed to attain the conditions of consciousness, said to be the ultimate goal of Yoga, which carries the embodied spirit to regions of unspeakable glory and bliss. (*ibid*.)

The alleged emphasis of the literature consulted on psychic powers evidently did not align with Krishna's meditation goals. Therefore, he may have downplayed their significance in his search for meaning. At the same time, these statements planted a seed of doubt in Krishna. Since the anticipated powers did not initially manifest in his case, he may have questioned whether his experience was truly a kundalini awakening despite perhaps meeting other criteria outlined in those books. This likely led to doubts about the authenticity of the experience, which he reflected upon in *Kundalini*:

> I had undergone a singular experience, but how could I be sure that I was not the victim of an abnormal pathological condition, peculiar to me alone? How could I be sure that I was not suffering from a continuous hallucinatory affliction […], the unexpected result, in my case, of prolonged concentration and too much absorption in the occult? (*ibid*., 161)

Krishna reports revisiting old and unearthing new literature on what he called "Kundalini Yoga" (*ibid*., 66). After his initial doubts, these books strengthened his conviction that he had indeed roused the vital energy described in premodern literature. Nevertheless, he neither found any relief in this knowledge nor any practical advice – with the notable exception of a passage where the student of kundalini yoga was told to avoid an empty stomach. Krishna stressed that "this brief advice, flashing across my brain at a most critical moment when [he] hovered between life and death […], saved [his] life and sanity" (*ibid*., 70).

Aside from written material, Krishna consulted a selected number of individuals. The most striking example was Krishna's brother-in-law:

> I made no mention of my condition to anyone save my brother-in-law, who came to Jammu during those days on a short business visit. He was many years older than I and loved me like a son. […] He had himself practised meditation for many years under the guidance of a preceptor who claimed knowledge of Kundalini Yoga. […] Without the least pretension to knowledge, he gave me every bit of information he possessed. (*ibid*., 68)

The information received from his brother-in-law became the foundation of Krishna's explanatory theory and remained central to his teachings throughout his life. According to his brother-in-law, his teacher

> had remarked that if by mistake Kundalini were aroused through any other *nadi* (nerve)[255] except *Sushumna*, there was every danger of serious psychic and physical disturbances, ending in permanent disability, insanity, or death. This was particularly the case, the teacher had said, if the awakening occurred through *pingala* on the right side of the spine when the unfortunate man is literally burned to death due to excessive internal heat, which cannot be controlled by any external means. (*ibid*., 69, original emphasis)

Unfortunately, no additional information is available on Krishna's brother-in-law or the teacher. Therefore, the source of his teacher's views on kundalini remains enigmatic. In any case, secondary sources that discuss premodern descriptions of *kuṇḍalinī*'s movement do not support the claim that it could accidentally move through the "wrong" channel (Hatley 2022; Mallinson and Singleton 2017). The notion of heat is a recurring metaphor, however, associated with kundalini's rise through the central channel (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 179).

Despite its peculiarity, receiving this information initiated the next step in Krishna's search for meaning. He visualised what he now considered as kundalini's wrongful position to the right-hand side of the central channel and aimed to relocate kundalini with "will-power":

> With my mind reeling and senses deadened with pain, but with all the will-power left at my command, I brought my attention to bear on the left side of the seat of Kundalini, and tried to force an imaginary cold current upward through the middle of the spinal cord. […] I distinctly felt the location of the nerve and strained hard mentally to divert its flow into the central channel. Then, […] a miracle happened. There was a sound like a nerve thread snapping and instantaneously a silvery streak passed zigzag through the spinal cord, […] pouring an effulgent, cascading shower of brilliant vital energy into my brain. (Krishna 1967, 75)

What Krishna described as a "miracle" in the above quote refers to his belief that he successfully redirected the supposedly misled energy stream to its appropriate channel.

[255] The term "nerve" as an anatomical explanation for "nadi" has prevailed since theosophical writings during the late nineteenth century and was popularised by Swami Vivekananda (see Chapters 5.2. and 5.3.1.). Krishna does not clarify if his brother-in-law used this designation or if he derived the equivalence of "nerve" and "nadi" from elsewhere.

Although this "correction" did not end what he perceived as a dreadful psychosomatic crisis, he nonetheless interpreted this event as a preliminary step to his overcoming it (*ibid*., 76–77).

The next phase of his experience extended over twelve years and was marked by various stages. There were periods with no internal reactions, followed by times of intense doubt and psychosomatic crises. These crises significantly affected his physical and mental health to the extent that he feared for both his sanity and his life (*ibid*., 53–110).

Ultimately, in 1949, he "received" his first lines of verse (see Chapters 9 and 11.1.) and prevailed over his doubts. Following this incident, Krishna recognised his condition as a "superconscious state" (*ibid*., 11), adorned with divine grace and psychic powers, including writing in for him unknown languages, telepathy, and clairvoyant access to wisdom and the future (Degler 2023, 115; Krishna 1967, 252) – Krishna's initial reservation about psychic powers had seemingly waned as he claimed to have attained them himself. Moreover, Krishna assessed kundalini as "the guardian of the morals" (Krishna 1976a, 19). Thus, he believed that kundalini had purified his mind of desires, passions, and evil thoughts and deeds. Consequently, he attributed the realisation of virtues to his "superconscious" condition, which he compared to the enlightened states of some of history's greatest mystics (LGK, box 4).

Krishna underscored that no external alteration occurred – besides the realisation of virtues, which could potentially be externally perceivable through concrete behaviour, such as active compassion. In particular, the physical appearance of an "enlightened" person would remain unaltered: "He will look normal in his appearance, maybe with a better charm and a more fascinating personality, a better way of talking, […] but not in the physical makeup, I mean not in any particular sign in the body outwardly that can be recognized" (Krishna 1978b, 28). In an interview, Krishna drew an analogy between kundalini's internal activities and a bodily infection, underscoring the primacy of internal alterations:

> It is like … Suppose we have an infection. Then the body tries to throw it out and the organs work with increased activity. There is higher temperature, the heart beats faster. Similarly, in the beginning stages [of kundalini's activation] it seems as if a foreign element has entered the body and the reaction follows. Ultimately, there is a battle between the energy and the organs and they are subdued. The nerves become accustomed and then a man becomes again normal. Now I am just […] a normal human being. I don't perceive now the energy flowing through my nerves. They have become

> accustomed. But in the beginning, the sensations were very acute and I was constantly disturbed. (Krishna 1976a, 10)

Krishna's experience fundamentally altered his daily meditation practice. After seventeen years of practice, he interrupted his daily routine as a reaction to the psychosomatic crises. However, after successfully integrating what he considered to be kundalini, he did not return to his practice. Weizsäcker underlined how Krishna "had completely abandoned his active meditating, but he would occasionally and without effort permit himself to be submerged into the ocean of consciousness surrounding him" (Weizsäcker 1972, 18).

After forsaking his daily practice, writing developed into Krishna's new meditative vehicle. He maintained that his "superconscious" condition enabled his contact with an "other intelligence" (Krishna 1976a, 72), which would be coming upon him frequently, especially while writing. In the introduction of his book *The Present Crisis* (1981), Krishna describes how an "inner voice" guided the communication of his message:

> Through all the period of writing this work, I was myself overwhelmed with wonder at the way in which I was guided to take down this Message […]. I even now feel, after reading it over and over again, that I could never be the author. […] I could actually feel a Superior Intelligence intervening when ideas, crystallized into words strung in order like a necklace, floated before my inner vision to be put down on paper. […] I am lost in wonder when I recall that many of these paragraphs were written down as if I was copying from an invisible open book in front of me. (Krishna 1981, 6)

Furthermore, writing was of therapeutic value to Krishna – it helped him overcome his doubts about the veracity of his experience and systematically examine the decisive event that changed his life.

After careful and lengthy consideration, this examination culminated in the publication of his autobiographical account, *Kundalini. The Evolutionary Energy in Man* in 1967 (see Chapter 11.2.). This seminal book arguably shaped a generation's thoughts on kundalini. Besides its cultural importance, *Kundalini* sheds light on Krishna's interpretative model of kundalini, which he barely changed in subsequent publications. The following chapters introduce Krishna's key tenets in his attempt to interpret his "kundalini experience".

10.2. Krishna's Interpretative Model

The rising of kundalini can be interpreted through various frameworks: from a Hindu theological perspective, the movement of *kuṇḍalinī* depicts the goddess Kundalini Shakti's striving to unite with her male counterpart, Lord Shiva; *kuṇḍalinī*'s activation has also been illustrated by employing subtle-body models, where *kuṇḍalinī* is imagined as an energy stream based at the *mūlādhāra cakra*, which rises through the central channel (*suṣumnā*), and ultimately reaches the *sahasrāra cakra*, the thousand-petalled lotus;[256] and from a psycho-physiological perspective, kundalini's movement may be interpreted as shedding light on a supposed alteration of consciousness and the rise of bodily symptoms as kundalini moves. In *Kundalini*, Krishna laid a strong focus on the latter, without, however, excluding other frameworks:

> This mechanism, known as Kundalini, is the real cause of all genuine spiritual and psychic phenomena, the biological basis of evolution and development of personality, the secret orgin [*sic*] of all esoteric and occult doctrines, the master key to the unsolved mystery of creation, the inexhaustible source of philosophy, art and science, and the fountainhead of all religious faiths, past, present and future. (Krishna 1967, 209)

I will emphasise three key elements of Krishna's interpretative model that recur throughout his writings and form the foundation of his psycho-physiological understanding of kundalini: kundalini as an intrinsic biological mechanism, kundalini's evolutionary potential, and kundalini as a facilitator of higher states of consciousness and genius. These aspects must be understood in relation to one another to grasp their full significance.

10.2.1. Kundalini as Biological Mechanism

In *Kundalini*, Krishna reported various physical symptoms accompanying his experience. According to his account, he endured extreme pain, suffered from illnesses, experienced loss of appetite, and noticed changes in his sensory perception (Krishna 1967). These physical sensations reinforced his belief that kundalini was not only a component of the subtle body but was intimately connected to the physical body. Krishna identified two significant implications of this perspective: first, the "awakening" of kundalini involves a distinct

[256] As Chapter 4.1. underscores, several subtle-body models reference *kuṇḍalinī*. The version expressed in this chapter is one example among many; however, it is one that has become widely accepted.

physiological aspect, evidenced by a range of relatively consistent physical symptoms, and second, kundalini represents a universal biological mechanism rooted in the physical body.

The first implication emphasises the experience of kundalini's activation in the body. It suggests that when kundalini is "awakened", it manifests physically in the body through specific and consistent symptoms. These symptoms might include sensations like pain, changes in temperature, or other noticeable physical effects. The key idea here is that the activation of kundalini is not just a subtle, energetic phenomenon but has tangible, physical manifestations that can be observed and felt in the body.

The belief that physical symptoms are an integral aspect of kundalini's activation was already addressed during the first and second waves of *kuṇḍalinī*'s scientification and became widespread during the latter half of the twentieth century. Individuals such as the psychiatrist Lee Sannella (see Chapter 22.1.4.) and the religious teacher Swami Muktananda (see Chapter 7.3.), who elaborated on kundalini's interpretation, also advocated such views (Sannella 1976, 44–51; Muktananda 2000, 96–98). Krishna's significance in this regard lies in his pioneering role in describing the physical symptoms of kundalini's activation from an autobiographical perspective. He claimed he reached his conclusions by closely observing and analysing his physical condition, thus creating a catalogue of physical symptoms (Krishna 1967). Since he defined the identification of an active kundalini by its physical symptoms as "unmistakable" (Krishna 1972c, 99), he advocated the feasibility of scientific research into this phenomenon.

The second implication posits that kundalini is a fundamental aspect of human biology. The "Cambridge Online Dictionary" defines "biological" as referring to the "natural processes of living things" ("Cambridge Dictionary", n.d., accessed: May 26, 2023). Following Krishna's argument, this would imply that kundalini is an intrinsic aspect of the human organism. In other words, Krishna contends that the movement of kundalini is as natural as blood circulation (Krishna 1972c, 79). Therefore, one of his central arguments is that kundalini possesses a fundamental and even ordinary biological nature:

> The awakening of Kundalini is a perfectly natural biological phenomenon of an uncommon kind […]. The only peculiarity which gives it a semblance of the bizarre and the uncanny is the biological process which, set afoot, leads to the emergence of a conscious personality so superior […] as to make the whole phenomenon appear to be the performance of a supernatural agency rather than the outcome of […] natural though as yet unknown biological laws. (Krishna 1967, 198)

Krishna thus believed that he had discovered a biological mechanism that lies dormant in every human body. Describing this mechanism as equally special and ordinary, he emphasised that kundalini universally exists within everyone as a biological mechanism. Furthermore, he maintained that it was *always* a part of the body, functioning across all individuals, regardless of their awareness of it and whether it is "awakened". Now, what is the nature of said biological mechanism?

Krishna proposes that the awakening of kundalini triggers a significant physiological process, impacting the entire nervous system and inducing noticeable changes throughout the body. He explains that this process stimulates nerves that are typically imperceptible to consciousness (Krishna 1972c, 88–89). These nerves would "extract a nectar-like essence from surrounding tissues" (*ibid*., 89), which is conveyed into the spinal cord, streams into the brain and floods the reproductive organs, causing them to "become abnormally active as if to keep pace with the activity of the entire nervous system" (*ibid*.). Additionally, the essence stimulates vital organs, particularly the digestive system, prompting them "to adjust their functions to [accommodate] the new life introduced into the system" (*ibid*.). He also argues that reproductive fluids play a crucial role in this process, providing essential nourishment to the brain and enhancing consciousness:

> The semen in men is now produced in such abundance that a tiny stream rises day and night through the spine into the cranium to provide the richest and the purest food for the now heavily overworked brain cells. In women, the sexual energy and secretions involved in erotics are used as the fuel. (*ibid*., 90)

As a result of the movement of the "nectar-like essence" and seminal fluids, vital organs, brain cells, and nerve fibres are stimulated to a higher level of "activity" (*ibid*., 91), which in turn necessitates "the emergence of a more enlarged consciousness" (*ibid*.). This mechanism thus represents a comprehensive interplay of physiological changes that facilitate significant personal and cognitive developments. Krishna accordingly characterises this mechanism as a "process of rejuvenation" (*ibid*., 90), "rebirth" (*ibid*.), and "evolutionary process" (*ibid*.), emphasising its role in inducing transformative changes within the body (*ibid*., 88–91).

To support these claims, Krishna referred to his experience and observations of his condition over more than thirty years. Moreover, he underscored that this mechanism has been "confirmed not in a few but in hundreds upon hundreds of authentic documents dating from prehistoric times not only in India but in Tibet, China, Japan, and the Middle East" (*ibid*.,

87). Corresponding to this "documentary evidence" (*ibid*.), Krishna further added a cultural layer to his claim of universality.

Despite identifying kundalini as a biological mechanism, Krishna emphasised that this process was "guided by a Super-Intelligence, invisible but at the same time unmistakably seen conducting the whole operation" (Krishna 1972c, 88). He suggested that the biological process he interpreted as kundalini's movement could further offer insights into the divine influence on the physical world – particularly on the human organism. This approach aligns with what Michael Cavanaugh terms "biotheology". In *Biotheology: A New Synthesis of Science and Religion* (1995), Cavanaugh integrates theological doctrines with contemporary evolutionary biology, arguing for the central role of biology and evolution in (Judeo-Christian) religious theory (Cavanaugh 1995). Similarly, Krishna's "bio-theological" perspective considers kundalini as the biological manifestation of the divine. By exploring the intersection of kundalini's presumed biological and religious dimensions, Krishna aimed to foster a reconciliation of religion and science (Krishna 1993, 165).

In the "Introduction" to the book *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* (1972), Weizsäcker addresses Krishna's dual perspective of kundalini as a religious and biological phenomenon: "In Gopi Krishna's view, the point at issue is a spiritual law. What is unique about his view is that this spiritual law is at the same time a biological law. […] It is the law of evolution" (Weizsäcker 1972, 22–23). Krishna's claim that kundalini is a biological mechanism thus integrates his interpretation of kundalini as evolutionary energy.

10.2.2. Kundalini as Evolutionary Force

Evolutionary theories are primarily linked to Charles Darwin and his theory of natural selection. However, several critical voices rejected Darwin's theory and introduced competing hypotheses. One such critic was Gopi Krishna: "The general trend of the [Darwinian] theory is that evolution has been planless and aimless. It has all been a chance, an accident by which matter built itself into living creatures and finally into man" (Krishna 1976a, 78). Krishna's dissatisfaction is mainly due to the lack of purpose in Darwin's theory of natural selection. Within Krishna's religious evolutionism, on the contrary, evolution is telos-driven and stimulated by kundalini.

Krishna emphasised that humanity represents the culmination of evolution. Deprecating the presumed lack of satisfying solutions regarding evolutionary developments, he dismissed

heredity, natural selection, and similar hypotheses as insufficient explanatory approaches. Therefore, he gives his entire attention to what he perceives as evolution that "actually happens before our eyes" (*ibid*.), meaning the progress of humanity to the next higher stage of consciousness (*ibid*., 78–83). Krishna's evolutionary theory is thus primarily concerned with the evolution of humanity and, more precisely, with the mind. Cosmology, or the evolution of species in prehistoric times, in contrast, is not the centre of his interest (Krishna 1977).

Krishna premised his evolutionary theory on the claim that kundalini operates as a biological mechanism. As already mentioned, once initiated, this mechanism stimulates the increased activity of the nervous system. Additionally, Krishna claimed that the mechanism triggers an evolutionary process within the brain (Krishna 1972c, 81).[257] This process has biological implications (see above) and leads to a change of consciousness. While the relationship between consciousness and the brain remains contested, Krishna maintained that the evolution of the brain affects consciousness: "On the awakening of Kundalini […] a more powerful fuel, in the form of radiation, streams into the brain, enhancing its activity to such degree that a highly extended consciousness […] replaces the old, narrow, sense-dominated awareness that never could rise beyond the strictly circumscribed limits" (*ibid*., 95). In addition to a change of consciousness, this process may also result in the development of genius (see below).

The point of departure for this evolutionary process is the reproductive organs. However, change of consciousness and cerebral genius – both regarded as evolutionary goals – can only occur if kundalini, the biological mechanism, is activated. Krishna and his supporters began referring to this interpretation of kundalini's movement as the "kundalini hypothesis" (Degler 2023, 154). One of the most explicit descriptions of the "kundalini hypothesis" is found in a letter to Krishna's friend and collaborator, Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker:

> I say that the cerebro-spinal system with the reproductive organs at one end and a region in the brain at the other perform [*sic*] in man the dual function of reproduction and evolution, and that mankind owes the occasional appearance of prophets and mystics as also of men of genius to the amazing fact that in some individuals this mighty mechanism is abnormally active in the evolutionary direction from birth, resulting in

[257] For a broad introduction to the history of the brain, see Stetka (2021); for an introduction to the philosophical implications of neuroscience, i.e., the study of the function of the brain, see Roth (1996).

> the development of extraordinary spiritual or intellectual talents in them. (Krishna to Weizsäcker, August 5, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.)

Although Krishna had already pronounced aspects of his "kundalini hypothesis" in letters and previous publications, *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* represents a coherent summary of its focal contents (Degler 2023, 154; Krishna 1972c, 116).

The implications of kundalini's evolutionary potential extend beyond the individual. Given its presumed universality, Krishna suggested that kundalini awakenings occur globally. He argued that the collective effect of these individual "transformations" (Krishna 1972c, 90) would influence global developments, as each "transformative process" enhances biological and cognitive capacities. However, Krishna underscored that such influence must not only be positive. Given the possibility of "misguided" kundalini awakenings, advancing one's capacities could also entail abuse (*ibid*., 111).[258] In any case, the "transformation" of individuals as stimulated by kundalini would not only impact current developments but also shape the future. By linking kundalini to humanity's future, Krishna ventured into futurology.

Futurology, or future studies, is the systematic and interdisciplinary exploration of potential futures. It uses analytical techniques from mathematics, economics, environmental research, and computer science to study trends and scenarios. Futurology has faced criticism for employing an "element of crystal-ball gazing" (A. E. Thompson 1979, 9) due to its methodological challenges and occasional vagueness. Nevertheless, it remains sophisticated and aims to offer valuable insights into how current decisions might shape the future. Futurology peaked in popularity during the second half of the twentieth century, especially from the 1960s through the 1990s, when numerous international conferences, research projects, and publications addressed the topic. However, in the wake of two world wars and a potential nuclear threat, members of countercultural movements and alternative religions also developed an interest in futurology. These groups subsumed various methods, theories, and narratives under the label futurology, including Biblical prophecies, ancient divination techniques, environmental scanning, risk analysis, and weather forecasts (O'Toole 2017; A. E. Thompson 1979). Accordingly, it is imperative to distinguish between the academic and the fringe discipline of futurology. In this study, I will use futurology only in the second sense.

[258] The next chapter details Krishna's views on kundalini's potential dangers to society.

The belief in an imminent new age shares many ties with futurology. Although both discuss future scenarios, they differ significantly. Futurology explores radical, alternative futures through critical and often speculative analysis, aiming to understand and prepare for potential societal changes. The New Age movement, in contrast, emphasises spiritual growth and the change of individual and collective consciousness, focusing more on personal transformation and less on structured future-forecasting. Nevertheless, both discourses often overlapped during the heyday of New Age religion (Hanegraaff 1996).

Krishna conveyed concerns about mankind's future from his earliest publications onward.[259] His book *The Shape of Events to Come* (1974) exemplifies his futurological considerations, prominently treating the prospect of a dystopian world (see Chapter 11.3). Influenced by the general zeitgeist, Krishna employed anti-war rhetoric and expressed warnings of a devastating future full of violence, lack of moral values, and, as an ultimate threat, even a third world war. In the book, he predicts future events based on insights from visions. According to him, an activated kundalini enables individuals to foresee the "shape of events to come" and act accordingly. Kundalini thus poses a unique chance for futurological insights and predictions. Moreover, Krishna mused upon how such knowledge about future events would motivate individuals to uphold values and morals to prevent humanity's demise through violence and war (Krishna 1977, 58; 1979c, 83). Krishna thus suggested that kundalini's role as an evolutionary mechanism has several links to futurology and that humanity's survival in the future depends on the success of every single evolutionary process.

Some evolutionary thinkers significantly influenced Krishna's evolutionism. Notable examples include the French Jesuit and philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) and his evolutionary mysticism,[260] Aurobindo Ghose and his integrative evolutionism, Swami Vivekananda and his modern Advaitic evolutionism,[261] and Swiss philosopher Jean

[259] Many individuals who collaborated with Krishna expressed a distinct interest in futurology. Notable examples include Weizsäcker, Carl Friedrich Basedow, and Sinai (see Chapter 15), as well as Edgar Mitchell and John White (see Chapter 16). As discussed throughout Chapter 12, Krishna also participated in several events and publication projects associated with futurology.

[260] Chardin's theories on biological and spiritual evolutionism fill entire anthologies and have been discussed for decades. Wucherer-Huldenfeld (2003), Zaehner (1971), Le Morvan (1965), and De Terra (1966) thoroughly analyse Chardin's philosophy, key concepts, terminology, and reception.

[261] Swami Vivekananda synthesised the evolutionary theories of Lamarck, Spencer, theosophy, and Vedanta. According to Brown, Vivekananda "deeply influenced almost all subsequent attempts at harmonising Dharmic and Darwinian ideas" (Brown 2012, 78). Vivekananda was thus instrumental in the modern attempt to reconcile religion and science, and his Advaitic evolutionism served as a paragon of counter-Darwinian

Gebser's work on the evolution of consciousness (Degler 2023, 171; Krishna to Basedow, April 25, 1971, LGK, box 6).[262]

Of these thinkers, Chardin and Aurobindo had the most considerable impact on Krishna's ideas. Chardin's evolutionary mysticism was grounded in Catholicism and his scientific findings as a palaeontologist, whereas Sri Aurobindo's integral evolutionism was shaped by Hindu reformism and nationalism and his English education. Their evolutionary theories consider the evolution from inanimate matter toward supreme or divine consciousness. While Chardin believed in a linear evolution involving a distinct point of origin (Alpha Point) and a final point of unification with the divine (Omega Point), Aurobindo stressed the eternal recurrence of evolution and involution without any beginning or end (Gantke 2007, 81). Chardin considered the Omega Point the highest form of consciousness; in Aurobindo's writings, the Supermind assumes this status. The notion of the human mind evolving to higher spheres attracted Gopi Krishna's attention and aligned with his thoughts on the evolution of consciousness.[263] I will first analyse Krishna's links to Chardin, followed by Aurobindo.

Two aspects of Chardin's evolutionism are particularly relevant when comparing his ideas with Krishna's theory: Chardin's concept of a collective mind and the Bergson-inspired notion of orthogenesis.[264]

The first aspect centres on Chardin's thoughts on his concepts of the "noosphere" and "Omega Point". Chardin envisioned the noosphere as a telluric membrane, the "thinking layer" (Chardin 1959, 182) that emerged from the interaction of human minds.[265] He

spiritual evolutionism (*ibid*., 131–154). Chapter 5.3.1. thoroughly introduces Swami Vivekananda and his impact on kundalini's modern transformation.

[262] Jean Gebser's major work on the evolution of consciousness is *Ursprung und Gegenwart* (*The Ever-Present Origin*). While he had already started working on the manuscript as early as 1932, the first edition of the German book was not published before 1949 (Wehr 1996; Gantke 2007, 72–73). Refer to Chapter 12.4. for a discussion of Krishna's encounter with Gebser.

[263] Teilhard de Chardin's and Aurobindo Ghose's evolutionary theories significantly contributed to the growing interest in (spiritual) evolution, paving the way for modern theories on the evolution of the mind (Hanegraaff 1996; Bowler 2003; Lane 1996). This study consiers both thinkers as key influences on consciousness research and integral education.

[264] Evolutionary philosophers such as Aurobindo, Chardin, and Gebser operated simultaneously without direct contact with one another (Enomiya-Lassalle 1981; Gantke 2007; Zaehner 1971). Therefore, some parallels between Krishna and Aurobindo, e.g., the topic of divine purpose, might be traced back to Aurobindo and Chardin.

[265] Chardin describes evolution as a sequence of evolutionary "eras" or "layers", characterised by a continuous increase in complexity. These eras represent distinct stages in the evolutionary process, e.g., geogenesis, biogenesis, psychogenesis (related to humanity), and noogenesis (related to the development and interaction of the human mind); at the same time, however, these eras refer to particular "spheres", spatial layers surrounding the earth, that are superposed upon each other (Chardin 1959, 148–152).

believed that the noosphere encompassed the totality of human consciousness (*ibid*.). As evolution advances, the noosphere increases in complexity, implying that consciousness continues to progress. Chardin's narrative of the evolutionary rise of consciousness reaches its climax in the noosphere, which he considered the final evolutionary "era" and the peak of complexity (Chardin 1959, 181; Fuchs-Kittowski and Krüger 1997, 773). He proposed that, ultimately, the collective human minds of the noosphere would merge into a unified entity, culminating "in some sort of supreme consciousness" (Chardin 1959, 258). At this ultimate stage of evolution, the sphere of mind – the noosphere – converges into the Omega Point, which Chardin equates with God.

Chardin's view of the evolution of consciousness thus includes an additional layer: the emergence of a collective mind. The ascent toward supreme consciousness culminates at the Omega Point, where individual and collective minds transform into what he called the "Hyper-Personal" (*ibid*., 260) – a fusion of the individual and the collective, of humans and the divine (*ibid*., 257–260). This final convergence of matter and mind, which Chardin described as "an ecstasy transcending the dimensions and the framework of the visible universe" (*ibid*., 289), parallels Krishna's understanding of kundalini's potential to equally transform individual and "collective consciousness" (Krishna 1976a, 83).

As previously mentioned, Krishna held the belief in the universality of kundalini and the global occurrence of its awakening. While he did not express similar thoughts as Chardin regarding an overarching collective consciousness, he believed that the awakening of kundalini might result in a superconscious state. As he maintained, this process was essential for the divinisation of humanity as a whole. Additionally, Krishna argued that an activated kundalini provides insights about social, political, and moral conditions that humanity must fulfil to elevate its collective consciousness toward a superconscious state. He emphasised that the more people who successfully activate their kundalini, the more significant the impact of this transformation (Krishna 1967, 291–292). In this belief, Krishna drew inspiration from Chardin's ideas on collective consciousness:

> Some scholars, as for instance, Teilhard de Chardin and even Julian Huxley, they believe that there is some sort of an evolution going on, and for Teilhard de Chardin, this evolution would lead to collective consciousness which will be in communion with the reality […]. Similarly, what Julian Huxley says is that a socio-cultural evolution is going

> on that man is becoming more and more well-versed about the world and is gathering more and more information about the universe. (Krishna 1976a, 83)[266]

Another relevant aspect of Chardin's evolutionary theory is his interpretation of orthogenesis. This concept suggests that evolutionary processes tend to follow a straight line, driven by some internal force or mechanism. The French philosopher Henri-Louis Bergson (1859–1941) and other proponents of orthogenesis introduced a teleological element to explain evolutionary variations – in Bergson's case, the *élan vital* represents the animating vital force behind his creative evolution (Bergson 1928, 92–107). Chardin also supported the idea of linear progress shaping evolutionary complexity.[267] However, unlike Bergson, Chardin did not posit an "original impetus"; instead, he emphasised a teleological impulse guided by divine purpose (Bergson 1928, 107; Chardin 1959, 111, 273). Propelled by this impulse, according to Chardin, life and consciousness ascend from a distinct point of origin (Alpha Point) toward a final point of unification with the divine (Omega Point). Krishna's kundalini, then, resonates with Chardin's notion of a driving force behind the continuous ascent of human consciousness.[268] Degler highlights Krishna and Chardin's connection with the following words: "Gopi Krishna […], like the great Jesuit priest Teilhard de Chardin, believed [that the evolution to a higher state of consciousness] was leading the entire human race to a point of God Consciousness and […] was taking place in each and every one of us today" (Degler 2023, 27).

Aurobindo's integral evolutionism, previously explored in Chapter 5.3.2, will be revisited here in brief. Both Krishna and Aurobindo prioritised mind over matter, positing the gradual

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[266] The evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley introduced the English translation of Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man* (1959). Krishna sometimes mentions Huxley along with Chardin (Krishna 1976a, 83). In 1972, Julian Huxley and Gopi Krishna exchanged several letters. Chapter 15.3.2. addresses these letters and discusses Krishna's relationship with Huxley.

[267] Bergson had a profound influence on Chardin, shaping his thoughts not only on orthogenesis but also on progress philosophy, the concept of energy as a vital principle, and evolution in general. In his autobiographical writings, Chardin vividly recalls how Bergson's *Creative Evolution* (1909) ignited his lifelong passion for evolutionary theory: "I can remember very clearly the avidity with which, at that time, I read Bergson's *Creative Evolution*. […] the only effect that brilliant book had upon me was to provide fuel at just the right moment, and very briefly, for a fire that was already consuming my heart and mind" (Chardin 1978, 25, original emphasis). Thus, Chardin's "discovery" of evolution was partly inspired by Bergson (Zaehner 1971, 3).

[268] During an interview for UNESCO in the late 1970s, Gopi Krishna distanced himself from Chardin's Omega Point, which he then called "an undefined summit as […] Teilhard de Chardin and others have said" (Krishna 2009, 289). He opposed Chardin's Omega Point with the "predetermined target" (*ibid*.) of a kundalini-evoked illumination as he claimed to have experienced himself.

ascent of consciousness as the ultimate goal of evolution.[269] However, while Aurobindo minimised the significance of biological factors, emphasising spiritual dimensions instead, Gopi Krishna framed his evolutionary theory within a biological context (Brown 2012, 156–158). Despite their shared view of evolution as the process of the mind's increasing spiritualisation, their reasoning diverged fundamentally (Ghose 1950; Krishna 1997).

Unlike Chardin, Aurobindo adopted a cyclical understanding of evolution, characterised by endless cycles of involution and evolution: These alternating sequences of divine consciousness descending and ascending perpetuate the divine play of manifesting spirit on Earth, ultimately leading to the divinisation of man (Gantke 2007, 90; Ghose 1939, 1:90). Aurobindo attributed these cycles to a "Life-Principle" (Ghose 1950, 8). Similarly, Gopi Krishna embraced a cyclical view of evolution but diverged from Aurobindo by excluding the concepts of involution and eternity. For Krishna, the cycles in question pertain to karma-driven cycles of death and rebirth, introducing the possibility of disrupting these cycles and completing the evolutionary process within a single lifetime:

> The evolutionary mechanism [kundalini] is so constructed that at a certain state of maturity it can be stimulated to such intense activity by means of appropriate methods that the evolutionary cycle can be completed in one's lifetime, raising man to the next higher stage of consciousness decreed for him by Divine Ordination. (Krishna 1972c, 98; 1993, 380)

Krishna's assertion that kundalini allows an individual to complete the evolutionary cycle within one lifetime situates him at the intersection of Aurobindo's cyclical and eternal vision of evolution and Chardin's linear and teleological perspective (Ghose 1950; Chardin 1959). The notion of divinely guided ascents and descents of human consciousness, as articulated by Aurobindo, condenses in Krishna's system into the continuous ascent and descent of kundalini. This belief in a vital impetus driving evolutionary processes forms a bridge between the evolutionism of Krishna and Aurobindo. Krishna's kundalini functions as Aurobindo's Life-Principle: a non-materialistic agency that fosters the development of life, stimulates increasing complexity, and ultimately transforms matter into spirit – resonating with both Bergson's and Chardin's orthogenetic ideas.

[269] Despite barely referencing Aurobindo, Krishna held an appreciative and respectful opinion of the philosopher, praising him as an "outstanding [product] of this ancient [yoga] culture" (Krishna 1972c, 77). William I. Thompson (1974, 107) and Sravana Borkataky-Varma (2020, 376–377) pointed to Aurobindo's impact on Krishna's concept.

Krishna's interpretation of kundalini as an evolutionary energy encompasses both biological and mental dimensions. Having already discussed the biological implications, the next chapter will illustrate how Krishna associates kundalini with elevated states of consciousness and the development of genius.

10.2.3. Kundalini as a Catalyst for Higher Consciousness

In a letter to Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, Gopi Krishna maintains that "mankind owes the occasional appearance of prophets and mystics as also of men of genius to the amazing fact that in some individuals this mighty mechanism is abnormally active […], resulting in the development of extraordinary spiritual or intellectual talents in them" (Krishna to Weizsäcker, August 5, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.). As outlined in the previous chapters, Krishna maintained that kundalini – as a biological mechanism – triggers a "transformation" of the physical body, which entails the evolution of the brain. Another aspect of kundalini's "transformational" impact is the emergence of higher states of consciousness. His distinct understanding of higher consciousness and its relation to the development of genius represents a core tenet of his interpretative model.[270]

Over and above these points, it is essential to underscore that Krishna's concept of higher states of consciousness does not address temporary alterations in consciousness. Instead, Krishna envisioned the emergence of a new "type of mind" (Krishna 1972c, 97) within a permanently restructured body. Higher states of consciousness for Krishna thus represent a fundamentally new mode of human existence, not just a change in condition. Accordingly, he described the presumed physiological processes during such a change of consciousness: "The metabolic processes of the body are highly accelerated, and an inner process of brain building and streamlining, somewhat akin to the processes occurring in an embryo in the womb, takes place until consciousness is completely transmogrified and a superior type of mind is born" (*ibid*.). Krishna's explanations of higher states of consciousness, much like his views on the physiological changes caused by the movement of kundalini, blend biological and religious assumptions.

[270] Krishna juggled with terms such as "consciousness", "mind", and "brain", at times using them interchangeably, at times sharply dividing them (Krishna 1979c, 3; 1979b, 65).

Krishna was by no means the initiator of such claims. The identification of *śakti* with consciousness (*cit*) can be traced back to Abhinavagupta (Gupta 2003, 4).[271] Many centuries later, Arthur Avalon drew on Abhinavagupta's initial identification of *śakti* with *cit* and described physical and mental conditions in the wake of kundalini's arousal (Woodroffe 1928, 240–271).[272] Several sections of their lengthy introduction to *The Serpent Power* (1918) are dedicated to consciousness and its various states:

> That which is the general characteristic of the Indian systems, and that which constitutes their real profundity, is the paramount importance attached to Consciousness and its states. […] And whatever be the means employed, it is the transformation of the "lower" into "higher" states of consciousness which is the process and fruit of Yoga and the cause of all its experiences. (Woodroffe 1950, 19)

The Avalon team not only distinguishes between different states of consciousness but also mentions an alteration of consciousness resulting from yogic means. Avalon characterises it as the kinetic aspect of consciousness – as opposed to static consciousness, which refers to Shiva. The movement of kundalini would thus equate to the movement of consciousness. Above all, kundalini's movement also corresponds to the evolutionary process – in the sense of the evolution of consciousness (*ibid*., 48).

In conjunction with his views on higher states of consciousness, Krishna also discussed the potential cognitive differences between those whose kundalini is awake and those whose serpent power is (still) coiled and dormant. This is where the concept of genius mingles with kundalini's activation. He differentiates prophets, seers, and mystics from illuminated minds, whose intellectual and artistic talent has been "responsible for every advance made by mankind so far" (Krishna 1990, 223).[273] Individuals with "psychic or miraculous powers" (Krishna 1972c, 106), such as "mediums and sensitives or others possessing the gift of healing or other psi faculties" (*ibid*.), equally belong to Krishna's category of kundalini-inspired geniuses.

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[271] Chapter 7.3. discusses the identification of *śakti* with consciousness (*cit*) in the context of Kashmir Shaivism and Siddha Yoga.

[272] Arthur Avalon counts among the most significant pioneering projects in interpreting and translating tantric texts and their central tenets for the English-speaking world (Strube 2022; 2021). Chapter 5.3.3. addresses this in more detail.

[273] Notable examples of publications that Krishna relied on for his understanding of genius include Ernst Kretschmer's *The Psychology of Men of Genius* (1931) and Cesare Lombroso's *The Man of Genius* (1891) (Shepard to Krishna, August 26, 1972, LGK, n.d.).

For Weizsäcker, Krishna's distinction between saints and geniuses runs along the differentiation between "religious genius" and "worldly genius" (Weizsäcker 1972, 14). Intriguingly, he points to an explanation rooted in kundalini's movement in the subtle body. While both are triggered by kundalini, they differ in terms of its movement in the subtle body: "Gopi Krishna himself explains the worldly genius of the artist and the scientist as a raising of Kundalini to the second-highest [subtle] center" (*ibid*.).[274]

Another aspect of kundalini's ability to cultivate saints and geniuses involves the idea of paranormal abilities, miracles, or powers: "The initiate [into kundalini] must become a genius or a virtuoso of a high order, with extraordinary power of expression, both in verse and prose, […] precognition, powers of healing, psychic talents, and other miraculous gifts" (Krishna 1972c, 98). This quote suggests that Krishna also viewed charisma as one of kundalini's fruits. Moreover, he embraced the perspective found in South Asian texts, which links the rise of kundalini to the attainment of *siddhis* or paranormal powers (see Chapter 4.1.).[275] While the association between kundalini and paranormal powers is not a novel thought, Krishna's broad interpretation of these powers extends beyond the yogic context to reinforce kundalini's universal nature.

Krishna's list of kundalini-facilitated geniuses is long. A notable example that he presented to his readership was the Canadian psychiatrist Richard Maurice Bucke (1837–1902). Comparing Bucke to mystics throughout history, Krishna suggested that Bucke's kundalini had been activated and sparked higher states of consciousness (*ibid*., 96). This claim rests on an autobiographical report, part of Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (1901). In this report, Bucke narrates his 1872 experience of what he called "cosmic consciousness":

> It was in the early spring, at the beginning of his thirty-sixth year. […] His mind, deeply under the influence of the ideas, images and emotions called up by the reading and talk of the evening, was calm and peaceful. He was in a state of quiet, almost passive enjoyment. All at once, without warning of any kind, he found himself wrapped around as it were by a flame-colored cloud. For an instant he thought of fire, some sudden conflagration in the great city; the next he knew that the light was within himself.

[274] Krishna does not elaborate on this view in *Kundalini* (1967) or *The Biological Basis* (1972). Perhaps he shared this conviction with Weizsäcker during one of their meetings or correspondence.

[275] Arthur Avalon underlined that in the *Sat-Chakra-Nirupana*, the achievement of *siddhis* occurs upon the "mastery of the centres" (Avalon 1950, 17). Accordingly, it is not the complete rise of kundalini results in siddhis, but the mastery of individual chakras. Mallinson and Singleton (2017, 359–94) examine South Asian views on yogic powers.

> Directly afterwards came upon him a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination quite impossible to describe. Into his brain streamed one momentary lightning-flash of the Brahmic Splendor which has ever since lightened his life; upon his heart fell one drop of Brahmic Bliss, leaving thenceforward for always an after taste of heaven. […] He claims that he learned more within the few seconds during which the illumination lasted than in previous months or even years of study, and that he learned much that no study could ever have taught. (Bucke 1905, 7–8)

The resemblance between Bucke's and Krishna's experience reports is remarkable and likely motivated Krishna to compare Bucke's experience to his own. However, given that Krishna had received Bucke's book only in 1971, it is unlikely that he had found inspiration for his narration in Bucke (Krishna to Basedow, April 25 1971, LGK, n.d.).[276] This notwithstanding, Bucke's concept of cosmic consciousness developed into an integral component of Krishna's writings (Krishna 1974; 1979c).[277]

Krishna's category of kundalini-engendered geniuses further encompasses "evil geniuses of history" (Krishna 1972c, 106), such as dictators, autocrats, and warlords. Krishna asserted that kundalini's capacity to give rise to genius endowments and divine-like states of consciousness is not limited to morally good outcomes. Instead, it has a malignant form. Thus, Krishna suggested a link between higher states of consciousness and morally wrong and perilous behaviour:

> If the Serpent Power is the source behind genius and high intellectual or artistic talents it must also be the factor responsible for the evil geniuses of history, the highly talented military commanders, dictators, and demagogues who drenched humanity in blood, and also for the human monsters who, dead to every moral sentiment, with their proclivity and genius for crime, commit such dreadful acts […]. This is the malignant or destructive aspect of Kundalini. (*ibid*., 106–107)

By associating kundalini's destructive aspect with "the evil geniuses of history", kundalini's threats extend beyond individual menaces, such as Gopi Krishna's psychosomatic crises.

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[276] Gopi Krishna received Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness* from Carl Friedrich Basedow, Weizsäcker's acquaintance (Krishna to Basedow, April 25 1971, LGK, n.d.). Basedow became one of Krishna's closest collaborators in Germany. As outlined in Chapter 15.3.1., Basedow remained loyal to Krishna's cause until Basedow died in 1978.

[277] While Krishna used the term "cosmic consciousness" in his first autobiographical account (1967) only once (Krishna 1967, 140), in subsequent publications, the term frequently recurs in reference to kundalini-induced higher states of consciousness (Krishna 1974; 1979c). Krishna was probably already familiar with the term before reading Bucke but did not attach much significance to it.

Such ingenious villains could "play havoc with the whole of humanity and all it has achieved during the last many thousand years" (*ibid*., 107). Owing to their power and scope – as in the case with "evil" world leaders – Krishna warned about kundalini's danger to society at large.

The constant dread of nuclear war hanging over Krishna and his contemporaries led to sincere concerns about the near future and its manifold threats. Misguided evolution, as well as corrupt social, political, and moral conditions, were the central underpinnings of Krishna's futurological considerations. Apart from evolutionary and societal components, Krishna blamed ignorance about kundalini for violence, suffering, and war. He insisted that until there has been some elaborated research regarding the nature of kundalini, "blood will continue to be shed" (Krishna 1990, 225). Gopi Krishna's interpretation of kundalini as an impetus of genius hence supported his futurology.

Notably, Krishna's kundalini-based concept of higher consciousness emphasises "extraordinary" individuals who have undergone "transformative" experiences with kundalini. In contrast, "ordinary" people remain largely unexamined and are only mentioned when emphasising the "ordinary" origins of those who later experience such transformations (Krishna 1993, 188). A prime example is Krishna himself, who described himself as an "ordinary man in a humble walk of life, burdened with responsibilities" (*ibid*., 259). This emphasis further sheds light on Krishna's views on a presumed religious elite and its role in advancing the human race (see Chapter 15.3.1.). According to him, illuminated individuals – kundalini-inspired saints and geniuses – will reach the next level of humanity's evolution before this becomes common to all. These "fully evolved members of the human race" (Krishna 1972c, 81–82) will guide humanity towards this next level.

A final remark is due to Krishna's criticism of psychologists' examination of exalted states of consciousness. He pled for a sharp distinction between higher and altered states of consciousness, rejecting the latter: "The grave difficulty in all this, from the point of view of […] Gopi Krishna, was how altered states had become widely synonymous with *higher* states of consciousness" (Degler 2023, 189, original emphasis).[278] However, the

[278] In some instances, Krishna nonetheless used the phrases "higher states of consciousness" and "altered states of consciousness" synonymously. In his *Secrets of Kundalini in Panchastavi* (1978), e.g., he employs a multitude of different expressions to refer to exalted states of consciousness, including "raise[d] consciousness" (Krishna 1978a, 16), "altered state of consciousness" (*ibid*., 17), "illuminated consciousness" (*ibid*., 32), and "higher consciousness" (*ibid*., 33). This suggests that he was not as definite in his terminology as his supporters presented him as being (Degler 2023, 189).

psychologist Charles Tart (b. 1937), who popularised the concept of altered states of consciousness (see Chapter 20.4.1.), was not Krishna's only or primary target.

Gopi Krishna's major critique concerned the involvement of psychedelic substances, maintaining that "even an authority like William James has been in error in the comparison he has made between mystical ecstasy and the states induced by wine and nitrous oxide" (Krishna 2009, 277). Moreover, Krishna contrasted "growth techniques", as propagated by transpersonal psychologists and the Human Potential movement (see Chapter 23.1.), with his understanding of a genuine mystical experience:

> The world is still not well-informed about the fact that there is a vast gulf of difference between the hallucinatory condition of the mind, induced by drugs, inert types of meditation, hysteria or hypnosis and the mystical trance, whether a born endowment or brought about by religious disciplines of any kind. Present-day psychology is entirely at sea about this condition. (Krishna 1975a, 67)

Aside from Krishna's general rejection of psychological examinations of higher consciousness, he also explicitly criticised psychologists and other intellectuals who addressed Hindu religious ideas.[279]

C. G. Jung and Joseph Campbell advocated views of the chakras representing symbols (Jung, in Shamdasani 2012, xlv) and levels (J. Campbell 1975) of consciousness. Against that backdrop, Jung interpreted kundalini's movement as a psychological process (Shamdasani 2012, 98). Gopi Krishna rejected Jung's and Campbell's views as hubristic appropriations by European and US-American intellectuals.

In Krishna's book *Secrets of Kundalini in Panchastavi* (1978), he discusses Joseph Campbell's article "Kundalini Yoga: Seven Levels of Consciousness" (1975) at length (Krishna 1978a, 88–94). In his article, Campbell uses the psychologists Jung, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), and Alfred Adler (1870–1937) to define the chakras as levels of consciousness and associated character traits. Moreover, he compares kundalini yoga to European dragon-slaying myths. Krishna criticised the contents of his article as a misreading of South Asian texts for the sake of conformity with modern psychology:

> His attempt has been to dovetail the hoary tradition with the modern concepts in psychology and to interpret the symbols used for the first four chakras with the views

[279] Considering Hillman's psychological comments on Krishna's *Kundalini*, Krishna's criticism of psychological assessments of Hindu religious ideas evidently only developed over time. This is further supported by the omission of Hillman's comments from a 1975 edition of *Kundalini*, titled *The Awakening of Kundalini* (see Chapter 11.2.).

> expressed by the three well-known psychologists Freud, Adler and Jung. […] The view expressed is […] far from the truth when assessed in the light of the ancient tradition about Kundalini. […] It is thus evident that the real significance of what the Indian treatises on Kundalini Shakti […] intend to convey is not correctly understood in the West. (*ibid*., 88–89)

As part of the assessment of Campbell's views, Krishna also criticised Jung's hypothesis of kundalini's psychic nature and its rising from the unconscious (*ibid*., 9, 92, 108). In his book *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius*, Krishna condemned the psychologist for being "entirely preoccupied with his own theories about the unconscious" and using South Asian concepts "for the corroboration of his own ideas and nothing beyond that" (Krishna 1972c, 93). He goes on by claiming that

> the same thing happened in a seminar held by him on Kundalini of which a written summary is still available in the Jung Institute.[280] Not one of the savants present, as is evident from the views expressed by them, displayed the least knowledge about the real significance of this hoary cult and the tremendous import of the ancient doctrine they were discussing at the time. (*ibid*.)

Despite Krishna's criticism of Jung's psychological views on kundalini, he respected the psychologist for his interest in Asian religion, acknowledging that "of all the modern psychologists Jung had, perhaps, the most extensive knowledge of eastern [*sic*] mysticism" (Krishna to Loverde, April 4, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.6.).

10.2.4. Summary

The previous chapters illustrated Krishna's interpretative model. Krishna emphasised that every individual possesses the potential to activate kundalini within their body, thereby triggering an "evolutionary transformation" or "rebirth". However, despite this inherent

[280] It is interesting that Krishna apparently had access to the notes of Jung's and Hauer's "Kundalini Seminar", as early as 1971 (when the German edition of *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* was published). Despite the lack of any evidence of Krishna's visit to the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich, several indications suggest Krishna's association with the Institute. For instance, in a letter written by Hopman, issued in December 1967, he informs Krishna that the latter's autobiography has been sold at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich (Hopman to Krishna, December 3, 1967, LGK, box 6.1.8.). In another letter, Hopman conveys an invitation from James Hillman to stay at Hillman's house and discuss his ideas at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich (Hopman to Krishna, January 1, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.7.). Perhaps Krishna's network in Zurich or James Hillman organised Krishna's access.

universality, the outcome of such transformations might vary significantly. Moreover, according to Krishna, only a limited number of individuals succeed in fully activating kundalini. He thus attributes universal qualities to kundalini while simultaneously drawing a sharp distinction between the "common man", whose kundalini remains dormant or is only partially active, and "geniuses" and "illuminati" (Krishna 1978a, 129), whose kundalini had elevated them to higher spheres of consciousness. Krishna's threefold interpretative framework, which integrates kundalini as a biological mechanism, an evolutionary force, and a facilitator of higher states of consciousness, forms the foundation of Krishna's kundalini theory and the research efforts associated with his work. Moreover, it runs like a red thread through his body of written work.

11. The Development of Krishna's Thought in his Publications

Like many religious teachers before him, Gopi Krishna disseminated most of his views through writing. Krishna started writing in the early 1950s, composing books, pamphlets, articles, letters, poems, and public talks. He drafted a total of eighteen books, the majority revolving around his 1937 experience, his struggle, and ultimately the integration of what he considered to be kundalini into his everyday life. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, he elaborated on kundalini in the light of scientific theories and religious claims. However, Krishna also addressed subjects of political and societal relevance, which reflect his commitment to social activism before (and during) his international campaigning for kundalini research.

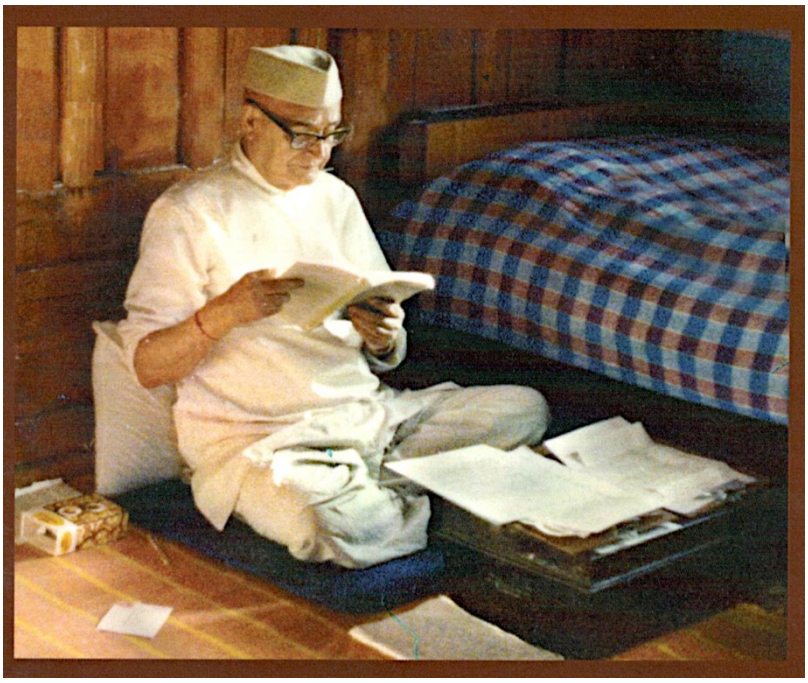


Figure 6: Gopi Krishna's study (photo credit: unknown; printed with permission of Michael Bradford).

To fully comprehend Krishna's teachings, concepts, and objectives, it is vital to look at the body of his writings and the development of his thoughts. In this chapter, I am thus introducing four books from different stages of his career: *From the Unseen* (1952), *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967), *The Shape of Events to Come* (1968), and *The Way to Self-Knowledge* (1985). As this chapter will demonstrate, some of Krishna's ideas and concepts permeated his books throughout his career, while others developed over time. Krishna's second publication, *Kundalini*, warrants additional attention regarding its genesis and impact on Krishna's career and will therefore be discussed in more detail.

11.1. *From the Unseen* (1952)

Krishna employed poetry and prose in his writings. However, poetry remained his preferred genre throughout his career, as he believed that kundalini's grace divinely inspired his poetic works.[281] While most of his publications included some poetic elements – whether in the form of a single verse, a dedication, or entire chapters written in verse – he faced

[281] Krishna wrote seven books entirely in verse, including *From the Unseen* (1952), *The Shape of Events to Come* (1968), *The Coming War* (1968 – not published), *The Riddle of Consciousness* (1973), *On War* (1975 – not published), *The Present Crisis* (1981), and *The Way to Self-Knowledge* (1985) (Degler 2023).

considerable frustration early on due to publishers' reluctance to accept all-verse manuscripts, deeming poetry less commercially viable.

A notable example is Krishna's first publication, *From the Unseen* (1952).[282] Originally a pamphlet, it was later published in 1977 by Krishna's KRF and features poems in nine different languages, accompanied by a three-page preface in which Krishna explains his motivations for the work.[283]

The peculiarity of the book lies in Krishna's assertion that he was unfamiliar with the languages and scripts of the poems before their creation, attributing his knowledge of them to divine revelation (Krishna 1952, 1). To consolidate his claim of divine inspiration, he described the writing process as driven by an "inexplicable and uncontrollable urge to write" (*ibid*.) rather than deliberate choice. He was both astonished and intrigued by this lack of control and the results. Krishna spoke of being compelled by what he called the "perennial spring" (*ibid*., 2), the "source" (*ibid*.), or the "will" (*ibid*., 3). Although he did not explicitly define this source as "kundalini", this is what he implied.

The preface touches on Krishna's concerns about contemporary political tensions and the potential for another world war. He writes:

> there is a definite purpose behind this writing, which will be revealed at its proper time […], pointing to the terrible turn that the world events are likely to take in the near future, and of which the previous two world wars and massacres can be said to have been no more than mere fore-running shadows. (*ibid*., 2–3)

By warning about the current crisis of the world and humanity, he indicated that the "source", i.e., kundalini, could be the last resort (*ibid*., 3). Accordingly, he emphasises that the "source" was the wellspring "from which has emanated all that is good, noble and beautiful" (*ibid*., 2) and viewed it as a key source of genius (*ibid*.). These topics – the current political situation, the threat of (nuclear) war, consciousness, and genius – reoccurred throughout Krishna's later works.

The German physicist Weizsäcker – with whom Krishna collaborated from 1971 onwards – expressed his fascination with the multilingual nature of the poetry collection (Weizsäcker

[282] Gopi Krishna privately published *From the Unseen* with the help of his non-profit organisation Samiti. In 1977, Krishna's CIKR (Srinagar) republished the original pamphlet, which was followed by further republications in 1985 (FIND Research Trust, Canada, and N.C. Publishing, USA) and 2019 (ICR, Canada) (Degler 2023, 94). The 2019 edition further includes as an appendix some letters in verse that Krishna addressed to the biologist Julian Huxley and the NASA astronaut Edgar Mitchell, among others.

[283] The poems are written in English, French, Italian, German, Hindi, Kashmiri, Urdu, Persian, and Punjabi (Krishna 1952).

1972, 20–21). Weizsäcker was particularly intrigued by a German poem. Written in basic, slightly erratic German, the poem is intelligible by German natives:

> Ein schöner Vogel immer singt
> In meinem Herz mit leisem Ton,
> Ich kenne ihn nicht, aber er
> Die innersten Gedanken liest.
>
> Und wenn vergießt der Nachtwind auf
> Die grünen Gräser seine Tränen,
> Und ich und alle Menschen sind
> Schon zu Bett, dann der Vogel wacht. (Krishna 1952, 26)[284]

Weizsäcker neither defended nor expanded on Krishna's "divinely inspired" verses. However, he acknowledged that despite their simplicity, imperfections, and naivety, their multilingual aspect left him perplexed (Weizsäcker 1972, 20–21).

In sum, *From the Unseen* is significant for two reasons: It reveals the early development of themes central to Krishna's later work and serves as a foundational text asserting the authenticity of his experience and an unmistakable "proof" of kundalini's presence within his organism (Krishna 1967, 242).

After many years of uncertainty, *From the Unseen* marked Krishna's initial attempt to communicate his views on kundalini to a broader audience. In 1952, however, Krishna was unknown beyond his immediate surroundings, and his undertaking might never have reached its global success if it had not been for Hopman and Hillman reaching out to him (see below). As outlined in Chapter 9, the friends played a crucial role in launching Krishna's career as an internationally recognised author and advocate of kundalini research.

11.2. *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967)

Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man (1967) is Krishna's best-known and most successful book.[285] It revolves around his 1937 experience and subsequent search for

[284] English translation: "A beautiful bird always sings // In my heart with a soft tone // I do not know it, but it // reads the innermost thoughts. // And when the night wind sheds // its tears on the green grass // and I and all people are // already in bed, then the bird is alert" (Krishna 1952, 26), translated by M.T.

[285] The book remains in print to this day, has been published in thirteen countries, and has been translated into ten languages (Degler 2023, 94).

meaning (see Chapter 10.1.) and already contains key ideas recurring throughout his body of thought. Framed as an autobiography, the book provides basic information on Krishna's upbringing, family situation, and striving for knowledge (Krishna 1967, 7–42). The greater part of the book, however, discusses his agony in the aftermath of his experience, stating how he undertook efforts to prevent his own demise. The book ends with Krishna's specification of the alleged achievements of this "transformative process" (*ibid*., 188), including an "exceptional state of consciousness" (*ibid*., 283), the attainment of paranormal abilities, and divine revelations (*ibid*., 241–303). Key topics that Krishna addresses in *Kundalini* range from kundalini's danger and potential for pathologisation (Chapter 3), the evolutionary, biological, and universal nature of kundalini (Chapters 5–7), the change of consciousness in the wake of kundalini's activation (Chapter 8), and kundalini's ties to the human organism in its interpretation as biological mechanism (Chapter 13).

At the time of the book's publication in 1967, autobiographies by South Asian writers, especially in English, were relatively rare. Among the most notable was Paramhansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946), which, while widely recognised, is more accurately classified as hagiography or "auto-hagiography" (Foxen 2017, 18).[286] Yogananda's book marked the beginning of a series of similar auto-hagiographical accounts by yogis, including Swami Narayananda's *The Primal Power in Man or the Kundalini Shakti* (1950), Swami Sivananda's *Autobiography of Swami Sivananda* (1958), and Swami Muktananda's *Play of Consciousness* (1978), to name but a few. Intriguingly, in *Kundalini*, Krishna equally addressed religious concepts; however, he sought to consolidate these with what he presented as a "scientific exposition" (Krishna, in Degler 2023, 95). He thereby shifted from an auto-hagiographical approach to a stance of religious scientism – an approach permeating all his subsequent writings.[287]

The original draft of *Kundalini* looked completely different from the version published in 1967. It was titled *Kundalini or the Evolutionary Energy in Man*, and was entirely written in verse. As early as 1957, Krishna finished the original draft and contacted several international publishing houses, including Rider & Company and Routledge & Kegan Paul (Degler 2023, 94–96). None accepted the draft for publication. Not only did Krishna receive rejections, but he experienced discrimination and condescension from US-American and

[286] Robin Rinehart coined the term "auto-hagiography" in his book *One Lifetime, Many Lives: The Experience of Modern Hindu Hagiography* (1999). According to Rinehart's definition, the term amalgamates history and myth.

[287] Chapter 28 details the concept of scientism and considers kundalini's role as an object of research.

British publishers during this process. With a patronising attitude, publishers questioned his knowledge of yoga and challenged his employment of the English language, as the following statement in a letter by a New York agent underpins: "Dear Mr. Krishna: Your letter is a fascinating one. How in the world do you write in so professional a manner, English I mean" (Unknown agent, in Degler 2023, 104).[288]

After these disappointments, James Hillman and Tontyn Hopman offered their help, and the tide turned (see Chapter 9). Both considered the initial meeting with Krishna in Srinagar in 1952 a momentous event that influenced the course of their lives – in particular since shortly after having met Krishna both believed themselves to have experienced kundalini in their own bodies. While they dealt with their "kundalini experiences" in distinct ways, they did not doubt the impact of their meeting with Krishna.

Hopman underwent a traumatic experience and considered Krishna's guidance his lifeline to sanity. Thenceforth, he addressed Krishna as "Maharaj" (literally "great king"), regarded him as his religious teacher, and remained one of his most loyal supporters until Krishna's passing (Hopman to Krishna, January 4, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.7.; Russell 2013, 1:174). In a letter to Krishna, he emphasised that his "efforts on behalf of the publication of the book [*Kundalini*] […] were done entirely out of gratitude to you and because I thought the book of importance" (Hopman to Krishna, January 4, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.7.).

Hillman, on the other hand, experienced what he took to be the activation of kundalini before his wedding ceremony: "I was terrified. What happened is, I had the kundalini (experience), but at once damped that idea down. I wanted no part of it!" (Hillman, in Russell 2013, 1:137). However, unlike Hopman, he was not interested in Krishna's supervision. Instead, he addressed the topic as part of his psychological studies. For instance, in his first book, *Emotion* (1960), Hillman discussed "the history of the idea of *psychic energy* as a circulating flow within the organism" (Hillman, in Krishna 1967, 78, original emphasis; Russell 2013, 1:132–133). Despite his intellectual examination of kundalini as a "psychic energy" circulating within the human organism, he emphasised that he "was not interested in pursuing Kundalini on my own behalf. […] What I wanted to go into analysis for was to find out about it, and make sure it didn't happen again" (Hillman, in Russell 2013, 1:139). Nevertheless, Krishna played an important role for Hillman, too. In his commentary added

[288] Krishna's challenges demonstrate the difficulties South Asian authors, yogis, and teachers faced in disseminating their beliefs among US-Americans. The history of kundalini taking root in the United States thus corresponds to the slow acceptance of South Asians and their philosophies during the latter half of the twentieth century, as outlined in Chapter 6.

to Krishna's *Kundalini*, Hillman wrote: "Because […] unusual events occurred to me in the high mountains after meeting with Gopi Krishna, I tend to regard him as an initiator and a signal person in my life. Our meeting went deeper than I then realized" (Hillman, in Krishna 1967, 43).[289]

While Hopman and Hillman had diverging motivations for offering support and guidance, they unanimously held Krishna in high esteem since their initial meeting in 1952. Accordingly, each emphasised their willingness to support Krishna's publication project as an "act of gratitude" (Hillman, in Krishna 1967, 43; Hopman to Krishna, January 4, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.7.). At that moment, probably neither of them imagined it would be an effortful and interminable undertaking of ten years until the 1967 Ramadhar & Hopman prose version was published (Degler 2023, 94–98; Russell 2013, 1:174). This development warrants some details.

Hopman and Hillman gradually persuaded Krishna to cut as many verses as possible, emphasising that "the more prose the better" (Hopman, in Degler 2023, 99). Eventually, Krishna accepted their suggestions and removed even the last portions written in verse (Degler 2023, 102). Additionally, Krishna initially intended to write the book as a general treatise on kundalini rather than an autobiography; "it was meant as a book about kundalini, not about himself or his life" (*ibid*., 98). Ultimately, Krishna also agreed with Hillman and Hopman's suggestion of an autobiography: "I have deliberately given it in the shape of a story of my life to make the otherwise obtuse and entirely new subject [of kundalini] more intelligible to the reader" (Krishna, in Degler 2023, 98).

Despite the book's new orientation, its entirely revised style, and the efforts of Hopman and Hillman, in 1964 still no publisher would accept the manuscript for publication. However, the team remained persistent and pursued new initiatives. Hopman contacted Sri Ramadhar (n.d.a.), a South Asian owner of a printing press, who had previously shown interest in Krishna's work. Together, Hopman and Ramadhar co-founded the publishing house Ramadhar & Hopman. Meanwhile, Hillman agreed to write a commentary accompanying Krishna's autobiographical account. Many publishing houses had criticised the manuscript as lacking context for a non-South Asian audience, so Hillman's psychological

[289] According to Hillman, before he departed from Srinagar, he had another meeting with Krishna. During their conversation, Krishna told Hillman that "high in the mountains, […] that's where man meets God" (Krishna, in Russell 2013, 1:133). The authenticity of this statement cannot be confirmed. Nonetheless, Hillman, who had several unusual experiences during a trekking trip (high in the mountains), placed particular significance on Krishna's remark.

commentaries aimed to address this gap and enhance Krishna's credibility. Additionally, Hillman, who was already well known and well connected, sought contributions from established scholars for the book's introduction. Although Aldous Huxley and Mircea Eliade declined,[290] Frederic Spiegelberg agreed to contribute (Degler 2023, 104–107; Russell 2013, 1:174).

Frederic Spiegelberg was a respected professor of religious studies at Stanford University, California (see Chapter 24.1.). His theories of comparative religion were significantly shaped by Jung, whom Spiegelberg had met in 1927 while teaching at the University of Dresden. Throughout his life, Spiegelberg maintained ties with Jung, both personally and professionally, with Spiegelberg and his family regularly travelling to Zurich for him to lecture at Jung's Institute (Kabil 2012; Kripal 2007, 142). In 1964, when Hillman – a rising star in Jungian psychology – invited Spiegelberg to contribute to Krishna's book, their common interest in Jung likely played a pivotal role in Spiegelberg's decision to accept Hillman's invitation to write an introduction to *Kundalini*.

Spiegelberg does not mention Jung's interest in kundalini yoga as an additional reason for his contribution, which suggests that he might have been unaware of Jung's "Kundalini Seminar".[291] Considering that the seminar material was not published before 1975 and 1976, Spiegelberg's ignorance is not surprising. Before its printed form was available, only a few people were familiar with it (Shamdasani 2012, xi).

In 1967, after ten years of work and nearly thirty years since Krishna's initial experience, the book was finally published in English, featuring both a psychological commentary and an introduction.

A notable step in the history of *Kundalini*'s success was its republication in 1971 by the renowned US-American publishing house Shambala (Figure 7).[292] This publication significantly contributed to a growing interest in Krishna's ideas in the United States and beyond. Accordingly, Degler underscored how "Shambala's international reputation for

[290] In a letter to Aldous Huxley, Hillman wrote about Krishna's book: "It is the honest report of the spontaneous appearance of Kundalini, continuous (off and on) over many years . . . described in more detail than anything I have ever read. As a document of psychological interest I believe it should be published. I had the feeling that you might find the manuscript of interest, and might like writing an introduction" (Hillman to Huxley, March 25, 1963, in Russell 2013, 1:174). Huxley died soon after in November 1963.

[291] Sonu Shamdasani (2012) comprehensively analyses Jung's seminar and the psychologisation of yoga.

[292] The 1971 Shambala edition of *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* is based on a revised edition published in 1970 by Vincent Stuart & John M. Watkins Ltd. (London, United Kingdom). Degler underlines Tontyn Hopman's and Gene Kieffer's efforts to enable the Stuart & Watkins and the Shambala editions, respectively (Degler 2023, 152–157).

excellence made this company's edition the single most important development in the book's publishing history" (Degler 2023, 157; Krishna 1971).

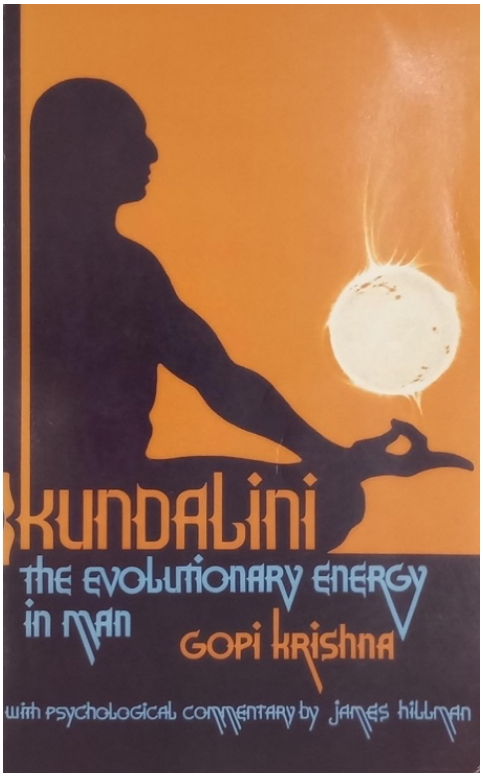


Figure 7: Cover of Gopi Krishna's revised 1971 Shambala edition of *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (Krishna 1971).

Another revised edition of Kundalini that deserves reference was the 1975 edition published by D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Company Private Ltd. under the title *The Awakening of Kundalini* (LGK, box 6.5.). What distinguished *The Awakening of Kundalini* from *Kundalini* was the omission of Hillman's comments. This development originated from Gene Kieffer's endeavour to publish a revised (and cheaper) paperback version of Krishna's autobiography without what he considered Hillman's "down-grading" (Kieffer to Kobelt, June 7, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.2.) comments.[293] John White – Krishna's close collaborator – assumed a similar stance. In a review of Krishna's *Kundalini*, he criticises Hillman's comments as a "hindrance [that] interrupts the narrative's flow at points where the reader is sure to be deeply engaged with the drama of Gopi Krishna's life. In that respect it is almost frustrating, and some readers may find themselves skipping the commentary till last" (J. W. White 1972a, 46).

[293] Gene Kieffer counts among Krishna's most important supporters. He plays a major role throughout this study and will be introduced in Chapter 13.1.1.3.

Kieffer's endeavour was successful. By 1975, Hillman and Hopman forewent their royalties associated with Krishna's publication (Kieffer to Krishna, August 6, 1975, LGK, box 6.5.1.).[294] As a consequence, Hillman – who had not been in any close contact with Krishna for a while – distanced himself from Krishna, with no further communication recorded. Hopman, on the contrary, maintained his loyalty to Krishna.

In sum, *Kundalini* is significant in three ways: first, Krishna chose to present his "transformational" story as a first-person autobiographical account, making it accessible to a wide readership in Europe and North America; second, his comments on the devastating effects of kundalini introduced an innovative perspective on its activation and influenced later interpretations of kundalini as crisis; and third, his use of scientism as a legitimising strategy, which became a central theme in his publications and international collaborations; even the initial 1957 manuscript, i.e., *Kundalini or the Evolutionary Energy in Man*, was already framed in a scientistic manner: "In his letters [to the publishing houses] he promoted the work as the first scientific treatise on the philosophy of esoteric yoga and how it related to modern science" (Degler 2023, 94).[295] As discussed in this and the following chapters, while Krishna's book was not the first to examine kundalini from a scientistic perspective, its popularity and accessibility introduced the topic to a much wider audience. Additionally, Hillman's psychological commentary and Spiegelberg's introduction enhanced the book's impression of authenticity, sincerity, and legitimacy.

11.3. *The Shape of Events to Come* (1968)

Promulgating kundalini research was Krishna's primary mission during the final two decades of his life, a focus evident throughout his publications. He emphasised this necessity by linking kundalini to broadly relevant topics such as world politics, neuroscience, and future projections. *The Shape of Events to Come* (1968) exemplifies this integration of global

[294] Hillman did not officially grant permission to publish a revised version of *Kundalini* without his comments before 1976. This permission was eventually given in a letter dated March 6, 1976, addressed to Krishna. The letter in question, along with additional correspondence between Krishna, Hillman, Hopman, and Kieffer, can be found in the James Hillman Collection at OPUS Archives in Santa Barbara, California. I am indebted to Devon Deimler for providing this information.

[295] The notion "the philosophy of esoteric yoga" is reminiscent of Srishchandra Basu's publication *The Esoteric Philosophy of the Tantras: Shiva Samhita* (1887). However, none of Krishna's publications consulted for the present study contain any reference to Srishchandra or his translation and interpretation of the *Śivasaṃhitā* (see Chapter 5.2.2.).

politics and futurology with kundalini theories.[296] Composed in verse, the book spans three chapters and forty-four pages.

In this work, Krishna posits that humanity is on the verge of a significant evolutionary leap, propelled by what he terms the "mighty Cosmic Law" (Krishna 1968, 7) – meaning kundalini.[297] He argues that this evolution could lead to a profound transformation in human consciousness and societal structures. However, Krishna cautions that neglecting this Law threatens humanity's evolutionary progress and its very survival. Accordingly, he interprets contemporary crises – such as wars, hunger, and pollution – as evidence of humanity's abuse and ignorance of kundalini (*ibid*., 5–9).

In *The Shape of Events to Come*, Krishna expands his exploration of kundalini to encompass collective and societal dimensions, moving beyond the strictly personal focus of *Kundalini*. Despite this shift, he maintains his interpretative approach, illustrating kundalini's potential dangers. He revisits an argument previously presented in *Kundalini*, namely the dangerous consequences of an active kundalini in world leaders (Krishna 1967, 298; 1968, 5–6). Krishna contends that corrupt and malevolent leadership stems from either ignorance of kundalini or the misuse of the power acquired through its activation. The theme of kundalini's moral implications in leadership recurs throughout his writings – notably in his analyses of Napolean Bonaparte's and Adolf Hitler's purportedly active kundalini (Krishna 1978a, 97).[298] Thus, Krishna asserts that world politics and issues of war and peace are inherently linked to kundalini.

As outlined above, Krishna considered his works in verse to be products of divine revelation. He believed contemporary societal issues stemmed from humanity's disconnection from the profound truths of the world's religions, viewing his revealed message as a crucial opportunity to address and avert current crises (Krishna 1968, 2–4).

In 1979, Krishna published an extended and revised version of *The Shape of Events to Come*. This updated version, though addressing the same themes, diverges significantly from the 1968 original. The revised edition expands to 201 pages, incorporating an introductory chapter, six prose chapters, and four additional verse chapters. Unlike its predecessor, this edition vividly portrays the dire threats facing humanity, including nuclear weapons, the

[296] Another pivotal example of a work addressing urgent problems of contemporary society is *The Present Crisis: A Survey and Critical Analysis of the Human Mind as it Exists in Our Time* (1981).

[297] Krishna omitted mention of kundalini in *The Shape of Events to Come*.

[298] Krishna's considerations about misguided kundalini activations and leadership also influenced his ideas on the potential impact of an elitist circle of individuals charged with an activated kundalini on world peace (see Chapter 15.3.1.).

arms race, and the potential for a third world war. Krishna supports his argument for the inevitability of a third world war with over twenty images depicting war scenes, mass graves, and nuclear strikes (Krishna 1979c, 172).

In the lengthy introduction to the book, Krishna vividly describes the threat of the thermonuclear destruction of humanity and the planet. According to him, the vividity of his description did not arise from his imagination. Instead, Krishna claimed that it arose from visions which he received in the wake of his kundalini experience:

> I have had hints and visions of the awful events to come […]. I wish with all my heart and soul that mankind might be saved the horrors of a thermonuclear war or the dreadful scenes of a natural calamity, but the Message un-mistakably points in the direction of an oncoming disaster […], it seems, as if a kind of inner compulsion is driving the race towards a course which is disastrous for it. The events that have occurred, […] confirm the forewarnings contained in the Message. I shudder to think of the future, if the other forecasts also come true. The Message is not a prophecy in the accepted sense of the term. It is an analysis of the present critical situation from the angle of evolution, brought about by our own neglect of spiritual laws. It is also a prognosis of the unhealthy mental conditions, resulting from the evils rampant in the human society, which act as serious blocks in the evolution of the race. (Krishna 1979c, 83)

In this passage, Krishna describes a misguided evolution carried forward by an "inner compulsion" and depravities at large. *The Shape of Events to Come* thus argues that a peaceful future depends on humanity's ability to redirect its evolutionary processes.

Both editions of *The Shape of Events to Come* perfectly exemplify Krishna's views on a transformative future shaped by religious and scientific progress. They also reflect his staunch belief in the necessity of kundalini research to prevent humanity's destruction. Krishna emphasised that "modern scholars on whom we depend […] have no knowledge of this trend" (Krishna 1968, 37). Therefore, he considered promoting research into the psychosomatic mechanisms of kundalini to be one of the most urgent tasks of the time.

11.4. *The Way to Self-Knowledge* (1985)

Another significant example of a book written in verse is Krishna's last work, *The Way to Self-Knowledge* (1985). He started writing the book in 1983 while staying in Zurich and completed it in New Delhi shortly before his passing in 1984 – according to Degler, its first draft was completed within several days (Degler 2023, 291). Gene Kieffer enthusiastically

called *The Way to Self-Knowledge* "a masterpiece [that] […] will live on for many, many centuries" (Kieffer to Kobelt, April 13, 1984, LGK, box 6). Degler also praised the book, emphasising its relevance for individuals and global affairs as it "contained entreaties for the changes that would prevent world catastrophe" (Degler 2023, 291).

While barely diverging from earlier publications, the book reaffirms the key themes of Krishna's oeuvre, illustrating their enduring relevance for Krishna's thought. This pertains to the emphasis on change of consciousness, world politics, the evolution of humanity through kundalini, and the existential crisis of humanity as a crisis of religion. Additionally, Krishna advocates for integrating religious practice to effect change within oneself and, ultimately, in the broader world.

Considering his restraint in recommending a practice, the step-by-step instruction offered in *The Way to Self-Knowledge* is remarkable:

> Begin your practice and reform
> With firm resolve and trust in God,[299]
> Rave no desire to take by storm
> The gate to Heaven or ride roughshod.
>
> The morning hours before sunrise,
> While most of us are still asleep,
> Provide the best time for the wise
> To engage in meditation deep.
>
> Start with shorter spans of time,
> Say fifteen minutes and no more,
> Evoke an image most sublime,
> Of Godhead or the other Shore,
>
> And keep your mind immovably fixed
> On this auspicious picture till
> You can keep it, pure and unmixed,

[299] Krishna frequently uses the notion of "God" in his writings. However, he refrains from a precise definition. The South Asian journalist R.K. Karanjia, who featured Krishna's ideas in a series of articles in the South Asian newspaper *Blitz,* writes about Krishna's perspective on God: "Gopi Krishna sees God as *a* '*super-intelligent cosmic energy*' responsible for all phenomena of life, and Kundalini as the subtle, formless mechanism of its operation in the human body for the evolution of the mind" (Karanjia 1976d, 11, original emphasis). Chapter 18 discusses Karanjia and his "Kundalini Yoga" series in *Blitz* in more detail.

With modest efforts of your will. (Krishna 1985, 28, 5. 155–158)

This detailed description of a meditation practice – which expands over several pages – marks a departure from earlier publications. Perhaps after promoting kundalini research for over fifteen years, he reflected on the origin of his journey: his meditation practice. Another indication of his exalted self-perceptions is the book's preface. Therein, he stresses the divine origin of his writing skills and what he considered the timeless truth of its underlying message:

> This book is from the Super-Mind
> A fast dictated gift sublime,
> The Message it contains will find
> Full confirmation in due time. (*ibid*., 7, verse 1)
>
> This heaven-sent verse will be excelled
> By future Seers, on their Rebirth,
> Whose mighty visions might be spelled
> In all main languages of the earth. (*ibid*., 12, verse 44)

While Krishna claimed divine inspiration for all his works in verse, these lines demonstrate a new level of confidence. The early Krishna, who wrote *From the Unseen*, was humbled in awe yet struggled with confusion, fear, and doubts. In 1952, Krishna did not know if any life except his own would ever be touched by the "revelations" he had received. The late Krishna, in contrast, writes in a self-confident manner, convinced by the sincerity and divinity of his experience. Hundreds of loyal supporters surrounded Krishna then, his books sold worldwide, and he wrote his last book in the firm belief that kundalini had been active in his body for several decades.

In sum, *The Way to Self-Knowledge* is relevant because it assembles Krishna's key topics and provides insights into his confidence as an international authority on kundalini research. Moreover, it is a rare testament to Krishna's views on meditation practice.

11.5. Summary

This chapter limited its scope to a selected range of Krishna's literary works and could be easily extended. However, considering the repetitive nature of Krishna's books, which revolved around a restricted number of recurring topics, it is not necessary to discuss each

work individually to gain comprehensive insights into his body of thought. Key topics discussed in his writings include the nature of consciousness, the transformative, universal, and evolutionary nature of kundalini, the current political situation, issues of peace and war, religious practice and belief, and religious interpretations of scientific theories. Overall, Krishna's writings pursued the disclosure of his understanding of kundalini and the promotion of kundalini research. These objectives not only played a role in his writings but also in his international research projects and initiatives.

12. Travelling Persons, Travelling Ideas: Krishna's Increasing Impact and Activities

In this chapter, I will highlight how travelling contributed to Krishna's growing influence and activities. By "travelling", I am referring not only to Krishna's extensive travels between 1967 and 1984, but also to the global dissemination of his ideas through newspaper articles, interviews, TV shows, and advertisements. Krishna outside of South Asia a total of eight times. The first five journeys took him to Europe, where he primarily stayed in Switzerland and Germany. In 1978, he crossed the Atlantic for the first time to visit North America, to where he returned twice more in 1979 and 1983.

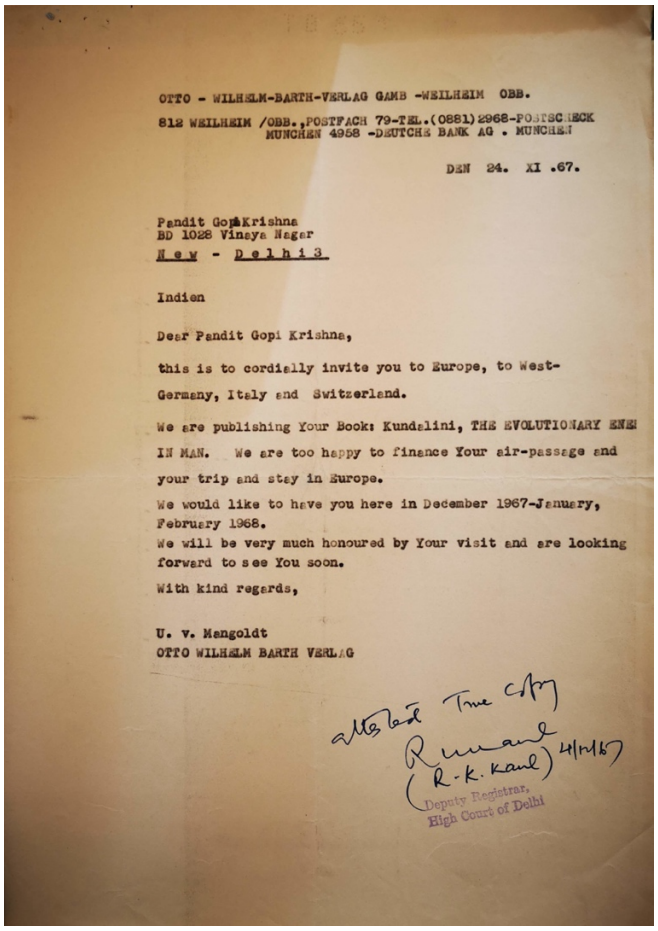
As the number of Krishna's publications and supporters increased, his schedule became increasingly packed. More people wanted to engage with him, and more institutes were eager to invite him. At the same time, Krishna benefitted from the growing number of non-South Asian supporters, who provided funding, editorial assistance, and valuable contacts. Drawing on the work of Appadurai (1996) and other theorists of entangled history, Krishna's ideas and the support he received moved along global cultural flows, following the dynamics of transnational exchange.

In addition to his travels, many of Krishna's local activities in South Asia significantly impacted his international presence and led to collaborations and invitations from abroad. This was especially true of his interactions with international visitors at the Central Institute of Kundalini Research (CIKR) in Nishat, Kashmir, and his participation in international events in South Asia. While Krishna's activities in South Asia will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 17 and 18, the following chapters will provide a detailed and chronological overview of his eight overseas journeys, illustrating how his travels initiated his rise to fame and the advancement of international kundalini research.

12.1. First Journey (December 1967–February 1968)

On November 26, 1967, Krishna received a letter from the German publisher Ursula von Mangoldt (1904–1987), who managed the German Otto Wilhelm Barth publishing house

from 1947 through 1972 (Bochinger 1994, 145).[300] In the letter, von Mangold agreed to publish a German version of Krishna's *Kundalini* and invited him to Europe (Figure 8). During Mangoldt's management, the Otto Wilhelm Barth publishing house developed into the leading German publishing house distributing literature on meditation, astrology, Zen Buddhism, and Yoga (*ibid*.). This was, first and foremost, due to Mangoldt's merits. She maintained a far-reaching network of the most in-vogue protagonists of Europe's alternative religious milieus, many of whom had published their works with Otto Wilhelm Barth (Baier 2009b, 2:827–831). Therefore, her personal and commercial interest in Krishna's book is certainly no great surprise.



OTTO - WILHELM-BARTH-VERLAG GMBH -WEILHEIM OBB.

812 WEILHEIM /OBB.,POSTFACH 79-TEL.(0881)2968-POSTSCHECK MUNCHEN 4958 -DEUTCHE BANK AG . MUNCHEN

DEN 24. XI .67.

Pandit Gopi Krishna
BD 1028 Vinaya Nagar
New - Delhi 3

Indien

Dear Pandit Gopi Krishna,

this is to cordially invite you to Europe, to West-Germany, Italy and Switzerland.

We are publishing Your Book: Kundalini, THE EVOLUTIONARY ENER IN MAN. We are too happy to finance Your air-passage and your trip and stay in Europe.

We would like to have you here in December 1967-January, February 1968.

We will be very much honoured by Your visit and are looking forward to see You soon.

With kind regards,

U. v. Mangoldt
OTTO WILHELM BARTH VERLAG

True Copy
(R.K. Kaul) 4/11/67
Deputy Registrar,
High Court of Delhi

Figure 8: Gopi Krishna's invitation to Europe by Ursula von Mangoldt (LGK, box 6.1.7., photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich).

Mangoldt planned Krishna's trip together with Sinai (see Chapter 15), who initially recommended Krishna's book to Mangoldt. During this first trip, Sinai assisted and

[300] Refer to Bochinger (1994, 143–158) for a thorough discussion of the cultural and historical significance of the Otto Wilhelm Barth publishing house for the alternative religious milieu in German-speaking countries.

accompanied Krishna, a role that Margaret Kobelt would assume on future trips (see below). As part of Krishna's visit, Mangoldt and Sinai scheduled several lectures for Krishna, such as at the University of Munich, the University of Stuttgart, and the University of Hamburg (Degler 2023, 131–132). These lectures were vital opportunities for Krishna to meet with German scholars and interested parties. Most significant were the ties he built with Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, whom he met in Hamburg, and (to a lesser degree) with Weizsäcker's mentor, the famous physicist Werner Heisenberg (1901–1976) (LGK, box 1.1.).[301]

Mangoldt's house, however, was as promising a venue for new encounters as the University lectures had been. One person that Krishna met at Mangoldt's house was Karlfried Graf von Dürckheim (1896–1988). The author and prominent advocate of Zen was a renowned figure of alternative religious circles in post-war Germany.[302] He counted among the pioneers of transpersonal psychology and had a strong liking for Christian and Buddhist forms of meditation. Moreover, from an early age, he showed interest in the life reform movement, lecturing on Bergson's *élan vital* (Baier 2017, 92–97). Therefore, Dürckheim and Krishna's conversations at Mangoldt's villa likely revolved around meditation practices and kundalini at the intersection of psychology and religion (Krishna to Kieffer, February 24, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.7.).

Krishna concluded his first European trip in Zurich. Margaret Kobelt, who had attended Krishna's lecture at the University of Stuttgart, invited Krishna to pay her a visit in Zurich (Degler 2023, 134–136). This was but the first of many upcoming visits of Krishna to Kobelt's family home in Zurich. Krishna returned to South Asia in February 1968.

12.2. Second Journey (July 1969–September 1969)

At the invitation of Gerhard Wolfram (n.d.a.), Gopi Krishna returned to Europe in 1969. Wolfram initially invited Krishna to attend a meeting titled "Religion und Wissenschaft" ("Religion and Science") to be held at Villa La Silva, Florence, Italy, scheduled from the eleventh until the thirteenth of July 1969. The meeting, which was co-organised by Wolfram

[301] Werner Heisenberg plays a marginal role in the modern history of kundalini research. Chapter 15.1. discusses his relationship with Weizsäcker.

[302] Dürckheim was a fierce supporter of the Third Reich and never (openly) reflected on his contributions to Nazi Germany. Refer to Baier (2017) for a critical examination of Dürckheim.

and Sinai, was eventually moved to Munich, Germany – Krishna would thus not travel to Italy until 1970.

The remarkable list of speakers included representatives of different religions, including the Yemenite king Muḥammad al-Badr (1929–1996), the Archbishop Gregorios II. Maniatopoulos (1912–1973), Swami Chidananda (1916–2008), and Roberto Assagioli (1888–1974) – the latter being listed as "universal" (LGK, box 6.1.5.).

During the meeting, the "Gesellschaft für Religion und Wissenschaft" ("Society for Religion and Science") was established, with Wolfram as its president and Sinai as its secretary. Unfortunately, no sources are available that detail the contents of the gathering, nor are there any references to Krishna's interactions with his fellow speakers. Krishna's potential exchange with the Italian psychiatrist Assagioli, a well-known pioneer of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, would be of particular interest.[303] Given that this was a small meeting, it is likely that Krishna and Assagioli discussed topics such as the roots of psychosis and genius. The gathering holds some significance as it marked Krishna's first attendance at an event with such an internationally diverse group of speakers (Krishna to Langhof, September 13, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.).

A statement in his letter to Wolfram underpins the importance Krishna attached to the meeting and its speakers: "I have purposely expressed my intention to come a few days earlier in order to acquaint myself with the full programme of the meeting" (Krishna to Wolfram, June 20, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.). Moreover, the formation of the "Gesellschaft für Religion und Wissenschaft" left a deep impression on Krishna, perhaps even kindling the idea of establishing a research society of his own: "It would be a good thing if we could form similar societies in other parts of the world so that all these units could work together for the scientific study of religious phenomena" (Krishna to Langhof, September 13, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.). Although in 1969 Krishna had already established the Central Institute for Kundalini Research (CIKR), his vision of an internationally expanding network had not yet been realised (see Chapter 13.1.).

After the meeting, he followed Wolfram's invitation to stay with him and his wife in their house in Munich and subsequently returned to Zurich to spend his remaining time there (Degler 2023, 147; Krishna to Wolfram, June 20, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.). The second trip thus followed a similar trajectory as the first, in as much as Krishna attended "several

[303] Assagioli was best known for his psychotherapeutic system, "psychosynthesis", which was a cornerstone in shaping transpersonal psychology and related concepts (Pfluger-Heist 2016).

meetings and had long talks and discussions with scholars and Scientists [*sic*] about the possibilities of demonstrating the activity of the spiritual Energy or Kundalini in man. Even the highest Intellectuals [*sic*] see a possibility of bringing together science and religion by experimenting on the lines I suggest" (Krishna to Langhof, September 13, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.). Krishna returned to Kashmir in September 1969 and remained in South Asia until October 1970.

12.3. Third Journey (October 1970–January 1971)

Krishna scheduled his third trip to Europe according to two events organised by Sinai: A gathering on "religion and science" in Cyprus and a conference titled "Religion and Science, and Statesmanship and Virtue" in Florence, Italy (LGK, box 6.1.6.).

Little information is available about the gathering in Cyprus, except for Krishna meeting the Greek Cypriot Archbishop Makarios III. (1913–1977). After having attended the gathering, Krishna and Sinai continued to Italy. Although the conference was cancelled due to financial shortcomings, Krishna attended several gatherings and gave lectures (Baatz 1998, 341). A fruitful outcome of this trip was the establishment of an Italian KRF branch (see Chapter 13.1.1.2.). As was his custom by then, Krishna continued to Zurich, resting at Kobelt's house (Degler 2023, 150–152).

During this trip and while staying in Zurich, Krishna met the US-American businessman Gene Kieffer for the first time. After reading Krishna's book, Kieffer expressed the wish to meet him in person, arriving in Switzerland in early November 1970. As thoroughly discussed in Chapter 13.1.1.3., Kieffer was to become Krishna's fierce supporter (*ibid*., 152–153).

Krishna alternated between Germany and Switzerland for the remaining time of his trip. Notable highlights included invitations from Weizsäcker to speak at the Max Planck Institute in Starnberg, where Weizsäcker served as the primary head, and from the Professor of Psychosomatics Arthur T. Jores (1901–1982) to speak in Hamburg at the "Gesellschaft für Religion, Wissenschaft und Frieden" ("Society for Religion, Science and Peace") of which Jores was the president (Krishna to Kieffer, April 14, 1971, LGK, box 6.2.3.).[304]

[304] Arthur Jores counts among the founding members of modern psychosomatics, i.e., a holistic approach to physical and mental health. In a letter to Jores, Krishna recalls the inspiring conversations they shared and underlined his trust in Jores and Weizsäcker as his foremost scientific collaborators on European soil: "There is, I think, no one else more eminent and capable than You and Prof. von Weizsäcker to initiate this Research

Moreover, Krishna was invited to another event in Munich. Organised by the "Gesellschaft für Religion, Wissenschaft und Meditation" ("Society for Religion, Science, and Meditation"), Krishna lectured about the necessity of research into kundalini and the responsibility of science. Another speaker at that event was Hugo M. Enomiya-Lassalle (1898–1990). Like Graf Dürckheim, whom Krishna met during his first trip to Europe, Enomiya-Lassalle was a pioneer of interpreting and popularising Zen in Europe (Baier 2009b, 2:813). According to Lassalle's biographer, Weizsäcker invited Lassalle to his home after the conference. It is therefore likely that Krishna and Lassalle spent several days together with Weizsäcker (Baatz 1998, 342).[305]

After Hamburg, Krishna paid a visit to Carl Friedrich Basedow, who lived in Starnberg and was an acquaintance of Weizsäcker. During Krishna's visit, plans for the establishment of a research society were specified. The society was titled "Forschungsgesellschaft für östliche Weisheit und westliche Wissenschaft" ("Research Foundation for Eastern Wisdom and Western Science", FWW) with Weizsäcker as its nominal president and Basedow as its general secretary (see Chapter 15.3.1.) (Degler 2023, 153). From Hamburg, Krishna moved on to Zurich, where he stayed for another month.

During his third trip to Europe, Krishna not only spoke at several events organised by research societies; he was also listed as a member of at least three different European institutes and societies dedicated to "Eastern" wisdom and "Western" science. He met with individuals in Italy, Germany, and Switzerland who believed in his work and agreed to set up local KRF branches. When Krishna returned to South Asia in January 1971, he was pleased with his success and motivated to advance his research project.

12.4. Fourth Journey (June 1971–April 1972)

In June 1971, less than six months later, Krishna boarded another plane to Europe. Over the next ten months, he travelled between Germany and Switzerland. By this time, he had established a strong network and was cared for by Kobelt at her family house in Zurich and

[on kundalini]. On arrival from India I have taken the first opportunity of entrusting this Secret of vital importance for mankind into Your competent hands in the full hope that it will receive the attention it deserves" (Krishna to Jores, January 5, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.7.). Despite Krishna's words, there are no references indicating that the correspondence between Jores and Krishna continued.

[305] According to Ursula Baatz, Lassalle's biographer, the Jesuit priest also participated in the gathering in Cyprus, in October 1970. While Baatz does not mention any encounter between Enomiya-Lassalle and Krishna in Cyprus, she refers to a later meeting at a conference in Munich (Baatz 1998, 341).

her chalet in Engelberg, as well as by Weizsäcker and Basedow in Starnberg.[306] He was also hosted by his Italian supporter, Evelyn Ferrantani, who was then living in Berlin. During this fourth visit, Krishna was interviewed by a German TV station, delivered several lectures, including one at Peter Oswald's renowned yoga studio in Basel, and co-organised a seminar with Weizsäcker.

A prominent European intellectual whose acquaintance Krishna made during his fourth trip to Europe was the Swiss philosopher Jean Gebser (1905–1973). The intercultural philosopher was interested in consciousness and shared several conceptual ties with Chardin and Aurobindo (Zaehner 1971, 3). When Krishna and Gebser met, Gebser only had about a year left of his life and was already seriously ill (he died in May 1973). Too sick to travel, Gebser invited Gopi Krishna to visit him at his home in Bern. While the content of their conversation (and subsequent letter correspondence) is unknown, it likely revolved around the evolution of consciousness – a shared interest that both had published on extensively. According to Degler, Gebser promoted and distributed Krishna's work, including sending the Indologist Georg Feuerstein a transcript of Krishna's 1962 lecture at the University of Basel (Degler 2023, 171).[307]

After returning to South Asia in April 1972, Krishna refrained from travelling for over three years and remained in South Asia. This resulted in several invitations to international conferences, workshops, and seminars, which he had to turn down. Perhaps most significant during that period was an invitation to the Council Grove Conference in the United States in April 1973 (see Chapter 21.3.2.). Instead, he wrote his books, kept up his correspondence, and welcomed international guests at his home in Kashmir.[308]

[306] While staying in Engelberg, Krishna arranged a meeting with Gene Kieffer and George Tompkins, the initiators of KRF branches in New York and California, respectively. They arrived in Switzerland with their wives and children and stayed for several weeks at Engelberg (Degler 2023, 169, 218; Kieffer to Krishna, July 22, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.).

[307] Degler refers to Margaret Kobelt when claiming that "Gebser was tremendously pleased to meet Gopi Krishna and honored by his visit" (Degler 2023, 171). However, it is difficult to assess their relationship; Gopi Krishna did not mention their meeting in Bern in any of his publications or letters, and Gebser's collected correspondences are still sealed at the Swiss National Library due to legal issues. For a comprehensive assessment, it would be necessary to examine Gebser's legacy.

[308] Notable visitors during that period included the author Amaury de Riencourt and (para)psychologist Stanley Krippner, both of whom discussed Krishna's experience and theory in their books (Degler 2023, 203; Krippner and Powers 1997, 22; Riencourt 1980, 192–197).

12.5. Fifth Journey (November 1975–November 1976)

On November 14, 1975, Krishna started travelling again. This time, he spent an entire year in Europe, his longest stay outside South Asia. Despite this long period, surprisingly little information on Krishna's activities is available (Degler 2023, 224).

The only notable activity during this stay was a video production by Tompkins, Kieffer, and White in October 1976 (see Chapter 16.1.1.). Krishna's supporters were interested in using modern media to disseminate Krishna's views. Aside from the 1976 video production, they arranged TV interviews with a German TV station in 1971, a Delhi TV station in 1974, Kashmir TV in 1976, a TV station in Zurich in 1978, and a Swiss-Italian TV channel in 1983 (Kobelt to Jagdish, Oct 7, 1978, LGK, box 6; Degler 2023, 208, 227).

After one year in Europe, Krishna returned to South Asia in November 1976 and remained there until April 1978.

12.6. Sixth Journey (April 1978–January 1979)

Krishna's sixth journey included his first trip to the United States. Despite never having travelled there, Krishna's ideas had already circulated among US-American students and yoga aficionados from at least 1971 (W. I. Thompson 1974, 85). Three intertwined developments likely fostered an interest in Krishna's ideas in the United States: First, Kieffer's tireless efforts to promote Krishna; second, the publication of the US-American edition of Krishna's *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1971) by Shambala Publications (see Chapter 11.2.); and the third development that bolstered fascination with Krishna pertains to biofeedback experiments at the Menninger Institute (*ibid*., 84–85).[309]

During the summer of 1978, he was initially invited to participate in events in Montana and California. However, both events were cancelled (Degler 2023, 246). Krishna's invitation to Montana seemed particularly promising. The event was part of a summer series of "personal transformation workshops", held at the Feathered Pipe Ranch in Helena, Montana. Krishna's seminar was scheduled for June 19 through June 28, 1978. Stuart Walker, one of the organisers, expected around fifty attendees and planned to have Krishna offer discourses and group interviews during these ten days. The invitation alone suggests Krishna's increasing

[309] Refer to Chapter 21.2. for a discussion of the research carried out at the Menninger Foundation involving the South Asian yogi Swami Rama and the role of biofeedback in empirical kundalini research.

fame among US-American alternative religious circles (Kieffer to Krishna, November 21, 1977, LGK, box 6.6.1.; Tompkins to Krishna, January 25, 1978, box 6.8.5.; box 4; Degler 2023, 242). For Krishna's scheduled trip to California, Kieffer organised a public lecture at Marin College. This institute equally indicates Krishna's growing reputation in the United States: Marin County, located North of San Francisco, has been the secret nucleus of the Human Potential movement and, more generally, of a Californian "consciousness culture" (see Chapter 20.4.1.). Then and now, Esalen's leading figures have lived in Marin. A lecture at the heart of this community likely wielded a significant impact (Kieffer to Krishna, April 11, 1978, LGK, box 6.6.1.).[310]

Due to the cancellations of these events and severe health issues, Krishna prolonged his stay in Zurich until October. During this period, he gave lectures at Zurich and Basel and met with some of his loyal supporters (Kobelt to Bhabi et al., May 31, 1978, LGK, box 6; Degler 2023, 246).

In mid-October 1978, Krishna, accompanied by Kobelt, ultimately travelled to the United States. Despite missed opportunities, his trip nonetheless proved fruitful. The most important event during this trip was a symposium in New York City titled "New Dimensions of Consciousness. Symposium on the Coevolution of Science and Spirit". The Sufi Order of the West organised the event, which aimed to offer a platform for catalysing "the coevolution of scientific knowledge and spiritual realization" (LGK, box 4). Held from November 17 through 20, 1978, at the Statler Hilton Hotel, the event attracted much media attention and was attended by approximately two thousand people. Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan (1916–2004), then head of the Sufi Order of the West, launched the event with an opening address.[311] Krishna and Inayat Khan met in February 1978 during a New Delhi seminar. Consequently, Inayat Khan, who also spoke at that seminar, invited Krishna to the "New Dimensions Symposium" (Degler 2023, 242).

[310] The relationship between the Esalen Institute and KRF was somewhat uneasy (see Chapter 23.4.). Perhaps Kieffer hoped to increase Krishna's reputation by scheduling a lecture at Marin College.

[311] The musician and mystic Hazrat Inayat Khan (b. Inayat Khan Rehmat Khan, 1882–1927) founded the "(International) Sufi Order" in 1918. His pioneering effort to introduce Sufism to the Anglo-American world was first carried forward by Inayat Khan's daughter, Noor Inayat Khan (1914–1944), and his son, Vilayat Inayat Khan. From 1957, the Order was called the "Sufi Order of the West" until the name changed again in 2016 into the "Inayati Order" (Inayatiyya, n.d.). Vilayat Inayat Khan met Krishna in February 1978 during a New Delhi seminar by the Brahma Kumaris. As a result of Krishna's encounter with Vilayat Inayat Khan, who also spoke at that seminar, the latter invited Krishna to attend the "New Dimensions Symposium" (Degler 2023, 242).

The remarkable list of conference speakers at the "New Dimensions Symposium" comprised "some of the most distinguished names among writers on consciousness and the new trends in psychology" (Krishna to Kieffer, April 17, 1978, LGK, box 6.6.1.). Gopi Krishna spoke, along with physicist and author Fritjof Capra (b. 1939), engineer Itzhak Bentov, New Age pioneer David Spangler (b. 1945), the Swiss psychiatrist and thanatologist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1926–2004), Nobel laureate in physics Eugene P. Wigner (1902–1995), the South Asian yogi and biofeedback subject Swami Rama, the author and psychologist Jean Houston (b. 1937) – who was then president of the "Association for Humanistic Psychology" – and neuropsychologist Karl H. Pribram (1919–2015).[312] Krishna's fellow panellists were Pribram and Wigner, both respected scholars affiliated with Stanford and Princeton, respectively (LGK, box 4).

Much attention was given to Krishna's panel, perhaps owing to his renowned fellow panellists. For instance, a short report on the conference, featured in a Newsletter by the American Society for Psychical Research, primarily highlighted Krishna's panel. The report describes Krishna's contribution with the following words: "Closing the Saturday morning session, Gopi Krishna dealt with the radical metamorphosis of his own nervous system produced when he awakened the Kundalini, a para-physical energy form" (Rosen 1979, 11). Other significant happenings during the conference included a joint press conference with representatives from *The New York Times*, *NBC News*, *Newsweek*, *CBC Television* (Canada), U*.S. News and World Report*, *Brain/Mind Bulletin*, *New Age Journal*, and *Science Digest* (Kopelman to Krishna, November 16, 1978, LGK, box 6.8.3.), and a full-day workshop led by Krishna.[313] The conference folder describes Krishna's workshop "Science and Mystical Consciousness" in the following way: "Discussion at length of cosmic consciousness, or mystical vision, as an inherent faculty like other forms of genius, and the biological factors that lead to this condition. The implications of revolutionized concepts of science will be explored" (LGK, box 4; box 2). Forty-nine people from all over the United States attended Krishna's workshop, suggesting the growing interest in his ideas.

A significant outcome of Krishna's presentation was an invitation from Edward F. Kelly (n.d.a.), a neuroscientist and parapsychologist affiliated with Duke University (Durham, North Carolina). Duke assumes a unique position among US-American higher-educational

[312] Several of these figures are representatives of New Age science. Hanegraaff (1996, 67–68) and Hammer (2004, 275–276) discuss, e.g., Karl Pribram in depth.

[313] Other workshop conveners were Bentov, Capra, Inayat Khan, Pribram, Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, and Spangler (LGK, box 4).

institutions, looking back on five decades of parapsychological research. The focus on parapsychology was popularised by Joseph B. Rhine (1895–1980), who headed Duke's Parapsychology Laboratory (established 1927) from 1930 onward.[314] Aside from the Parapsychology Laboratory, a research group affiliated with Duke's Electrical Engineering Department also conducted parapsychological research. Kelly was heading the parapsychological group in question when he contacted Krishna, expressing his interest in running technology-based tests on Krishna:

> Several of us have read one or more of your earlier books, and several of our group were in the audience at the recent weekend meeting in New York. We have all been deeply impressed both by your extraordinary experiences and by the scientific attitude that you express toward them. Consequently, we would like to explore the possibility of your coming to Durham to work with us in our laboratory, preferably for a substantial period of time. I stress that you would not be treated here as an object of hostile "scientific" scrutiny. Rather you would be our colleague in studies of various phenomena whose reality we all accept and which we simply want to understand better. Our function would be to provide a congenial though technically rigorous environment for whatever research lines you and we jointly decide to pursue. I have no doubt that such a collaboration could prove outstandingly productive in numerous ways. (Kelly to Krishna, November 22, 1978, LGK, box 6.6.1.)[315]

Kelly's letter counts among the most important testimonies underpinning an increasing interest in kundalini research. Several statements in the letter carry significant weight: First, Kelly mentions that he and other colleagues were aware of Krishna's books before the "New Dimensions Symposium", indicating that by 1978, his work had caught the attention of fringe academic circles. Second, Kelly underlines that the research group would invite Krishna not as a research subject but as a fellow researcher. Like Elmer and Alyce Green's

[314] Rhine tested in Duke's Parapsychology Laboratory the so-called "extrasensory perception" (ESP) – a term he coined in 1935 – of "ordinary" individuals. Psychic research, parapsychology's forerunner, in contrast, laid its focus on exceptional or unusual individuals. Duke's Parapsychology Laboratory has survived as the "Rhine Research Center", where parapsychological research continues to date; however, it is without any university affiliation (Museum of Durham History 2015; Melton 2001b, 42–43). Asprem (2014, 287–412) offers excellent insights into the development of parapsychology from psychic research to academic discipline.

[315] I am indebted to Edward F. Kelly for permitting me to quote from his letter to Gopi Krishna. Reflecting on the letter's content, Kelly confirms that he continues to support the statements from the letter, adding that he only regrets that he and his team never got to work with Gopi Krishna. At the Division of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia, Kelly, along with other faculty members, currently conducts empirical kundalini research and thus continues to pursue his interest (personal email communication).

biofeedback experiment with Swami Rama, Kelly's group was willing to enter a scholar-practitioner collaboration. In other words, they accepted Krishna's experience as a source of expertise comparable to their scholarly training. Third, the research group was not exclusively interested in Krishna's experience but also cherished his "scientific attitude". Since he had published *Kundalini* in 1967, his pivotal goal had been to convince scientific circles in Europe and North America of his empirical research-oriented attitude towards kundalini. Kelly's acknowledgement of Krishna's "scientific" stance thus implied a significant achievement for Krishna's cause.

Kelly's interest notwithstanding, a collaboration between Duke and Krishna was never realised.[316] In a letter addressed to Kieffer, Krishna mentioned that Kelly had invited him to join the research group at Duke in October 1980. Already then, in 1979, Krishna seemed to be on the fence, pondering whether a trip to Duke would be feasible (Krishna to Kieffer, November 30, 1979, LGK, box 6.6.1.). In another letter, Krishna indicates that he might want to postpone the trip until 1981 (Krishna to Prasad, November 17, 1979, LGK, box 6.6.1.). Ultimately, the trip never happened, which Degler and Bradford traced back to personal and medical issues and problems with properties in South Asia that required much of Krishna's attention (Bradford and Degler 2022).

Before and after the "New Dimensions Symposium", Krishna stayed with Kieffer at the latter's house in Stamford, Connecticut, where Kieffer had organised small study groups and discourses with interested parties. The post-symposium discourses carry particular weight as they underline the impact of Krishna's previous presentation. Accordingly, Kelly's invitation also rested on their personal encounter at Gene Kieffer's house. Besides Kelly, Paul Fenske (n.d.a.) and Elizabeth Fenske (n.d.a.) were significant participants in the post-symposium discourses. At the time, the Fenskes headed the International Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship (SFF) and invited Krishna to speak at their upcoming SFF conference in Philadelphia in May 1979.[317] Krishna agreed to attend and thus settled his subsequent journey to the United States (Degler 2023, 247; Fenske to Krishna, December 9, 1978, LGK, box 6.8.3.).

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[316] Kelly confirmed that a collaboration between Gopi Krishna and Duke University never got underway (personal email communication).

[317] The Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship (SFF) was founded in Evanston, Illinois, in 1956 by Protestant clergy and laypersons. SFF acknowledges both the spiritual and the paranormal, promoting their reconciliation. Along with highlighting the validity of psychic nature in man, SFF stressed their church loyalty. In the early 1970s, SFF sponsored an affiliated "academic" organisation called the "Academy of Religion and Psychical Research" and held several meetings with the Academy. From the mid-70s, particularly since Krishna's initial contribution at the 1979 conference, kundalini was frequently addressed at events and in newsletters by SFF

After about ten months in Europe and the United States, Krishna returned to South Asia in January 1979. However, only three months later, he commenced his next trip.

12.7. Seventh Journey (April 1979–October 1979)

The highlights of this seventh trip were the SFF conference in Philadelphia and his first visit to Canada. There, he spoke at the second "International Kundalini Conference" and attended a seminar series in Northern Ontario. As had become his custom, he took a break in Zurich before and after the long flights from Europe to North America.

The SFF Conference "Boundless Frontiers: Space, Time, and Spirit" (May 10 through 13, 1979) offered Krishna a significant platform to disseminate his ideas. Among all participants, Krishna was the only speaker granted three slots, including two lectures and a workshop. The lectures centred on his experience with kundalini ("Kundalini: The Mystery of the Coiled Serpent") and its societal and global implications ("Kundalini in Space and Time"). In his workshop "Kundalini: Experienced and Applied", Krishna expanded on the contents of his lectures, describing the presumed significance of his experience. Moreover, he promoted his project of kundalini research: "As a point of added interest Gopi Krishna will describe a plan he has for research into the phenomenon of Kundalini and its personal and social implications" (SFF Conference Folder, LGK, box 4).

Once again, Krishna lectured alongside several renowned luminaries of the expanding field of consciousness research, including the psychologist Charles Tart – whose theories on ASC Krishna rejected (see Chapter 10.2.3.) – and the philosopher Huston Smith (1919–2016).[318] Moreover, Krishna's collaborator, John White, attended the conference, offering a workshop. Shortly before the conference White's edited volume *Kundalini: Evolution and Enlightenment* (1979) was published (see Chapter 16.1.2.). Predominantly based on Krishna's work, the volume's success and positive feedback likely increased the interest in Krishna and kundalini research (*ibid*.).

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and the "Academy of Religion and Psychical Research". The Fellowship exist to date (Wagner 1983, 203–210; LGK, n.d.).

[318] Considered a leading teaching figure of the US-American counterculture, the philosopher Huston Smith significantly shaped perspectives on religion. Influenced by his friend Aldous Huxley, Smith's religious interpretations were saturated by ideas from Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945). Moreover, as early members of the psychedelic movement, Smith and the philosopher H. Fitzgerald Heard (1889–1971) advocated for an intellectual appreciation of ASC. See Lattin (2010) for a thorough portrayal of Smith's personal and intellectual development, as well as his exploration of spirituality and psychedelics.

After Philadelphia, Krishna travelled to Canada, where Joseph Dippong had established the most successful wing of Krishna's KRF (see below) In 1977, Dippong and approximately two hundred and thirty people visited Krishna in Kashmir. Afterwards, the discourses, lectures, and workshops held in Kashmir were subsumed under the heading "First International Conference on Kundalini". Along these lines, Krishna's 1979 trip to Canada occasioned the "Second International Conference on Kundalini", held at the University of Toronto (Figure 9). Scheduled from June 30 through July 2, 1979, around four hundred people attended, and several KRFC-related speakers were presenting, including Joseph Dippong (KRFC's president), Paul Pond (KRFC's prospective president), Yvonne Kason (KRFC's co-head), and Gopi Krishna – who was naturally granted generous slots throughout the event.

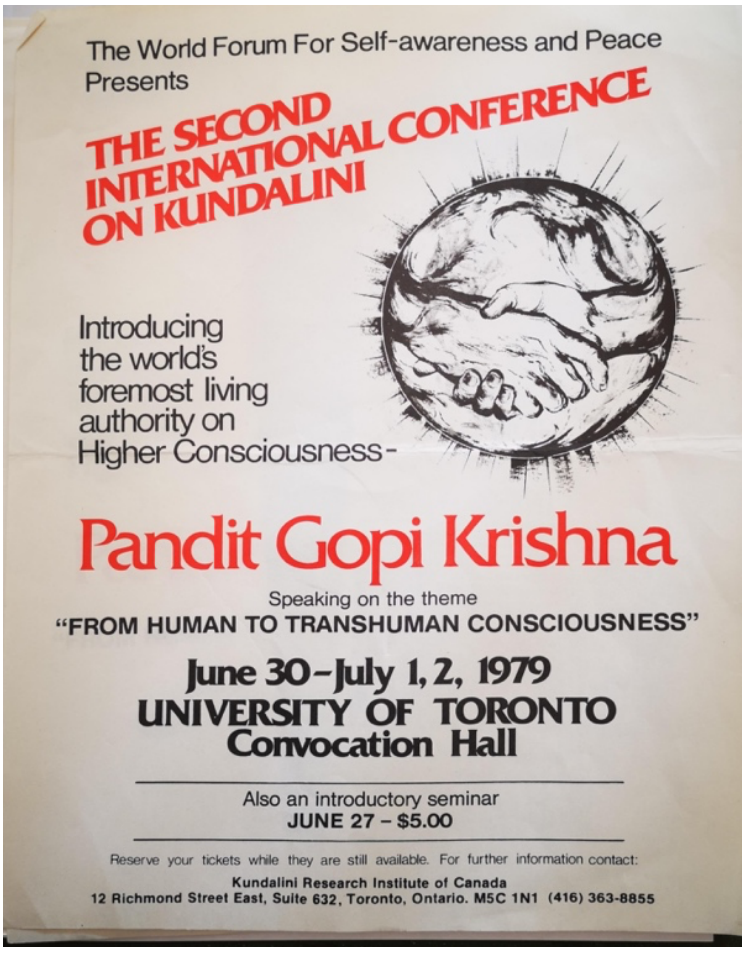

Figure 9: Folder of the "Second International Conference on Kundalini" (LGK, box 4, photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich).

The conference folder promoted Krishna and his talks with the words: "Introducing the world's foremost living authority on Higher Consciousness – Pandit Gopi Krishna. Speaking

on the theme 'From Human to Transhuman Consciousness'" (Folder KRFC, LGK, box 4).[319] Besides Krishna's three lectures on human and transhuman consciousness, he offered an introductory seminar before the conference on June 27, 1979. Krishna's Canada trip concluded with a multi-day course in a rural Northern Ontario area (Degler 2023, 257).

Figure 10: Gopi Krishna's welcoming at KRFC (ARC, Mss 1, Special Research Collections, UCSB; printed with permission of the Special Research Collections, UCSB).

While earlier conferences allowed Krishna to meet scholars, scientists, and potential sponsors, the Toronto conference and discourse series aimed to consolidate the bond between

[319] Krishna distinguishes between human and transhuman consciousness. According to his theory, humans may reach transhuman states by means of the arousal of kundalini or, more generally, through yoga. While the term proper traces back to Julian Huxley's essay "Transhumanism" (1957), Krishna does not refer to Huxley in that regard. Krishna's "transhuman consciousness" equates Bucke's "cosmic consciousness" and Vivekananda's "superconsciousness", denoting an illuminated condition. In *The Shape of Events to Come*, Krishna described transhuman consciousness with the following words: "With the arousal of Kundalini, this [individual human] unit or circle or pool of awareness, consciousness or mind, starts to expand. What does this mean? It means that the individual ego, with its small periphery of awareness, always perceptive of its close link with the body, begins to grow wider and wider and the idea of the body dimmer and dimmer, until it seems that one is floating in space, unfettered by the mortal frame. […] [transhuman] consciousness now dominates the whole scene, clearly perceptive of the transformation that has occurred" (Krishna 1979c, 3).

Krishna and his supporters (see Figure 10). Considering the tremendous backing he received from his Canadian supporters, the Canadian events were crucial for Krishna's mission to promote kundalini research.

However, there was also a drawback to his successful trip. According to Degler, Krishna's seventh trip counted among his most exhausting ones. His exhaustion did not solely derive from his demanding schedule and the number of meetings and discourses with new and established supporters. Additionally, dissonances between Dippong and Krishna ultimately resulted in a break with the former, which will be discussed in detail below. Given Dippong's singular importance for funding kundalini research, the dissolution of their collaboration was a significant setback in Krishna's project. Therefore, as successful as it had been in terms of growing recognition and fame in North America, this trip also resulted in the loss of support.

Krishna returned to South Asia in October 1979. He was to remain there for over two years, challenged with personal, medical, financial, and organisational issues. During this period, he cancelled three vital opportunities: the previously mentioned research collaboration with Duke University, an invitation to the "Global Conference on the Future", and an invitation by Georg Feuerstein to collaborate on a research project on yoga. Having already discussed Krishna's invitation to Duke, some words about the "Conference on the Future" and Feuerstein are still due.

The epidemiologist Trevor G. Hancock invited Krishna to speak at the "Global Conference on the Future", to be held in Toronto in July 1980. Representing the Health Committee, Hancock was hoping that Krishna would "address the health section of the Conference on the topic of the Spiritual Aspect of Personal Responsibility for health […] from the perspective of the 'Spiritual' powers" (Hancock to Krishna, October 25, 1979, LGK, box 6.8.3.), enlightening the audience with his "wisdom" (*ibid*.). Other notable speakers included the Austrian theologian Ivan D. Illich (1926–2002) and the Spanish sociologist and political scientist Vicente Navarro (b. 1937). However, it was mainly health professionals and social critics who contributed to the conference (*ibid*.). Ultimately, Krishna and Kieffer decided that the latter would represent the former at the conference, reading Krishna's paper and participating in "the ensuing discussions on the integral importance of body, mind and spirit in securing personal health" (Hancock to Kieffer, January 21, 1980, LGK, box 6.8.3.).

Georg Feuerstein (1947–2012) was a German author and Indologist who specialised in yoga, tantra, and Hindu religions. Some key publications that address kundalini include *Yoga: The Technology of Ecstasy* (1990) and *Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy* (1998). As mentioned above, Jean Gebser initially introduced Feuerstein to Krishna's work. In a 1972

letter to Krishna, Feuerstein praised Krishna's work and congratulated him on "[securing] the interest of a number of serious cholars [*sic*] in Europe" (Feuerstein to Krishna, February 6, 1972, LGK, box 6.3.4.). Krishna and Weizsäcker's co-written book *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* (1972) particularly interested the yoga scholar. Most importantly, he encouraged Krishna to apprise him of Krishna's research findings and projects regularly:

> I would be only too glad to keep in touch with you and the various centres which you have established for the study of kundaliniyoga [*sic*]. Since my interest lies in coordinating current research on Yoga and evaluating the research findings in a critical, but empathic light, I would welcome any cooperation from your side. Naturally, I would be very interested in receiving from you or any of the scientists working on the kundalini project now and then some research notes or critical papers which I then could publish in the [Yoga Quarterly] Review. (*ibid*.)

Feuerstein's initial curiosity about Krishna derived from Feuerstein's scholarly interest in yoga. However, it is likely that Feuerstein's own experiences with kundalini additionally sparked his fascination. In his book *Yoga. The Technology of Ecstasy* (1989), he described his experience, explicitly referring to Krishna: "Fortunately, I never suffered the terrible agonies of a fully awakened but misconducted life-force (kundalini), as was the case, for instance, with the late Pandit Gopi Krishna. Nevertheless, I experienced firsthand some of the disturbing side effects of a kundalini" (Feuerstein 1990, xii). Another link between Feuerstein and kundalini research appears in the shape of Lee Sannella. In a foreword to Sannella's *On Genius* (2006), Feuerstein underlined Sannella's *Kundalini: Psychosis or Transcendence* (1976) as a "breakthrough contribution to a widely misunderstood spiritual phenomenon that has long intrigued me" (Feuerstein, in Sannella 2006, ix).

In 1979, Feuerstein invited Krishna to collaborate. Unfortunately, only limited information is available about said invitation. Krishna mentions a "letter from Dr. Georg Feuerstein for our cooperation for the Research Program on Yoga which he and his colleagues wish to undertake, at the moment in Durham University, England" (Krishna to Kieffer, November 10, 1979, LGK, box 6.6.1.). While the specific letter in question was inaccessible, certain information can be inferred from Krishna's letter to Kieffer. Krishna indicates that in his response to Feuerstein, he expressed his willingness to collaborate with the latter, highlighted his own research efforts, and disclosed his criticism of "Dr. Mircea Eliade and Aldous Huxley as their ideas have been responsible for the general misconception about yoga among scholars prevailing at present" (*ibid*.).

To my knowledge, Krishna and Feuerstein did not collaborate on any project, nor did they ever meet. But according to the archival material, they did indeed keep in touch. Moreover, the reference to Krishna in one of Feuerstein's books – the latter by then already considered a luminary in yoga studies – suggests the steadfast role that Krishna had assumed.

12.8. Eighth Journey (May 1983–January 1984)

In May 1983 Krishna started what would become his last journey overseas. This trip coincided with the peak of his international career and stands out in terms of significant events, lectures, and encounters, including Krishna's invitation to speak at the annual conference of the International Transpersonal Association (ITA) in Switzerland, at Forum Alpbach (Austria), alongside the Dalai Lama (b. Tenzin Gyatso, b. 1935), and his lecture at a conference of the United Nations (UN) in New York (LGK, box 6.1.5.).

Before these significant events, Krishna once again met several European collaborators and other interested parties. One of the most pivotal happenings was a meeting between Krishna and Stan and Christina Grof, who interviewed Krishna (see Chapter 23.4.). Moreover, ITA featured Krishna at preliminary events, where he delivered two lectures, one in Bern and the other at the University of Zurich, titled "Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man" (LGK, box 6.1.3.). Other key events included several meetings in Munich organised by Weizsäcker. No information is available on the content or participants at those meetings; Degler vaguely refers to them as "a number of [highly successful] sessions with scientists in Munich" (Degler 2023, 279). After this series of events, Krishna spent some time with Weizsäcker at the latter's home in Starnberg and, upon his return to Switzerland, at Kobelt's chalet in Engelberg (*ibid*., 279–280).

The eighth annual conference of the ITA took place in Davos, Switzerland (September 1 through 3, 1983). That year's topic was "Personal Transformation and Universal Responsibility", and the speakers' list included eminent names, such as the fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, the Jesuit priest Hugo M. Enomiya-Lassalle, the Indian politician Karan Singh, the US-American Vipassana teacher Jack Kornfield (b. 1945), Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, the anthropologist Michael Harner (1929–2018), and as a Swiss newspaper phrased it, "the enlightened Indian Gopi Krishna" (Schleicher 1983).[320] Several hundred

[320] German original: "der indische Erleuchtete Gopi Krishna" (Schleicher 1983), translated by M.T.

participants were expected, and considerable media attention was attached to the event.[321] Krishna and Kobelt had already arrived at Davos about two weeks before the conference to settle in and prepare for the event, and eventually Tompkins also joined in (Kobelt to Kieffer, April 27, 1983, LGK, box 6).

Krishna's lecture, titled "Kundalini: Empowering Human Evolution", took place on September 2, 1983, and lasted one hour with an extra hour for questions. Aside from his interpretation of kundalini as an evolutionary energy, Krishna addressed the presumed goal of yoga and the necessity of karma yoga in a world that suffers from war, poverty, and severe social problems:

> Selfish occupation with one's own salvation, when the world is burning, is not a sign of spiritual regenerations. The first effort […] as a Karma Yogi [is to] set himself to the task of extinguishing the fire. It is for this reason that I am presenting the world situation in an objective way, to draw attention to the acute problems that need the effort of one and all of us to solve. (Krishna 1996, 46)

This quote demonstrates Krishna's increasing shift in focus. Unlike earlier public lectures, the topics of world peace and the future of humankind replaced questions about empirical verifications of kundalini as critical priorities. In a letter to his supporters, Krishna writes: "As you know, there is nothing nearer to my heart than to work for world Peace, or unity and brotherhood of the people of this planet as also for the revival of true spiritual values all over the earth. These are the imperatives we all must obey" (Krishna to friends, Sep 7, 1983, LGK, box 4). However, being mindful of his audience, he also addressed distinct transpersonal topics, including the presumed connection between spirit and mind and the unique importance of a properly directed kundalini movement for mental health (Degler 2023, 282).

After Davos, Krishna and Kobelt made their way to Alpbach, where the "Forum of Humanistic Psychology and Psychotherapy", also known as "Forum International", organised a conference (September 7 through 11, 1983). Titled "Other Realities: The New Convergence of Science and Representatives of Spiritual Disciplines" (Geisler 1983, 904),[322] the Alpbach conference followed a similar pattern as the ITA conference, featuring scientists, philosophers, and religious speakers and their distinct perspectives. The list of

[321] In a document entitled "Davos Journalists", eight international journalists are listed who conducted interviews with Krishna, either for radio shows or newspaper articles (Davos journalists, LGK, box 2).

[322] German original: "Andere Wirklichkeiten: Die Konvergenz neuer Naturwissenschaften und alter spiritueller Traditionen" (Geisler 1983, 904), translated by M.T.

participants included Fritjof Capra, philosopher and physicist David Bohm (1917–1992), Zen teacher Richard D. Baker Roshi (b. 1936), parapsychologist A. Rupert Sheldrake (b. 1942), the Dalai Lama, and the author William I. Thompson[323] (Greiling 1983).

Like his Davos lecture, Krishna's presentation at Alpbach targeted the present crisis and how "spiritual knowledge" was to assist scientific insights: "I made it plain, in my last speach [*sic*] at Alpbach, that it was beyond the power of science to help mankind in the present crisis and that spiritual knowledge is what is needed to counterbalance the materialistic ideas spread by science" (Krishna to Koops, September 18, 1983, LGK, box 6.6.1.).

As discussed below (Chapter 13.2.1.1.), Krishna did not consider himself a practitioner or religious teacher. Nevertheless, this reputation endured throughout his career. This becomes particularly evident from Krishna's introduction at Alpbach. Rainer Kakuska (n.d.a.), who chaired Krishna's panel, emphasised Krishna's role as a religious representative and not – as many of Krishna's supporters did – as a self-taught philosopher-scientist:

> Rainer Kakuska noted that the renowned physicist Fritjof Capra had made the comment that when he shut his eyes during the presentations, he could sometimes not tell if he was listening to a scientist or a spiritual teacher. Kakuska then went on […] that he did not think Fritjof would have said that about Gopi Krishna's talk. In Kakuska's opinion, he was the only one among all the speakers who clearly took the side of the superiority of religion. (Degler 2023, 286)

Given the Dalai Lama's and Roshi Baker's participation at the event, Kakuska perhaps exaggerated by considering Krishna the only speaker in favour of religion. Nevertheless, his introduction conveyed the public perception of Krishna as a religious writer and teacher. As his close supporter, it is not surprising that Degler dismissed Kakuska's opinion and defended Krishna's "pro-science" (*ibid*., 285) attitude – which, in fact, is not contradictory to his role as a religious teacher. Intriguingly, in addition to his self-perception as "researcher", Krishna acknowledged his attribution to the religious sphere. This is evident from a document signed by several Alpbach speakers, including their names, professions, affiliations and addresses; Krishna added "spiritual research student" (Geisler 1983, 911) as a profession.

Regardless of Krishna's stance, he evidently argued from a religious perspective when considering "the experience […] of a unifying principle in creation" (Krishna, in Degler

[323] William I. Thompson, who was both interested in and dismissive of Krishna's work, will be discussed in Chapter 15.3.1.

2023, 287) as the missing link in the endeavour to reconcile religion and science.[324] As he outlined in his talk, this unifying principle refers to the experience of oneness, kundalini, God, the Holy Spirit, and mystical experiences at large. Moreover, as Krishna maintained, scientific insights depended on elaborating this unifying principle and religious experience (Degler 2023, 286–287; Greiling 1983, 920–921). In essence, Kakuska's assessment aptly introduced Krishna's presentation.

Following Krishna's contributions to the conferences in Davos and Alpbach, several psychologists and psychiatrists became interested in Krishna's work (Krishna to Koops, September 18, 1983, LGK, box 6.1.1.). A notable example was Christian Scharfetter (1936–2012), then head of the Psychiatric University Hospital Burghölzli, Zurich, who paid Krishna a visit in Zurich. Scharfetter researched clinical psychopathology, particularly schizophrenia, but he also had an interest in intercultural psychiatry and consciousness studies (Schwarz, n.d.).

According to Krishna, Scharfetter sent him some schizophrenic case studies "indicative of the Kundalini syndrome" (Krishna to Koops, Septemebr 21, 1983, LGK, box 6.1.1.). As discussed below in Chapter 22.1., the term "kundalini syndrome" traces back to Itzhak Bentov, who coined the designation "physio-kundalini syndrome", encompassing physiological and psychological concomitants to the activation of kundalini. Lee Sannella adopted the term to underpin his portrayal of kundalini as a "rebirth process", as detailed in his book *Kundalini: Psychosis or Transcendence* (1976). In the same year, in 1976, Krishna underlined that kundalini was responsible for psychosis and neurosis (Krishna and White 2016, 10).

Seven years later, upon receiving Scharfetter's case histories, Krishna took credit for introducing the link between kundalini and mental illness, omitting Bentov's and Sannella's contribution:

> It is a good augury for our work that a number of psychiatrists, both in Europe and the USA, have become deeply interested in our work and are convinced that Kundalini could be the causative factor in many cases of schizophrenic and manic depressive psychosis. This is a great thing as before any research can be started, at least, a few

[324] Krishna's main views as presented in his Alpbach talk are summarised in an article in the German-language magazine *Esotera. Die Wunderwelt an den Grenzen unseres Wissens* (Greiling 1983, 920–921).

> psychiatrists or scientists should become convinced of the ideas I am expressing. (Krishna to Koops, September 21, 1983, LGK, box 6.1.1.)[325]

Confident about the feedback he received from his presentations and meetings in Europe, Krishna travelled to North America by the end of September. His first stop was Toronto, where he met with his loyal supporters, now subsumed under the designation FIND (see Chapter 13.1.1.4.). During several meetings with the "core group", Krishna and his supporters consolidated their commitment to collaborating on kundalini research.

After Toronto, Krishna travelled to New York, where he spoke at a UN event. Held at the General Assembly Building of the UN on October 23, 1983, the "People's Assembly for Disarmament Week" featured Gopi Krishna, Vilayat Inayat Khan (Sufi Order of the West), Hopi Elder David Monongye (n.d.a.), and the Black activist Rev. Ambrose I. Lane (1935–2010), among others. The theme was "Forum for Survival: Moral Imperative and Political Commitments", with the event's folder quoting from Krishna's *The Present Crisis* (1981), where he advises "a complete change in our social and political structures" (Krishna 1981, iii), stressing how "spirituality, pruned of all superstition and falsehood, becomes the guiding star of our life" (*ibid*.).

Regarding the scope of the event, it was Krishna's most significant presentation. Besides the one thousand participants in the audience, a satellite communication system allowed the broadcasting of the event: "The message [of the elders and other spiritual leaders] will be presented to the U.N., and it will be broadcast to millions of the earth's inhabitants through Intelsat, a satellite communications network which transmits to 117 countries around the world" (UN folder, LGK, box 4; Degler 2023, 289–290).

Given the broad reach and prestige, this event was pivotal for Krishna's aim to promote kundalini research. Surprisingly, however, he described his attendance in rather plain words:

> The meeting was held on the evening of the 23rd of October in the U.N.O. building. The audience was about a 1,000. The moderator was Mr. Robert Muller, the Assistant Secretary General of the U.N.O. I was the last to speak and after me Mr. Robert Muller made his comments. It was raining heavily and we returned to our apartment at about midnight. (Krishna to Koops, October 25, 1983, LGK, box 6.1.1.)

Robert Muller (1923–2010), the Assistant Secretary-General of the UN, moderated the evening event. Degler describes Muller as the key promoter of "world peace and the

[325] Krishna's relationship with Itzhak Bentov, Lee Sannella, and other associated individuals of the Kundalini Clinic will be discussed in Chapter 22.3.

importance of the spiritual" (Degler 2023, 289) in the UN. Corresponding to Degler's assessment, Muller emphasised the importance of "anyone who gives the work of the United Nations a spiritual interpretation" (UN folder, LGK, box 4).

Krishna owed his invitation to the event to Muller, who had been interested in Krishna's project for several years. Kieffer made Muller's acquaintance in 1981, calling the latter their "good friend" (Krishna to Kobelt, December 21, 1981, LGK, box 6). In other words, Kieffer considered Muller a supporter of their cause – which he indeed was. He had read Krishna's books, e.g., *The Present Crisis*, invited Krishna twice to an event sponsored by the UN,[326] and introduced Kieffer to the Senegalese jurist Doudou Diène (b. 1941) – yet another influential kundalini sympathiser. Diène has held several high positions at UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) – Kieffer even called him "director of UNESCO in New York" (Kieffer to Krishna, December 28, 1981, LGK, box 6.9.2.). Diène expressed interest in Krishna's kundalini interpretations during a meeting with Kieffer. Kieffer hoped that Diène would support their cause by recommending Krishna's writings to the chief editor of the *UNESCO Courier*,[327] or by convening "a conference on Kundalini at the United Nations through UNESCO" (*ibid*.). He insisted that this "meeting appears to me to be a significant breakthrough" (*ibid*.). Ultimately, Diène's interest in kundalini did not result in the "significant breakthrough" that Kieffer had hoped for. Acquaintances with Muller and Diène nonetheless assisted Krishna's efforts to disseminate his kundalini interpretations and enhanced his profile.

The "People's Assembly for Disarmament Week" was Krishna's last major public event. Upon his return to Zurich in November 1983, he fell ill. Even though he ultimately regained enough strength to return to South Asia in January 1984, his poor health prevented him from doing any further travelling before his passing. Therefore, Krishna could not follow up on invitations to Japan, Europe, and South America. Nevertheless, the significant increase in invitations indicates Krishna's growing fame and the success of his research endeavours. Particularly his last trip was a testimony to his achievements. Globally recognised organisations and events expressed interest in Krishna's ideas, providing a platform for

[326] Muller already invited Krishna to an event in 1982 on the topic "Dynamics of Religious Symbols in a Changing Time". While Krishna initially confirmed the invitation, in the end he had to cancel the event, postponing his participation at a UN event to 1983 (Roy to Kieffer, March 24, 1982, LGK, box 6.9.2.).

[327] The *UNESCO Courier* is distributed in twenty-two languages and has a vast reach. Kieffer hoped the magazine would accept Krishna's article "Weizsacker as a Thinker of the Future" (to be published in Weizsäcker's *Festschrift*) for publication in its June 1983 edition. While he got approval from the editors of Weizsäcker's *Festschrift* to submit Krishna's article to the *UNESCO Courier*, ultimately, it was never published in the prestigious magazine (Kieffer to Meyer-Abich, March 14, 1982, LGK, box 6).

promoting his kundalini concepts. Davos, Alpbach, and New York had opened the world to Krishna. However, these opportunities did not serve him much longer.

12.9. Summary

This chapter examined the growing circulation of Krishna's ideas. Between 1967 and 1984, the year of his death, Krishna embarked on eight overseas journeys to expand his network and disseminate his teachings through personal interactions and lecture activities. In addition, he drafted numerous books and articles whose wide distribution further advanced his mission. The circulation of Krishna's ideas through various channels between South Asia, Europe, and North America is a paramount example of modern transcultural processes and their contribution to the transformation of religion. Krishna's true strength lay in his network of supporters and collaborators. From the 1950s onwards, kundalini enthusiasts from South Asia, Europe, and North America actively promoted Krishna's books and ideas, significantly enhancing his international recognition. As the following chapter will demonstrate, the national branches of Krishna's Kundalini Research Foundations (KRF) played a distinctive role in disseminating his ideas.

13. Krishna's Kundalini Research Projects: The History of a Failure

John White, a well-connected and well-informed figure in twentieth-century alternative religious milieus, wrote: "The chief advocate of kundalini research has been Gopi Krishna" (J. W. White 1990a, 213). On the grounds of Gopi Krishna's key role, the present study assesses Krishna as the leading pioneer of modern kundalini research, pulling the strings of an international network, which he referred to as the "Kundalini Brotherhood" (Krishna to Tompkins, October 13, 1979, LGK, box 6.8.5.). Accordingly, scrutinising Krishna-related research foundations is critical to fully comprehending modern efforts to investigate kundalini.

However, despite Krishna's seminal role and efforts, this study suggests that his research endeavours collectively add up to a history of failure, with none of his research projects genuinely coming to fruition. To support this claim, I will first introduce the international network of Kundalini Research Foundations (KRF),[328] followed by a discussion of Krishna's Yoga Experimental Project. This endeavour was intended as the pinnacle of Krishna's research efforts; however, it also failed.

13.1. The Kundalini Research Foundations

Gopi Krishna refused to accept devotees or students. Instead, according to John White, "he wanted coworkers in scientific and scholarly research" (J. W. White 2009, 211). His effort to boost international collaborations among individuals interested in kundalini research resulted in a vast network and an increasing interest in the notion of kundalini as an evolutionary energy and biological mechanism.

Krishna's initial research foundation, the Central Institute for Kundalini Research (CIKR), inspired affiliated offshoot branches in South Asia, Europe, and North America.[329] Gene Kieffer underlined how "the best way to spread the message is for anyone wishing to be president of his own tax-exempt Kundalini Research Foundation [to be made aware that he] is welcome to do so" (Kieffer to Dippong, August 24, 1976 LGK, box 6.6.1). Although some

[328] It needs to be stated that the designation "Kundalini Research Foundation" was not consistently used throughout the history of KRF. This notwithstanding, I will use KRF as an umbrella term for institutes devoted to kundalini research as propagated by Gopi Krishna.

[329] The following chapters will present the branches of KRF in geographical and (when applicable) chronological order.

KRF research branches did not survive the first rush of motivation, an international network was diligently engaged in kundalini research for several decades and flourished well into the 1990s, with some continuing to date. Employing archival material, information gained from interviews, and written material from Gopi Krishna and his supporters, this chapter examines a cultural phenomenon to which scholars have hitherto paid little attention.

13.1.1. An Overview of Krishna-Related Kundalini Research Foundations

13.1.1.1. South Asia

The history of KRF started in 1967 when Krishna fulfilled his long-fostered wish to establish an institute committed to the research into kundalini: The Central Institute for Kundalini Research (CIKR) at Nishat, Srinagar. As Krishna's home country, where he was well-connected and highly respected, India held a unique position among the nations that saw KRFs emerge. From a Hindu nationalist perspective, conducting kundalini research at its "place of origin" appealed to Krishna and others, who shared his Hindu nationalist inclinations (see Chapters 17 and 18). However, Krishna was undoubtedly interested in reaching a broader audience beyond India's borders. He believed that Europe and the United States, in particular, provided fruitful grounds for what he envisioned as scientific investigations of kundalini. Although Margaret Kobelt underscored that "[it] was his heart's wish that India would become the leading nation in the research on Kundalini" (Kobelt 1984, 2), KRF had to expand its focus to include international research efforts strategically. For these reasons, or perhaps despite them, South Asia's KRFs outnumbered any other country's branches.

The archival material suggests that Krishna and his supporters opened eight South Asian KRF branches.[330] Some were more active, such as the Madras Foundation, the Calcutta

[330] The South Asian chapter of KRF had branches in Srinagar (Jammu and Kashmir), New Delhi, Kolkata (formerly Calcutta, West Bengal), Mumbai (formerly Bombay, Maharashtra), Chennai (formerly known as Madras, Tamil Nadu), Chandpura (Rajasthan), Bangalore (Karnataka), and Prayagraj (formerly known as Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh) (LGK, box 6). Source material on South Asian KRF branches is extremely scarce. This notwithstanding, I was able to reconstruct several formation dates by examining archival material, such as personal correspondences and scattered documents of the branches in question. Of the South Asian branches, Bangalore was founded in 1976, Allahabad in 1978, and Calcutta probably also in 1978. No information is available on the remaining branches (LGK, box 6.7.).

Centre of Kundalini Research Foundation,[331] and the Allahabad Institute for Kundalini Research, but others, such as the Chandbura branch, never properly gained momentum (LGK, box 6). I will discuss three branches in more detail: The Central Institute for Kundalini Research (CIKR), the New Delhi KRF branch, and the Allahabad Institute for Kundalini Research.

Krishna opened CIKR in 1967 with the help of his earliest supporters. Degler underscored the role of Sinai in this undertaking: "While Gopi Krishna himself was no doubt the driving force behind the creation of that first kundalini research center, Sinai's role […] can hardly be overstated" (Degler 2023, 123). However, Tontyn Hopman – who has been previously introduced as Krishna's early supporter – was also involved in the planning of CIKR. In a letter to Krishna in December 1967, he stressed that he was "happy to learn that the 'Centre' will soon be ready" (Hopman to Krishna, December 3, 1967, LGK, box 6.1.8.).

Initially, the research centre was called "The Research Institute for Kundalini" (Krishna to Taraporewalla, September 20, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.), which Krishna referred to as a "Spiritual Research Centre" (*ibid*.).[332] Krishna's 1969 letter to the Bombay-based publishing house D.B. Taraporewalla Sons and Co. Ltd. counts among the earliest references to CIKR, suggesting that Krishna initially emphasised "spirituality" as a critical pillar of his research centres (*ibid*.).[333] By 1971, CIKR started using its official letterhead, which was subsequently adopted by all KRF branches (LGK, box 6).[334]

Krishna had purchased a piece of land in Nishat, which he intended to use as CIKR's headquarters. Nishat was conveniently situated next to Dal Lake (Srinagar) and near Krishna's family home in Karan Nagar (about fifteen kilometres). A primary function of the Nishat property was welcoming international guests – some of whom stayed for several weeks. Moreover, Krishna hoped to use the Nishat property as his main writing workspace.

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[331] Although it may seem like an overstatement, the "Calcutta Centre of Kundalini Research Foundation" was, in fact, the official name of the Calcutta KRF branch.

[332] It is not clear in which year Krishna renamed the "Research Institute for Kundalini" as the "Central Institute for Kundalini Research". The earliest reference I could trace dates to February 1977, coinciding with major adaptions at the KRF branches in Nishat and New Delhi (Krishna to White, February 11, 1977, LGK, box 6.6.2.).

[333] Krishna's letter to D.B. Taraporewalla Sons and Co. Ltd. also includes a list of books Krishna was interested in purchasing for the Institute's library, including William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), James H. Leuba's *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (1925), Robert C. Zaehner's *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane* (1957), and Richard M. Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901) (Krishna to D.B. Taraporewalla, September 20, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.).

[334] Gene Kieffer used the KRF letterhead for his New York KRF branch from at least April 1971, perhaps even earlier (Kieffer to Krishna, April 5 1971, LGK, box 6.2.3).

However, substantial renovation works were necessary to meet Krishna's expectations. At the recommendation of Weizsäcker, Krishna planned to have additional buildings constructed for office spaces, guesthouses, and a library. Since funding was scarce during the first years of KRF, it was not until 1971 that Krishna and his supporters undertook any serious renovation work at Nishat or Karan Nagar (Krishna's family house), which were then both used for CIKR. Krishna's secretary, K. N. Koul (n.d.a.), who had previously worked for Samiti and was a loyal supporter of Krishna's cause, oversaw these renovations (Degler 2023, 123, 165–166).

In 1977, another renovation phase began.[335] The reason for the second phase of renovations was the upcoming visit of several hundred Canadian supporters of Krishna at CIKR in Nishat (see Chapter 13.1.1.4.). Krishna expressed in a letter to Kieffer his wish to make a good impression on his international visitors, wherefore renovations were an inevitable necessity: "[Nishat is the] headquarter [*sic*] of a world-wide spiritual movement […] [and] must have a spacious premise to create a good impression on those who come to visit" (Krishna to Kieffer, March 8, 1977, LGK, box 6.8.8.; Degler 2023, 230).

As Krishna's network grew, he considered relocating the headquarters to New Delhi to better accommodate international visitors and bring together the various departments of KRF that had developed over the years, such as the Publication Department, the Research Centre, and Public Relations (Krishna to Kobelt, March 9, 1977, LGK, box 6.8.8.). Despite these considerations, CIKR at Nishat remained the headquarters for Krishna's project of kundalini research throughout his life (LGK, box 6).[336]

With Krishna having considered opening a New Delhi KRF branch since 1969, a branch was eventually established there in 1972 (or possibly already in 1971) (Krishna to Koul, October 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.; Krishna to Director of Telephone, May 17, 1972, box 6.3.4.). The New Delhi branch significantly expanded in 1977 when KRF inaugurated the Kundalini Research and Publication Trust.[337] The formation of a publishing house allowed Krishna to

[335] One sponsor for the renovation works was Peter Hoffman (n.d.a.), a (German) theosophist who lived in Madras. Hoffman was friends with the theosophist George Arundale and was further affiliated with the Krotona Institute of Theosophy at Ojai, California. According to his letter to Krishna, he sent a cheque for 3,000 US Dollars for renovations at Nishat (Hoffman to Krishna, December 14, 1978, LGK, box 6.8.5.).

[336] Degler, on the contrary, suggests that the headquarters was officially moved to Dehra Dun in 1981 (Degler 2023, 268).

[337] The Kundalini Research and Publication Trust existed at least until 1990. In that year, three trustees (Kobelt, Tompkins, and Kieffer) asked its current president, Radha Krishan Kaul, Krishna's son-in-law, to step down from his position due to "almost six years of failure in leading the Trust in carrying out the wishes of the late Pandit Gopi Krishna, founder" (Kobelt, Tompkins, and Kieffer to Kaul, June 6, 1990, LGK, box 2).

have “more direct control of his writings by publishing them under the auspices of various Kundalini research centers rather than outside publishers” (Degler 2023, 229).

A driving force behind establishing the Trust was the businessman R.S.C. Iengar (n.d.a.), who was involved with several KRF-related projects (see below). Regarding the Trust, Krishna praised Iengar’s role, emphasising that “the Publication Agency owes its existence to his [Iengar’s] inspiration and generous help” (Krishna to Tompkins, February 10, 1978, LGK, box 6.8.5.). Other individuals who contributed to the success of the Trust were Krishna’s supporter Tontyn Hopman, and Canadian volunteers, who assisted Krishna’s work in South Asia (see below). Some of their duties included printing Krishna’s old and new books, distributing these (re)prints, handling financial matters, and promoting the books among booksellers all over South Asia. Krishna’s ambition to use the Trust for the widespread distribution of his ideas is evident in the following quote from a letter to a Canadian volunteer:

> Please prepare the necessary data for the publication of the booklet in India. The first edition will be of at least 25000 [*sic*] copies. Please work out the cost and intimate it to Mr. Iengar. […] Our aim should be to sell and distribute about 100,000 copies in India during 1979. A few thousand copies of the booklet will be distributed free, a few thousand sold at cost price […]. The free supply will be mailed to all Ministers, [and] members of Parliament […]. Also to professors, scholars, scientists and Yoga-Ashrams all over India. For this purpose it will become necessary for a team of two members to visit the various capital cities in India. (Krishna to Hunsberger, November 30, 1978, LGK, box 6.7.3.)[338]

This quote reveals several vital points. First, it demonstrates Krishna’s growing desire to distribute his works on a large scale – in this case, throughout South Asia. Second, it highlights his target audience: prominent and influential members of the South Asian intellectual and religious elite. Although he mentions “Yoga-Ashrams”, his focus was predominantly on intellectual circles. Third, it provides insight into the well-thought-out strategy of the KRF. Krishna meticulously assigned his supporters specific tasks to effectively distribute thousands of free copies across South Asia to boost their visibility.

[338] The booklet mentioned in Krishna’s letter refers to *The Real Nature of Mystical Experience*, which was based on a speech that Krishna delivered at the “New Dimensions Symposium”, New York, November 17, 1978 (Krishna to Hunsberger, November 30, 1978, LGK, box 6.7.3.). While Degler wrote that the booklet was printed in the United States, Krishna’s letter points to South Asia (Degler 2023, 246–247).

The idea of forming a Trust was closely tied to Krishna's long-term wish to publish KRF's own magazine (Degler 2023, 229). Initially, Krishna was determined to disseminate KRF's news and research activities as a newsletter. A magazine, he argued, was too time-consuming and work-demanding, given the little staff he then had at his disposal: "I can find no one here [to] whom to entrust this important work with the confidence that he would do justice to it. Mere appointment of an editor is not sufficient" (Krishna to Iengar, February 9, 1977, LGK, box 6.6.2.). He was further concerned that a magazine of poor quality would harm KRF's image rather than support their cause. For these reasons, although willing, Krishna and his supporters let the case rest (*ibid*.).

However, the project took an unexpected turn when Krishna received an intriguing offer from the South Asian editor A.K. Krishna Nambiar (n.d.a.). According to Krishna, Nambiar, a "religious-minded gentleman who is editing the magazine, 'Spiritual India', has made an offer that he would be glad to devote the journal to spread [*sic*] the knowledge about kundalini" (Krishna to Iengar, March 11, 1977, LGK, box 6.8.8.). Nambiar's quarterly magazine had been in print since 1972, and was well established.[339] Krishna thus gladly accepted the offer under the condition of renaming the magazine *Spiritual India and Kundalini.*[340] Nambiar agreed to the new name and to a change of ownership, thus transferring the magazine to the Kundalini Research and Publication Trust (Krishna to Iengar, March 16, 1977, LGK, box 6.8.8.).

Spiritual India and Kundalini became the primary communication vehicle of KRF and ran from 1977 until 1988 (Figure 11). The frequency gradually decreased, with volumes 1 (1977) and 2 (1978) being published quarterly, volumes 3 (1979) and 4 (1980) twice a year, and volumes 7 (1984) and 8 (1988) only appearing once a year (no information is available regarding volumes 5 and 6). Moreover, the inaugural edition was the longest (88 pages), but the subsequent editions were much smaller.[341]

[339] The magazine had a print capacity of 2,000 copies, a considerably long list of subscribers, and even a certain recognition outside of South Asia. According to Krishna, he came across a reference from 1975 to *Spiritual India* in the *Times Magazine* (Krishna to Iengar, March 16, 1977, LGK, box 6.8.8.).

[340] Krishna first suggested *Kundalini and Spiritual India*. This suggestion (and Nambiar's agreement) notwithstanding, the inaugural issue carried the name *Spiritual India and Kundalini*. *A Magazine of International Spiritual and Scientific Progress* (Krishna to Iengar, March 16, 1977, LGK, box 6.8.8.).

[341] I am indebted to Michael Bradford for sharing this information with me.

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CONTENTS

Editorial		2
KUNDALINI : The Gaurdian of Human Evolution	—Pandit Gopi Krishna	3
KUNDALINI : Sex, Evolution and Higher Consciousness	—John White	13
Shri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa on Kundalini	—N. C. Shrivastava	22
Science of Bhagava dgita	—Virajeshver	24
The Philosophy of Sufism	—Dr. K. M. P. Mohamed Cassim	27
Shuddha Tantra Siddhi	—Maharshi Shuddhananda Bharati	30
Life After Death	—Joseph Dippong	32
Sri Aurobindo : The Synthesis of the East and the West	—Brahma Nand	38
Nefertiti and Akhenaten and Their Religious Revolution	—Gene Kieffer	44
Scientific Research After Truth : How the ancient Indians did it	—Dr. Mrs. Sita Krishna Nambiar	61
Of Kundalini And The Unconscious	—Tontyn Hopman	69
The Glimpses of the Yoga of Kundalini	—I. B. Sinha Ray	74
The Biological Basis of Kundalini	—Dr. Erik Floor	79
Kundalini Yoga	—Swami Satyananda Saraswati	81
Children's Corner : Ram, Snail and Cherry Tree	—A. K. Krishna Nambiar	84
Do You Know 'Yoga Awareness' ?		85
News and Book Review		86
Subscription Rates and Order Form		87

Cover Page : Pandit Gopi Krishna

Editor : A. K. KRISHNA NAMBIAR

Figure 11: *Spiritual India and Kundalini Magazine*, volume 1, cover and table of contents (scanned by Michael Bradford; printed with permission of *ibid*.).

The establishment of their own magazine and publication activities show that the opening of the Kundalini Research and Publication Trust facilitated new opportunities and enabled KRF to reach a hitherto unreached number of people.[342] KRF was on the threshold of a new phase of their project of kundalini research.

The third example of a South Asian KRF branch is the Allahabad Institute for Kundalini Research. Founded in 1978, it had a registered office in George Town, Allahabad, regular meetings, and a charter, which has survived as a small booklet (Figure 12). The charter is titled *Rules and Regulations* and lists five aims and objectives (Allahabad Institute for Kundalini Research, n.d.). These rest on Gopi Krishna's writings and thoughts, which are apparent, e.g., from the use of terms such as "biological force" (*ibid*., 1) and the strong emphasis on scientific research. Moreover, Gopi Krishna is credited as the Institute's "Chief Patron for Life" (*ibid*., 3).

[342] Another major undertaking of the Delhi KRF branch concerned the KRF Anthology Project (see Chapter 13.2.1.2.).

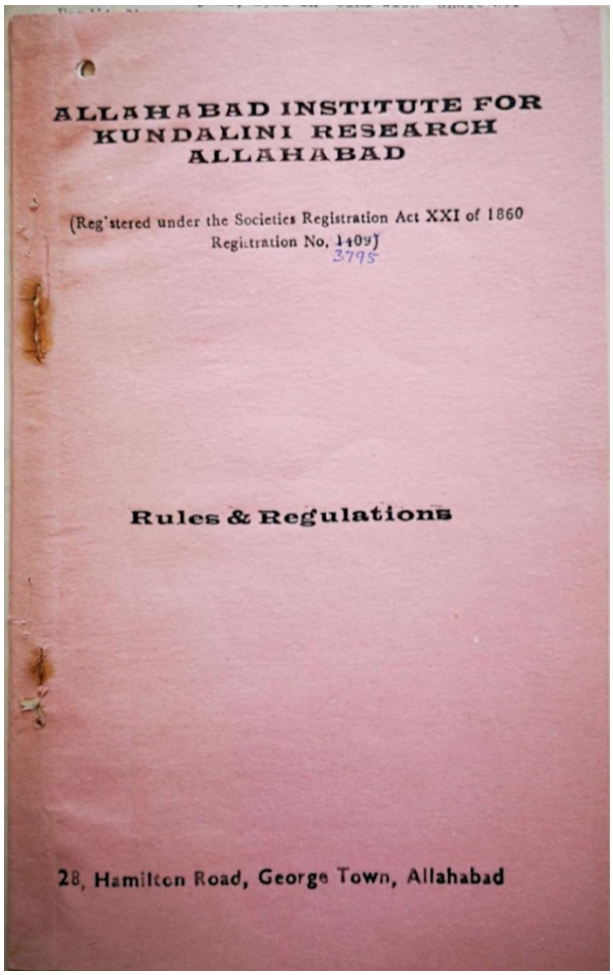

Figure 12: Allahabad Institute for Kundalini Research, *Rules and Regulations* (LGK, box 6.7.2., photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich).

Given that none of the other branches released a similar charter – or at least no others seem to have survived – I quote all five objectives, which likely applied to other KRF branches:

> The aims and objects [*sic*] for which the Institute is founded are:
> (i) To study systematically and scientifically various aspects of Kundalini described in Hindu Scriptures as Divine power, latent in human organisim [*sic*] and now believed to be a biological force responsible for human evolution.
> (ii) To undertake, encourage and promote scientific research into the nature and functions of Kundalini and the States [*sic*] of higher consciousness or mystical experience.
> (iii) To cooperate and collaborate with the inland and foreign researchers, institutes and organizations concerned with research into various aspects religious, medical, biological, scientific etc– [*sic*] of Kundalini.

(iv) To enage [*sic*] and initate [*sic*] all other activities that may advance and promote the study or research in any scientific understanding of human consciousness and the psycho-somatic aspect of Kundalini.

(v) To promote dissemination of knowledge and information about kundalini and the studies and researches relating to it through publications, lecturers, symposia etc. (*ibid*., 1)

These objectives underpin KRF's focus on conducting research and promoting the acquired results. Moreover, the charter encourages the members to actively engage in an exchange with national and international research groups. Arguably this was Gopi Krishna's central aim when establishing CIKR, and has remained key to his successors (see Chapter 13.1.2.). There are several reasons why it is likely that the Allahabad Institute counted among the most active KRF branches. First, the Allahabad Institute was very well structured and organised, as apparent from its charter. Its members set up a Managing Committee consisting of thirteen members who held different positions, e.g., president (Sheo Nath Singh), treasurer (Sri K. S. Rawat), secretary (I. L. Srivastava), and director (Jamuna Prasad).[343] The Managing Committee was re-elected every five years and responsible for new members, research projects, and enforcing compliance with the Allahabad Institute's regulations (*ibid*., 2).

Second, most people on the Managing Committee held a high degree, were experienced scholars and scientists, and were internationally well connected. Gopi Krishna particularly underscored the high profile of the members of the Allahabad Institute: "The managing committee of the Institute consists of eminent citizens, medical doctors, scholars and psychologists" (Krishna to Kieffer, April 13 1978, LGK, box 6).

The most prominent person associated with the Allahabad Institute for Kundalini Research was the parapsychologist Jamuna Prasad (n.d.a.), who served as Deputy Director of Education in Uttar Pradesh and was the leading researcher of the Foundation for Reincarnation and Spiritual Research. Prasad was renowned in South Asia but also enjoyed a particular reputation abroad, especially for his work in parapsychology and reincarnation, which he partly conducted with the US-American psychiatrist Ian P. Stevenson (1918–2007) during the latter's research trip to South Asia in 1961 (Degler 2023, 294; Stevenson 1974,

[343] There is no solid evidence, but the Allahabad KRF might have also had female members. Its *Rules and Regulations* says: "Every reference in these Rules to the Masculine includes the Feminine Gender" (Allahabad Institute for Kundalini Research, n.d., 2). It is further likely that Gopi Krishna's liberal views and his activism for social justice and women's rights wielded significant influence over his supporters (see Chapter 9).

xii). As director of KRF Allahabad, Prasad was considered "executive head" (Allahabad Institute for Kundalini Research, n.d., 3) and hence "responsible for the entire management of the Institute and its funds" (*ibid*.). Prasad led most of the correspondence with Krishna and his collaborators.

Krishna and Prasad seemed to have been fond of each other, the former sharing much information on his travels, health, and achievements in their shared project of kundalini research with the latter. Moreover, Krishna praised Prasad's – and, more generally, the Institute's – research efforts: "Your research [at the Allahabad Research Institute] will provide interesting material for the [Spiritual India and Kundalini] magazine" (Krishna to Prasad, February 6, 1978, LGK, box 6.7.2.). One project that Prasad was personally involved with was the Hindi translation of *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Mechanism in Man*, and Prasad's wife (mentioned by Krishna as Mrs. Dr. Jamuna Prasad) was responsible for a research project associated with the publication of an anthology (*ibid*.). Owing to Prasad's commitment, Yvonne Kason, a member of the Canadian branch of KRF (KRFC), underscored the singular position of Allahabad: "When I met with Pandit Krishna this November, he gave me further suggestions for research on Kundalini, and asked me to personally share them with you so that our respective efforts could be more unified" (Kason to Prasad, January 5, 1979, LGK, box 6.7.2.).

Thus, the Allahabad Institute was a thriving and internationally connected research centre whose research endeavours aligned with Gopi Krishna's vision of examining kundalini's psychosomatic effects scientifically. Despite its initial enthusiasm for kundalini research as propagated by Krishna, no significant outcomes of the Allahabad Institute for Kundalini Research are available. Therefore, the Allahabad Institute is a paramount example of the unsuccessful attempts to promote kundalini research among Krishna's supporters.

13.1.1.2. Europe

Europe was Gopi Krishna's favourite destination outside of South Asia. He stressed that he "prefer[red] the calmer climate of Europe for [his] work" (Krishna to Kieffer, September 6, 1972, LGK, box 6.2.5.) compared to North America. In Europe, Switzerland and Germany were his primary destinations of choice. In Switzerland, Margaret Kobelt became Gopi Krishna's leading supporter and secretary, and Zurich developed into his home away from home. It is therefore not surprising that the Zurich branch of KRF was of seminal importance

to Krishna and the entire cause. Besides the centre in Zurich, other European branches included Italian, German, French, and British KRFs.

The Italian KRF was based in Florence and closely tied to Antonio Naim and Marcella Naim's "Yoga Centro". The Naims (n.d.a.) were pioneers of yoga in Italy, and their "Yoga Centro" was one of Italy's first two yoga studios. Gopi Krishna met the Naims during his third trip to Europe in 1970 when he travelled to Italy expecting to give a presentation at a conference (see Chapter 12.3.). Although the conference was cancelled at short notice, Krishna's trip to Italy nonetheless proved successful. Besides meeting the Naims, he met Evelyn Ferrantini (n.d.a.), an Italian translator. These three Italians were instrumental in founding the Italian KRF and translating Krishna's *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* into Italian. As Degler points out, the Naims and Ferrantini "would remain […] good friend[s] and supporter[s] for the rest of his [Krishna's] life" (Degler 2023, 152), which is well-recorded by their enduring correspondence (Degler 2023, 150–152; LGK, box 6.7.6.).

By at least 1971, Ferrantani had relocated to Berlin, Germany and began promoting Krishna's cause from there (Degler 2023, 165). While evidence of a registered German branch of KRF is scarce, Ferrantani's efforts in Berlin likely aligned with those of the Naims in Italy. This study therefore suggests that Ferrantani maintained a German KRF branch.[344]

In France, kundalini research was mainly promoted by Baldoon (n.d.a.) and Nicole Dhingra (n.d.a.),[345] and the author Amaury de Riencourt (1918–2005). The Dhingras significantly contributed to promoting and disseminating Krishna's research and books. Nicole Dhingra, for instance, arranged an interview of Krishna with a Delhi TV station in 1974 – an apt example of the international interactions of KRF (*ibid*., 208, 246). Nevertheless, Riencourt was Krishna's most important French supporter.

Amaury de Riencourt was a French author born into nobility. As a historian, he specialised in Asian history and religion. Riencourt and Krishna's correspondence traces back to 1973 when the French author contacted Krishna. In 1974, Riencourt visited Krishna in South Asia and henceforth supported Krishna's ideas in France. Substantial portions of Riencourt's popular book *The Eye of Shiva: Eastern Mysticism and Science* (1980) are dedicated to Krishna's work and experience with kundalini, which he called a "metaphysical adventure"

[344] At times, Carl Friedrich Basedow is mentioned as a representative of a German KRF (LGK, box 2). However, this might indicate Basedow's role in the "Forschungsgesellschaft für östliche Weisheit und westliche Wissenschaft" (FWW), which Chapter 15.3.1. discusses.

[345] Baldoon Dhingra was a well-known and respected scholar and poet, mainly active in South Asia and France (where he lived). After he died in 1979, his wife Nicole Dhingra carried their work for KRF forward (Degler 2023, 199, 259).

(Riencourt 1980, 186; Krishna to Mohan, February 7, 1979, LGK, box 6.7.5.). They met again in June 1983 while Krishna stayed in Kobelt's chalet in Engelberg, Switzerland. According to Kobelt, Riencourt interviewed Krishna during his visit in preparation for writing a book about Krishna; however, no further data strengthens this claim (Degler 2023, 198, 280; Kobelt to Tompkins, May 5, 1983, LGK, box 6).

Krishna's relationship with Riencourt carries significant weight, as the latter was an internationally famed author and a renowned authority on South Asia, Tibet, and China. He met the current Dalai Lama while travelling in Tibet in 1947, was friends with Karan Singh, then Indian Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation, and his books were widely read. Riencourt's support thus clearly underpinned Krishna's European status and growing fame (Degler 2023, 198).

In Great Britain, three of Krishna's supporters actively promoted his ideas and were involved in the local English branch of KRF: Robin Monro (n.d.a.), Leslie Shepard (1917–2004), and R.S.C. Iengar. Monro was the first to express interest in establishing an English branch, driven by his fascination with yoga physiology. Initially introduced to Krishna by Tontyn Hopman (Monro's father-in-law) in 1968, Monro reached out to Krishna in January 1972, offering his support (Monro to Krishna, January 26, 1972, LGK, box 4; Hopman to Krishna, January 4, 1968, box 6.1.7.). In his response, Krishna welcomed Monro's offering:

> It will be, indeed a service to the cause of knowledge if you form an organisation for the purpose and establish contacts with the other Institutions that are already engaged on [*sic*] this research. You can call it Kundalini-Research-Organisation, or Society for the Study of physiological Phenomena of Religion and Yoga and affiliate it with the Kundalini-Research-Foundation of New York. It will also be linked with the Organisation in West-Germany of which the President is Prof. von Weizsecker [*sic*]. (Krishna to Monro, February 14, 1972, LGK, box 4)

This response provides several insights into the early days of Krishna's KRFs. First, it reveals that the name "Kundalini Research Foundation" was not initially used as an official designation for Krishna's research institutes. Second, it highlights Krishna's close collaboration with Weizsäcker's FWW (see Chapter 15.3.1.). Intriguingly, Krishna mentions Kieffer's New York KRF branch but makes no reference to the South Asian CIKR, possibly reflecting his focus on European and US-American intellectual circles. He also suggests that Monro contact Leslie Shepard, a London-based author and devoted supporter of Krishna's work, to collaborate on this endeavour. Shepard remained a significant figure throughout

Krishna's life, actively promoting his books and serving as an advisor on literary style and publication matters (Degler 2023, 145; Krishna to Monro, February 14, 1972, LGK, box 4). There is no solid evidence of whether Monro pursued (and succeeded) his aim of launching a kundalini-related research institute.[346] Instead, R.S.C. Iengar (and his home address) appeared as a primary reference for the English Foundation (LGK, box 2). Iengar, also associated with the Bombay KRF branch and involved with the Kundalini Research and Publication Trust, introduced Krishna to London-based scholars and sought British publishers for Krishna's books (LGK, box 6). Degler describes the "quiet Indian businessman […] [as] one of the most ardent promoters of Gopi Krishna's books" (Degler 2023, 200).

Kobelt's Swiss branch was undoubtedly the heart of the European KRF branches. Some key activities that Kobelt and other members[347] of the Swiss Foundation organised included movie nights in Zurich, lectures throughout Switzerland (e.g., in Zurich, Basel,[348] and Bern), distribution of Krishna's German books, and interviews with Krishna, including with John White and Joseph Dippong (1976), Italian-Swiss TV (1983), and Stan and Christina Grof (1983) (LGK, box 2, 5, and 6).

Hopman initiated the close collaboration and friendship between Kobelt and Krishna. Deeply intrigued by religion and what then was perceived as "Eastern" wisdom, Kobelt attended a Swiss event in 1967 featuring Krishnamurti. There, she inadvertently met Hopman, who shared her interests (Degler 2023, 134). Later that year, Hopman met Kobelt in Zurich during a business trip, telling her everything about Krishna, to whom he was devoted (see Chapter 11.2.). Kobelt's curiosity was further sparked when Sinai stayed, at Hopman's recommendation, at Gemsenstraße the following year, in 1968. Sinai stayed with Kobelt for several weeks and continued Hopman's song by praising Krishna (*ibid*., 135).

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[346] In a document titled "LIST OF ADDRESSES OF KUNDALINI RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS IN EUROPE AND INDIA", Monro is merely listed as "interested" under the heading of KRF England. While the date of said document is unclear, there are indications that it was drafted in 1978. In this case, Monro is owed no credit for establishing the English branch, as he remained interested only (LGK, box 2).

[347] While there was no complete list of the members of the Swiss KRF branch accessible, I was able to access some lists of visitors and addresses associated with its events. Among the people mentioned on the said lists, only a few are noteworthy since they remained part of the movement or occupied an influential position: Hopman, who had moved to Zurich; Dr. Lang, an assistant professor at ETH Zurich; Mrs. Boldrini, associated with the Jung Institute at Zurich; Peter Oswald, nowadays considered to be the leading pioneer of yoga in Switzerland; Dr. Christian Scharfetter, head of the Psychiatric Institute in Zurich; and Amaury de Riencourt, who was also associated with the French branch (LGK, box 2).

[348] Peter Oswald organised Krishna's lecture at Basel in 1972, which took place at the University of Basel (Degler 2023, 171).

Thus, in February 1968, Kobelt travelled to Stuttgart, Germany, to attend one of Krishna's first European lectures. Kobelt's initial encounter with Krishna made such a good impression on her that she invited him to visit her in Zurich. Krishna followed that invitation and stayed with Kobelt for two weeks – the first of numerous further stays. At his departure, he assured Kobelt that "no future trip to Europe would ever end without a stay in Gemsenstrasse [*sic*], and this proved to be the case for the rest of his life" (*ibid*., 136; 135–136).

Gemsenstraße 7 was Kobelt's home address in Zurich. However, it was not only Krishna's preferred residence when dwelling in Europe but became the headquarters of the Swiss KRF branch. Many of Krishna's supporters used it to get together or privately meet with Krishna. This was partly possible because Kobelt lived in a five-storey house big enough to accommodate several guests, hold meetings, and keep an office and library (*ibid*., 136).

Aside from offering her private home for KRF meetings and inviting Krishna's supporters to stay, Kobelt became Krishna's personal assistant and principal secretary, dealing with his correspondence and organising many administrative matters. Thanks to her diligence, most of his correspondence, along with his collection of articles, folders, images, etc., was preserved in a vast archive.[349] Kobelt's involvement thus made the Zurich branch the administrative heart of Krishna's research. Degler, who knew Kobelt personally and interviewed her extensively, summarised Kobelt's roles with the following words:

> Over the years Margaret not only provided him with a place to stay, she drove him around Europe to the various conferences he would one day speak at, accompanied him on his trips to Canada and the United States, oversaw the publication, translation, and royalty distribution of his many books, and handled much of his voluminous correspondence. She also helped found the Swiss branch of Kundalini Research Association and kept an office for it on Gemsenstrasse [*sic*]. Through all this, she cooked his meals and […] made sure he ate on time. (*ibid*.)

To some extent, it is reasonable to consider the Swiss branch as the unofficial headquarters of Krishna's international research centres. While CIKR officially remained the headquarters, and Gene Kieffer's New York branch was equally important, Zurich nonetheless seemed a much more pragmatic choice. South Asia (especially Kashmir) was difficult to reach, and Krishna spent much more time in Europe than in the United States.

[349] This archive, formerly stored at Gemsenstraße, was transferred to the Central Library of Zurich in the 1990s. Due to personal rights, parts of the archival material are temporarily locked. This especially concerns information on the activities of the Swiss KRF branch. Therefore, more research will be necessary to discuss this seminal hub of international kundalini research thoroughly.

Kobelt's home in Zurich may thus be interpreted as the international hub for kundalini research during kundalini's heyday.

13.1.1.3. United States

Gene Kieffer (n.d.a.) assumed the same role in the United States as Kobelt in Europe. From the day he learnt about Krishna's experience and teachings in 1969, Kieffer developed into a passionate, at times frantic supporter of the Pandit. His most important activities include the tireless distribution of books, placing advertisements in countless magazines and newspapers, meetings with potential supporters, looking for publishers in the United States, and handling Krishna's royalties. In his efforts to promote Krishna's work, he sacrificed jobs, leisure, finances,[350] and, at times, his reputation.

As Thomas Huxley was sometimes considered Darwin's bulldog, Kieffer assumed a similar role in Krishna's life. Accordingly, his methods, activities, and his position as "leading figure of the movement not only in the States, but even outside" (Krishna to Tompkins, June 27, 1976, LGK, box 6.8.5.) were not unanimously agreed upon by Krishna's supporters and collaborators. Joseph Dippong, who founded and led the Canadian KRF, and George Tompkins, Krishna's supporter in California, got into confrontations with Kieffer and even dissociated themselves from him (see below). These disagreements notwithstanding, Kieffer dedicated his life to the promotion of Krishna's thought and thus became his most enduring supporter. As Degler emphasised: "Gene [Kieffer] made a commitment to dedicate his time, energy, and whatever finances he could to furthering the yogi's [Krishna's] work. Extraordinarily as it may seem, Gene Kieffer […] never faltered in keeping this promise" (Degler 2023, 149).

According to Degler, Kieffer first heard of Krishna through Sivananda Radha Saraswati, better known as Swami Radha (b. Sylvia Hellman, 1911–1995), who sent him Krishna's autobiography in 1969 (*ibid*., 148).[351] Krishna confirms Degler's version in a letter to

[350] In 1972, Kieffer almost faced personal insolvency as he invested all his private funds into kundalini research. To compensate for his loss and regain extra money for research, he formed a new company in New York called National Colorgraphics. For the sake of the company's success and to further his network, Kieffer involved Japanese technicians in the company (Kieffer to Krishna, August 5, 1972, LGK, box 6.2.6.).

[351] Born in Germany, Sylvia Hellman (née Demitz) had moved to Canada and was initiated in 1956 into the lineage of the Rishikesh-based guru Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963). Subsequently, she founded the Yashodhara Ashram in British Columbia, now calling herself by her monastic name, Swami Radha. Her ashram and numerous publications, including *Kundalini Yoga for the West* (1978), made Swami Radha increasingly known in North America and Europe (Degler 2023, 148). She was very interested in Krishna's

Tompkins, where he writes: "In fact it was she [Swami Radha] who brought me and Gene [Kieffer] together which lead [*sic*] to this close association with my work" (Krishna to Tompkins, October 22, 1977, LGK, box 2). This confirmation notwithstanding, an archival document tells a different story. In a letter by Krishna to Kieffer, dated February 24, 1968, Krishna mentions that Karlfried Graf von Dürckheim, whom he had met in Germany, had suggested he contact Kieffer. It is unclear which versions are accurate or if they are somewhat intertwined (Krishna to Kieffer, February 24, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.7.).

In any case, Kieffer and Krishna first met in 1969 in Zurich, while Krishna stayed with Kobelt (Degler 2023, 152; Thompson to Krishna, February 1, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.6.). At that time, Kieffer was a successful advertising agent and lived in New York City with his wife and four children. Kieffer's advertising background and experience in editing and promoting proved valuable for KRF. One of his first activities as Krishna's supporter was the formation of a publishing company, New Concepts (N.C. Press), aimed at self-distributing Krishna's books (see Chapter 15.3.2.). This was the first of countless efforts to spread Krishna's ideas among scholars and scientists. He visited Krishna several times in South Asia and during the latter's European stays. Furthermore, Kieffer frequently represented Krishna at conferences in the United States and Europe, reading Krishna's papers in his place and negotiating book projects (Degler 2023, 158).[352]

Despite the pivotal position of Kieffer's KRF, there is no reference to other members of his New York branch.[353] Therefore, it is likely that Kieffer's Foundation consisted solely of a single member and was predominantly managed from Kieffer's desk. This, however, contradicted Krishna's explicit wish for collaboration and teamwork:

> Our success in the States can only be possible if Mr. Kieffer has round him a group of loyal associates who are allowed to work according to their light for contributing to one common purpose. It is for this reason that I have requested him to set up a number of

ideas and aimed to collaborate with him and invite him to her ashram. This notwithstanding, Krishna indicated certain discrepancies in her perception of Kundalini: "It is natural in her case to have the ideas she has expressed. She was instructed in the subject [of kundalini] in an Ashram in India long ago. At that time the concepts I am expressing were not at all known. […] We cannot expect Swami Radha to change her opinions now" (Krishna to Tompkins, February 10, 1978, LGK, box 6.8.5.).

[352] Another aspect of these efforts was Kieffer's attempts to dissociate Krishna's KRF from other kundalini-related institutions, including those of Yogi Bhajan and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi – these will be addressed in the Chapters 8.3. and 16.3.2., respectively.

[353] Some archival material indicates White's loose association with Kieffer's KRF. However, there is no definitive evidence that he is a proper member of any KRF branch. Instead, White was more likely to be a loyal collaborator without being affiliated with any KRF branch (Dippong to White, November 16, 1978, LGK, box 6.8.5.). Refer to Chapter 16.1.1. for a thorough examination of his relationship with Krishna.

> organisations in different parts of the States, each independent yet striving for the same end, and all acting together for a common cause with him as the leading figure of the Movement. (Krishna to Tompkins, June 27, 1976, LGK, box 6.8.5.)

Nevertheless, Kieffer took kundalini research and his role within KRF very seriously. This sincere approach, coupled with the responsibility imposed on him, quickly got him frustrated, offended, and emotional throughout the process. All hardships notwithstanding, Krishna's cause became Kieffer's life mission. While Krishna continually emphasised that he was not a guru, Kieffer nonetheless developed into an ardent disciple of his (Krishna 1976a, 29).

Another important supporter of Krishna in the United States was George Tompkins (n.d.a.), a US-American "businessman with an interest in the newly developing field of video production" (Degler 2023, 169). Tompkins met Krishna in 1971 when travelling to Switzerland on a family trip along with Gene Kieffer (also with family). His initial meeting left a lasting impact on Tompkins (as it did with Kieffer). He described this encounter with the following words: "In 1971 my life took a dramatic turn following my initial meeting with Pandit Gopi Krishna in Zürich, Switzerland. […] There is a Greek term *Kairos* which aptly describes this meeting – a decisive moment, dense with the possibility of grace" (Tompkins, in Degler 2023, 170, original emphasis). Throughout his life, Tompkins remained devoted to Gopi Krishna. His most important contributions to the cause include a film project in Zurich in 1976, extensive networking in the United States, and the launch of a California-based KRF in 1978.[354]

Tompkins aligned his institute with Krishna's KRF. This notwithstanding, he dissociated his organisation from other KRF branches, providing insights into tensions and conflicts among Krishna's closest supporters. According to Tompkins, his decision to launch a "separate autonomous office" (Tompkins to Krishna, May 30, 1976, LGK, box 6.8.5.) was rooted in a preceding conflict with Kieffer. As a first reaction to their confrontation, Kieffer aimed to instigate a Californian KRF branch, disregarding Tompkins' earlier-stated wish to be involved with such a project: "He […] saw immediate reason to engage someone else in California to head a new branch of the Foundation [KRF], and chose not to mention his name or qualifications. This spontaneous independent reaction certainly does not build a working

[354] Krishna mentions two other kundalini research centres in Philadelphia and Connecticut in a letter to Jamuna Prasad (Krishna to Prasad, January 17, 1979, LGK, box 6.7.2.). However, I did not come across these centres elsewhere. Therefore, it seems more plausible that New York and California represented the only KRF branches in the United States, or at least the only noteworthy ones that lasted.

cooperative relationship" (*ibid*.). Kieffer's behaviour prompted a counter-reaction by Tompkins, who decided to open an organisation of his own, labelled "Bio-Energy Research Foundation: Research into the Phenomenon of Kundalini". Tompkins emphasised the affiliation of this Foundation with Krishna's project, thus underscoring his loyalty:

> This organization would have a complete interchange of publishing materials, advertisements, research correspondence and other related materials, with the various worldwide Kundalini offices. We could also have an interchange of directors if personalities permitted. These various offices would then be responsible to the main Foundation in India; which would, among other assets, hold all publishing rights. This procedure allows for the spreading of responsibility, enlarging our viewpoints, and approaches to this holy cause. (*ibid*.)[355]

At the same time, he dissociated himself from Kieffer's New York KRF branch and expressed his wish to act autonomously from Kieffer: "If it were necessary to channel all policy and seek final approval of my actions through the 'head of the Foundation' in New York, it would constrict my own approach and perception. For this and many other reasons, I feel it necessary to establish an independent corporation" (*ibid*.).

Tompkins' disappointment and (temporary) dissociation from Kieffer exemplify how individual vanities challenge religious movements and struggles for power. Simultaneously, it shows how Krishna assumed the role of a mutually respected intermediary, ultimately dissolving the issues. By equally praising Tompkins' character and ability to contribute to their shared cause and stressing Kieffer's position as the leading figure of the (US-American) KRF branches, he aimed to re-establish harmony between his supporters:

> I am fully aware of your silent contribution to the Cause for the past several years. I am also well aware that your close association with the work can be of immense help to the Message. I felt so happy at your offer to set up an organisation in California to help the Cause. I also know that your gentle, persuasive personality can be of very great help to the other dedicated workers for the Mission. If we had a few other friends like Mr. Kieffer and you, all pulling in the same direction, in a large country like the United States, our progress would be much more rapid in the days to come. (Krishna to Tompkins, June 27, 1976, LGK, box 6.8.5.)

[355] Krishna had defined his project of kundalini research as a "holy mission", at least since 1971 (Krishna to Kieffer, April 14, 1971, LGK, box 6.2.3.). Perhaps Tompkins adopted this formulation from Krishna.

Finally, a note concerning the name of Tompkins' "Bio-Energy Research Foundation: Research into the Phenomenon of Kundalini" is due.[356] Krishna explicitly approved of Tompkins representing kundalini research in California and granted certain flexibility in the organisation's name: "You can gladly set up an Organisation in California under whatever name you choose. But the word 'Kundalini' should find a place in it. It can be Kundalini Research Association or Kundalini Research Organisation or Kundalini Research Center, – whatever you like" (*ibid*.). While kundalini is mentioned in the subtitle, its non-conformity is unmistakable nonetheless.[357]

Intriguingly, while Tompkins' conflict with Kieffer constituted a primary reason for Tompkins' decision, Kieffer initially suggested rebranding the organisations himself. In a letter from 1973, Kieffer recommends changing the name "Kundalini Research Foundation" into "Evolution Research Foundation", "Religion Research Foundation", or "Association of the Development of the Human Potential" (Swami Radha suggested the last of these) (Kieffer to Krishna, June 6, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5.). Kieffer pragmatically argued that it would be more challenging to raise money for an organisation associated with kundalini: "The word Kundalini is still very strange and mysterious to most Americans. There are the 001% of the population who might have some knowledge of it, but for the rest, nothing" (*ibid*.).[358] Perhaps Tompkins' decision to choose a different name for his organisation was inspired by his opponent at that time.

Another example of Kieffer's reluctance to use the term "kundalini" was the "Phoenix Tapes" release in 1982. During the 1980s, cassette tapes were considered a modern and thriving form of media. Kieffer was at the forefront of distributing Krishna's ideas through

[356] The source material does not provide any references for Tompkins' choice to use the term "bio-energy". The concept of bioenergetics is based on Wilhelm Reich's psychotherapeutic perspectives and was introduced by Reichian psychotherapist Alexander Lowen. Examining the seminar catalogues of the Esalen Institute of 1976 (the year when Tompkins decided to start a KRF in California), there is a noticeable increase in lectures on "bioenergetics" (*Esalen Catalogs*, n.d.). Given the influence of Esalen on California's counterculture, it is likely that Tompkins was either inspired by courses taught at Esalen or became familiar with the topic elsewhere due to Esalen's all-pervading impact in California (Kripal 2007). Chapter 22.2.1. discusses the topic of bioenergetics in more detail and demonstrates a link to the San Francisco-based Kundalini Clinic.

[357] Other writings occur, such as "BioEnergy Research Foundation" (Degler 2023, 225) and "Bioenergy Foundation" (LGK, box 1). It is not clear, however, if these are inaccuracies or if Tompkins changed the name of his organisation, taking Krishna's recommendation into account.

[358] The fear of experiencing disbenefits from using the expression "kundalini" echoes US-American proponents of Buddhism, who opted for "dropping" Buddhism when referring to Buddhist doctrines. In his book *Mindful America* (2014), Jeff Wilson underscores "the anxiety that Buddhism's foreignness prevents its message of liberation from being heard in American society. Many practitioners of Buddhist meditation fear that Americans are fundamentally unable to accept things that are unfamiliar" (Wilson 2014, 85).

this format. The "Phoenix Tapes" comprised a total of eighteen cassettes and featured several interviews conducted with Krishna between 1969 and 1973.[359] Kieffer deliberately chose the name "Phoenix Tapes" to avoid the term "kundalini". Moreover, during that period, he used the designation "Phoenix Group" instead of the "Kundalini Research Foundation". In a letter to Kobelt, he argued for this move on the basis of biased public opinions on kundalini: "If we used Kundalini Research Foundatio [*sic*] all we would get is a cold silence on the other end" (Kieffer to Kobelt, December 14, 1984, LGK, box 6).[360] Kieffer advertised the "Phoenix Tapes" to several psychologists and, for a short while, used a "Phoenix Tapes" letterhead (Kieffer to Kobelt, November 1, 1982, LGK, box 6).

Kieffer and Tompkins did not fully approve of each other's strategies and methods; however, their devotion to Krishna and their shared cause eventually outweighed their dissents. In 1983, during Krishna's last journey to Europe and North America, Kieffer suggested establishing an Experimental Project[361] in California with the help of Jim Genoni (n.d.a.).[362] Tompkins agreed to cooperate with Genoni and Kieffer and to discuss the project in depth during their upcoming meeting in Canada (Krishna to Koops, September 18, 1983, LGK, box 6.6.1.). However, the project was never realised due to Krishna's passing in 1984.

The most successful – yet troubled – KRF branch was founded in Canada.

13.1.1.4. Canada

The Canadian KRF branch (KRFC) was called the Kundalini Research Institute and was founded by Joseph Dippong (n.d.a.) in 1976. In terms of members, activities, funds, and durability, the Canadian Kundalini Research branch is unparalleled by any other branch. At

[359] The "Phoenix Tapes" included interviews with Krishna conducted by Sinai (1969), Gay Luce and Erik Peper (1972), and Kieffer (1973).

[360] Kieffer's inspiration for the name "Phoenix Tapes" derived from the "Phoenix Associates", a small group of Transpersonal Anthropologists who published a journal, *Phoenix: New Directions in the Study of Man*, and were interested in the relationship between altered states of consciousness and culture. After attending one of their meetings in October 1982, Kieffer decided on "Phoenix Tapes" (Kieffer to Krishna, October 4, 1982, LGK, box 6.9.2.).

[361] Considering the similar designation, the anticipated Experimental Project in California perhaps aligned with the South Asian undertaking of establishing the Yoga Experimental Project in Dehra Dun (Koops to Krishna, October 12, 1983, LGK, box 6.1.1.). Unfortunately, no further information was available concerning the Californian branch. The Yoga Experimental Project will be discussed below in Chapter 13.2.2.

[362] Information on Jim Genone (or Genoni) is scarce. Most likely, he was another supporter of Krishna's cause in California. In 1996, he was still listed as an affiliated member of what was then called KRN (KRN, affiliated members and organisations, LGK, box 4).

the same time, it was the only branch that dissolved after a scandal and reformed in a new format, which remains active to this day.

Degler, who knew Dippong personally and witnessed many of the developments as a KRFC member, frequently notes what she perceived as Dippong's controversial character and questionable activities, which were at times even violent (Degler 2023, 218–219). After 1981, when Dippong lost most of his credibility and trustworthiness, Paul Pond, another member of KRFC, took over Dippong's role as president.

Dippong was born in 1936 in Central Europe and worked as a businessman for most of his life. In 1970, however, after what he called a near-death experience, Dippong changed the orientation of his life and started promoting religion. He then became the founder and president of People Searching Inside (PSI), the Canadian Psychic Research Foundation, and the Kundalini Research Institute of Canada. In the inaugural issue of *Spiritual India and Kundalini*, Dippong published an article titled "Life After Death" (1977), describing his life-changing experience and the role Krishna played in his life. Dippong first reached out to Kieffer in 1975, showing interest in Krishna's work, and decided to visit Krishna as part of a trip to South Asia (Dippong 1977, 5).[363]

> On this trip, in June of 1975, and through the suggestion of two very good friends – Gene Keiffer [*sic*] and Swami Shivananda Rhada, I made a side trip to Srinagar, Kashmir, India, to visit Pandit Gopi Krishna. By this time, Pandit Gopi Krishna had become the foremost authority on Kundalini and its ramifications in every phase of life. (*ibid*.)

He continues by describing the international network of KRF and its dedication to promoting and assisting Krishna's work:

> When I returned home from India, I founded The Kundalini Research Institute of Canada. Today, along with other Kundalini research institutes that are rapidly being formed in various parts of the world, it is an affiliate of the Central Institute for Kundalini Research in Srinagar, Kashmir. […] Since my incredible experience of dying many years ago, I have given up my ambitions in the business world and have decided to devote the rest of my life to promoting the investigation of the phenomenon of

[363] Degler tells a different story. According to her account, Dippong first met Krishna in Zurich along with Kieffer, who had planned to visit Krishna there, when Dippong "insisted on coming along" (Degler 2023, 219).

> Kundalini and spiritual laws. […] The Kundalini Research Institute of Canada is very fortunate to be given the opportunity of assisting Pandit Gopi Krishna. (*ibid*., 6)

The story of how Dippong, such an ardent supporter of kundalini research, lost credibility among his fellows to the point that "almost all the members of Joseph Dippong's group left him […] and ousted him from the Brotherhood and the Board" (Kobelt to Kieffer, January 21, 1982, LGK, box 6) reads like a "classic" demise of a New Age leading figure. As mentioned above, Dippong was the head of three religious organisations, of which PSI proved the most troublesome. KRFC was a non-profit organisation, like all the KRF branches. PSI, by contrast, offered pricey courses, employing "EST-style encounter-group[364] and confrontation techniques" (Degler 2023, 255), which did not align with KRF's (unwritten) code of conduct.

The root of the problem was that PSI's courses provided the funds for all KRFC activities. While initially Krishna and his supporters accepted these funds, once the nature of the "EST-styled" courses was revealed, any previous link between KRF and PSI was vehemently denied. However, it is a matter of fact that throughout the years, KRFC and PSI had become inextricably tied. Denying KRF's tie to PSI thus equally involves denying KRF's tie with KRFC. After disclosing PSI's techniques, Krishna demanded critical changes and "wanted it to be absolutely clear that there was no connection between the PSI courses and KRI" (*ibid*., 257). Krishna's critique and the increasing dissatisfaction of the members of KRFC with Dippong's techniques ultimately resulted in the demise of KRFC. As discussed below, the successful Canadian KRF branch continued to exist first as FIND and subsequently as ICR but never regained its previous success and pool of funding (*ibid*., 254–258).

Before its downfall, KRFC was very well structured. Its "Department of Scientific Research" was divided into six distinct committees, each comprising five to thirteen members.[365] These committees were "investigating mystical experience through the examination of related phenomena such as creativity, genius and mental disorders" (KRFC album, LGK, box 5.1.). Besides the committee members, KRFC's general members outnumbered any other KRF

[364] In their book *Perspectives on the New Age* (1992), Lewis and Melton describe EST as "a self-help seminar of the seventies" (Lewis and Melton 1992, 128). Founded by Werner Erhard (b. John Paul Rosenberg, b. 1935), the methods used in EST seminars are "excessively confrontational" (*ibid*., 129), using "authoritarian trainers who enforce numerous rules upon the trainees" (*ibid*.). Loyalty and recruitment of new attendees were vital aspects of EST (*ibid*., 128–129).

[365] The six committees of KRFC's "Department of Scientific Research" included the Committee for the Investigation of Creativity, the Committee for the Investigation of Mental Disorders, the Committee for the Investigation of Genius, the Publications Committee, the Resource Center Committee, and the Canadian Psychic Research Foundation (KRFC album, LGK, box 5.1.).

branch – at its peak in 1979, KRFC had at least three hundred and fifty members. They published their own magazine (*Chimo*),[366] scheduled lectures, and organised "fund-raising events including Walk-a-thon, Bowl-a-thon, the Variety Shows, the Arts and Crafts Sales, etc." (*Chimo Magazine*, LGK, box 7.1.). Among KRFC's countless activities, two stand out in significance: Dippong's trip to CIKR along with nearly two hundred and fifty members of KRFC, and the organisation of two international conferences on kundalini.

The trip of the "Canadian friends", as they were usually referred to by Krishna (and by most of his supporters, including the Canadians themselves), was framed by Dippong as a "pilgrimage to Shrinigar [*sic*]" (Dippong to Krishna, March 3, 1977, LGK, box 6.8.8.). While Dippong initially announced a group of 350 participants, ultimately, 234 people embarked on the chartered plane (Degler 2023, 255). It nonetheless represents the biggest-ever kundalini-related field trip. An article in *Chimo* announced the trip with the following words:

> On Monday, August 8, 1977, approximately 250 Psi people, their minds filled with questions and their ears filled with love, will embark upon the most incredible journey of their lives. […] Gopi Krishna, this great and humble man will share ten days with us, explaining the Kundalini energy and answering our many questions concerning our spiritual lives. […] special music is being prepared for the long flight over and back. Visualize, if you will, 250 Psi people singing and sharing and loving and giving. This Pan-Am 747 will never have flown so high!
>
> On August 23rd, a profoundly changed group of individuals will return to Toronto to share their experiences and spread the knowledge they've gained throughout Canada and the World. (KRFC 1977, 5)

This announcement provides vital insights into KRFC's expectations and dynamics. First, the message aligns with Dippong's statement that the trip represented a "pilgrimage", which can be understood as travelling to the place of origin of someone's faith to gain deeper insights or to connect with the source personally. In this case, the pilgrims' "minds [are] filled with questions" about kundalini, and Gopi Krishna, glorified as a fount of wisdom, would, it was hoped, satisfy the pilgrims' thirst for religious knowledge, leading to a transformed state of mind. The reference to KRFC's members as "Psi people" underpins the entanglement of KRFC and PSI and shows the extent to which KRFC's group identity was shaped by Dippong's thriving but psychologically demanding or even intimidating

[366] In fact, *Chimo* was published and owned by People Searching Inside Inc. (i.e., PSI) and not by KRFC.

foundation. The resemblance between PSI and EST, then again, explains the members' urge for community, loyalty, and missionary work (Lewis and Melton 1992, 129). Against the backdrop of the significant role played by PSI in the trip to South Asia, it is not surprising that part of the trip was dedicated to research into psychic phenomena. The parapsychologist H.N. Banerjee (n.d.a.),[367] arranged a side trip for the "Canadian friends", inviting them to "participate in special seminars on […] Reincarnation and other psychic phenomena at the University for Parapsychology[368] at New Delhi" (KRFC 1977, 5).

The trip to South Asia was a tremendous success for KRFC. However, as Degler points out, it "could [not] have been accomplished without the blood, sweat, and tears of the PSI course participants" (Degler 2023, 256). Degler thus paints an entirely different picture from *Chimo*'s description of happy rainbow-styled people fulfilling their dreams. As Degler counts among those who were disappointed by Dippong, the discrepancy between the two stories accounts for KRFC's downfall.

The journey was captured in the documentary "Journey of Light" – another significant Canadian contribution to promoting kundalini research. Robert Rouveroy (1927–2009), who was to become a renowned cinematographer, joined the "Canadian friends" and recorded the entire event on film. Besides Rouveroy, Dippong also managed to hire an award-winning sound technician. The corresponding folder praises the movie as "an extraordinary documentary […] produced for the sole purpose of bringing the long lost [*sic*] knowledge of Kundalini to people everywhere" (KRFC, Journey to Light folder, ARC, box 182). The documentary, which also explored Gopi Krishna's story, the Kundalini Research Foundations, and the evolution of consciousness, was shown in North America, Europe, South Asia, and possibly other regions as well (*ibid*.).

Dippong considered the movie (along with the preceding trip) one of his foremost prestige projects and criticised Kieffer, Tompkins, and White for their lack of appreciation. His criticism already reads like a premonition of the imminent break:

> I have not heard one good comment about it from any of my three American friends […]. Everywhere that our film is shown, it receives a standing ovation. Thousands of well wishers [*sic*] both at home and abroad have acclaimed this unique film. How is it that our film causes such a warm reaction everywhere but does not penetrate into the

[367] Banerjee was Professor and Director of the Department of Parapsychology at Jaipur's University of Rajasthan (as of 1969) and had been in close contact with Krishna since 1968 (LGK, box 6.1.4.). Banerjee will be addressed in more detail in Part V, as part of the excursus on Motoyama, Chapter 1.

[368] It is unclear which educational institute Banerjee referred to with the term "University for Parapsychology".

> hearts of my American friends? (Dippong to White, November 16, 1978, LGK, box 6.8.5.)

The documentary and several archival documents framed the Canadians' trip to CIKR as the "First International Conference on Kundalini". The conference lasted ten days (as did the trip) and featured Krishna and Karan Singh as the main speakers. According to Krishna, the conference "created a great deal of interest all over India" (Krishna to Naim, December 17, 1977, LGK, box 6.7.6.) and was a great success.

While Krishna seemed enthusiastic about the number of people willing to visit and study with and from him, the travails involved with the organisation and the after-work were equally overwhelming. Preparing a ten-day event for almost four hundred people (besides the Canadians, around one hundred more people attended) in a remote area such as Srinagar proved challenging (Degler 2023, 230–231).

Back in Canada, in collaboration with PSI and the Canadian Psychic Research Foundation, KRFC organised another conference in Chatham, Ontario, from April 7 to April 9, 1978. The corresponding *Chimo* article reports on activities such as singing, dancing, sports, watching movies, and a "special kundalini meeting […] held for those people who have dedicated their lives to promote this knowledge of peace and brotherhood" (KRFC 1978, 16). The Chatham event was thus likely more of an informal networking event.

In contrast, the "Second International Conference on Kundalini" was a major undertaking. As with the first conference, it took place in the presence of Krishna. Scheduled June 30 through July 2, 1979, the University of Toronto served as the conference venue (Folder KRFC, LGK, box 4; Degler 2023, 257). Owing to the above-described events that caused the dissolution of KRFC, the "Second International Conference on Kundalini" remained the last – at least in the context of KRFC.

Aside from these activities, another major – if not the most important – contribution of KRFC to Krishna's cause was recruiting volunteers. From 1977 until 1985, a steady, if alternating, number of Canadian volunteers dwelled in South Asia to help Krishna on-site.[369] Works conducted by volunteers included administrative office work, overseeing the Publication Trust (see above), transcribing Krishna's manuscripts, gardening, maintenance, and defending the property against intruders, among countless other tasks. According to Degler, for "Gopi Krishna these people were a gift from heaven that answered his long-held hope

[369] While the volunteers alternated every few months, some stayed longer or returned. Michael Bradford, Monica Koops, Paul Beatie, David Hunsburger, and Alf Walker were among the most eager supporters of CIKR and other South Asian KRF branches (Bradford and Degler 2022; Degler 2023, 233–235).

for more assistance: with their help the Central Institute for Kundalini Research would be able to bring many of its planned projects to fruition" (Degler 2023, 235). As Degler emphasises the crucial role of these Canadian volunteers for Krishna, she indicates the impact of the break with Dippong on the entire movement. After Dippong reduced and eventually stopped the funding for the volunteer project, his "army of volunteers" (*ibid*., 257) was forced to leave South Asia. Despite financial and legal pressures, three volunteers remained in South Asia and stayed with Krishna until his passing.

During Krishna's second visit in 1983, Krishna and the remaining KRFC supporters, now subsumed under FIND, agreed on continuing their collaboration. The most important conclusions they reached concerned KRF's magazine S*piritual India and Kundalini* and funding opportunities for the Yoga Experimental Project: "In fact, many of the members are so enthusiastic that plans are already afoot for publication of the magazine in Toronto and for raising funds for the Experimental Project" (Krishna to Koops, October 18, 1983, LGK, box 6.1.1.). Regarding the magazine, they agreed to publish a "Western edition" of S*piritual India and Kundalini* to be distributed in North and South America and Europe. Each edition was to cover specific topics, such as "Brain Evolution and Genius", "Brain Evolution and Psychic Phenomena", "Kundalini and Occult Sciences", and "Narratives of Kundalini Experiences" (Krishna to Koops, October 25, 1983, LGK, box 6.1.1.). It is unlikely that the "Western edition" of S*piritual India and Kundalini* was ever published due to Krishna's passing the following year. Furthermore, no additional archival evidence suggests that it was implemented.

The Canadian KRF thus provided enormous funds and manpower, which significantly contributed to the publicity and visibility of Krishna's project of kundalini research. Renouncing this essential support underscored Krishna's integrity, consolidating the trust bond between Krishna and his loyal supporters – a bond that lasted even beyond his death.

13.1.2. Activities after Krishna's Death

"*Saying and listening will not change the world. It never did*" (Degler 2023, 297, original emphasis). With these words, Krishna ended his talk at the 1983 ITA conference in Davos. According to Degler, Krishna's words conveyed an underlying call for action. Perhaps Krishna's appeals to religious and political activism particularly resonated with his supporters, who aimed to keep his legacy alive. In this chapter, I am detailing the activities

of some protagonists and organisations, all united in their devotion to Krishna's work. Especially during the waning 1980s and early 1990s, many activities occurred, such as publications and conferences. However, in the twenty-first century too, Krishna's supporters continued to promote kundalini research, and in recent years, even new groups have emerged in pursuit of the accumulation of more knowledge about kundalini.

Over the years, the international expansion of KRF had led to an increasing integration of its branches, resulting in local KRF groups gaining international significance. As a result, their activities, interactions, and members – who often participated in multiple locations – cannot be fully understood within the confines of national borders. Notable examples include the Kundalini Research Network (KRN), the Kundalini Research Association (KRA), and Friends in New Direction (FIND), which continues today as the Institute of Consciousness Research (ICR). Furthermore, the rise and growing popularity of the internet in the twenty-first century have enabled online communities to transcend local boundaries.

Following Krishna's death, several new organisations emerged. Many of these new institutions collaborated and sometimes even shared members. Of particular significance was the replacement of KRF with KRA in 1986 (Statutes KRA, LGK, box 2). In a letter from 1987, addressed to (those who would become) KRA's board members, several potential designations for KRA are listed, indicating that the board had not yet decided on the final name "Kundalini Research Association" (Kieffer to board members, October 5, 1987, LGK, box 6).[370] This suggests that the final designation of KRA was not set before 1987 or 1988. Gene Kieffer was the only individual to maintain the designation "Kundalini Research Foundation" (KRF). While predominantly working alone, he frequently exchanged letters with Kobelt and was listed as a voting member of ICR's annual General Meeting in 1996 (ICR, LGK, box 4).

The archival material suggests that KRA was divided into several sections, with Kobelt heading a Swiss KRA section and Tompkins a South Asian one (Tompkins to Kason, January 6, 1996, LGK, box 4).[371] George Tompkins, previously introduced as Krishna's supporter in

[370] The names listed are: "International Body for Kundalini Research", "International Kundalini Research Association", "International Society for Kundalini Research" (according to the letterhead, the provisional name at that time), "International Association for Kundalini Research", and "International Kundalini Research Society" (Kieffer to board members, October 5, 1987, LGK, box 6). Kieffer suggested the last name of the list, inspired by the Los Angeles-based organisation "The Philosophical Research Society", which was founded by the theosophist Manly P. Hall (Kieffer to Kobelt and Hotz, October 6, 1987, LGK, box 6).

[371] According to Degler, Kobelt "headed the Swiss Kundalini Research Foundation until her death in 1997" (Degler 2023, 299). This, however, contradicts Kobelt's official stamp on an archival document, which says "KUNDALINI RESEARCH ASSOCIATION, Gemsenstrasse 7, 8006 ZÜRICH, Switzerland" (LGK, box 4)

California, went to South Asia after Krishna's death (in early 1985) and stayed there for several years to further the work, overseeing book publications, maintaining South Asian contacts (e.g., Karana Singh and members of the Bihar School of Yoga), and trying to keep Dehra Dun as a centre for kundalini research (Bradford and Degler 2022). Particularly the latter warrants attention.

In a letter to Yvonne Kason, Tompkins mentioned (perhaps advocating general interests of KRA) his plan to "move into the Dehra Dun house and property left by Gopi Krishna as the Headquarters for the Kundalini Research here in India" (Tompkins to Kason, January 6, 1996, LGK, box 4). However, Krishna's family attached certain conditions to Tompkins' use of the property, such as bearing its financial responsibilities, renovating the house, and fencing the property (*ibid*.). The costs exceeded eight thousand US Dollars, but he hoped to fundraise some money through affiliated organisations. Tompkins' efforts notwithstanding, Krishna's family decided not to continue pursuing kundalini research and ultimately sold the property at Dehra Dun.[372]

Aside from Tompkins' ideas, some plans were underway to have the Swiss psychiatrist Erna Hoch (1919–2003) move into the house in Dehra Dun (Kobelt to Chander, August 2, 1986, LGK, box 6). Hoch had been working in psychiatric clinics in South Asia from 1956, and from 1969 to 1980, she was the medical director at the only psychiatric hospital in Kashmir (Gosteli-Stiftung 2024; Hoch 1988, 343). During the 1970s, Hoch and Krishna were in regular exchange, discussing potential links between kundalini and mental disorders (Hoch 1988, 342). According to Degler, Hoch not only "discussed many psychiatric cases with him, [but] she successfully applied his suggestions for treatment" (Degler 2023, 204).[373] Hoch indeed expressed a pronounced interest in kundalini cases and reported having come across at least fourteen cases while serving as the director of the Mental Hospital in Kashmir (Hoch 1988, 343–344). However, despite praising Krishna as an "inspired sage" (*ibid*., 342),[374] Hoch rejected Krishna's interpretation of mental disorders as misguided kundalini

next to a stamp of her full name with the same address. In a short biography provided in a conference programme, Kobelt is also introduced as the founder and president of the Swiss section of KRA (KRN conference, LGK, box 4).

[372] Due to slow South Asian bureaucracy, Krishna bought the property in Dehra Dun in his name instead of the name of CIKR, as initially planned. While this accelerated the buying process, after Krishna's death, the property passed over to Krishna's family. Therefore, without his family's support, Krishna's supporters had no legal means to proceed with their research at Dehra Dun (Bradford and Degler 2022).

[373] Degler wrongly refers to Erna Hoch as Elizabeth Hoch. Moreover, she claims that Hoch arrived in Srinagar in 1972, when Hoch had, in fact, been in this area since 1969 (Degler 2023, 204).

[374] German original: "inspirierter Weiser" (Hoch 1988, 342), translated by M.T.

activations – a perspective she deemed "radical" (Hoch 1988, 342; Hoch to Kobelt, Oct 27 1981, LGK, box 6).[375] Furthermore, no additional reference supports Degler's claim that Hoch had "successfully applied his suggestions for treatment" (Degler 2023, 204).

Nevertheless, since Hoch respected Krishna and his attempts to study kundalini phenomena, it makes sense to assume that after his passing, she expressed interest in continuing his work. Margaret Kobelt – a close friend of Hoch, who perhaps had initially introduced Hoch and Krishna – showed a keen interest in Hoch moving to the property in Dehra Dun (Kobelt to Chander, August 2, 1986, LGK, box 6). While no definitive evidence is available, these plans likely remained unrealised due to the reluctance of Krishna's family.

In addition to the estate in Dehra Dun, the two properties in Kashmir – Krishna's family house and the compound used as the headquarters of CIKR – also changed their owners, if illegally, during an armed conflict only two years after Krishna's death:

> In the midst of another intense wave of persecution in 1986, the extensive property north of Srinagar where he [Krishna] had found the Central Institute for Kundalini Research was overtaken by Muslim extremists.[376] The two Hindus who were guarding the property were shot and killed, and the land, the house, and the outbuildings were seized. Eventually the family home in Karan Nagara in Srinagar was also taken over. None of this property was ever restored to Gopi Krishna's family, and no compensation of any kind was ever provided. (Degler 2023, 125)

Before the illegal confiscation and sale of Krishna's properties, Margaret Kobelt, Erna Hoch, and some Canadian volunteers were able to save critical documents. Nevertheless, these developments resulted in the end of the South Asian chapter of KRF in the mid-1980s.

An analysis of KRN sheds some light on the dynamics of the broader field of kundalini research outside South Asia in the 1990s. KRN was founded as a distinct group of parties interested in kundalini and "spiritual emergencies" (see Chapter 23.3.). An archival document provides valuable information on affiliated members and organisations of KRN, showing that KRN and KRA were still collaborating (the document was issued in 1994).

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[375] In Hoch's article "Verrückt oder verzückt?" (1988, "Insane or Inspired"), she discusses her views on Gopi Krishna and kundalini in depth. Moreover, in the article, she aligns her views with those expressed by Lee Sannella and Itzhak Bentov – both will be discussed in Chapter 22.1. (Hoch 1988, 348–351). Perhaps Hoch's rejection of Krishna's perspectives on mental disease, along with her sympathies for Sannella and Bentov's ideas, prompted criticism on the part of Krishna's supporters (Hoch to Kobelt, Oct 27 1981, LGK, box 6; Degler 2023, 204).

[376] Schofield (2003) provides a useful introduction to the political, historical, and religious context of armed conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir. For an introduction to Kashmir's ongoing conflicts since India gained its Independence, refer to Chapter 17.1.

Affiliated members of KRN included Michael Bradford, Teri Degler, Dale and Paul Pond, and George Tompkins. Moreover, the document mentions Kobelt's KRA, Tompkins' Bio-Energy Research Foundation, and FIND Research Trust as affiliated organisations of KRN (Affiliated members and organisations of KRN, LGK, box 4).[377] KRN described itself as "an international group of doctors, psychologists, scientists, and other scholars, therapists, and individuals, who are interested in disseminating, collaborating, and researching of spiritual and paranormal states of consciousness, as well as the relation of such states to a phenomenon, which in yoga tradition is known as Kundalini" (KRN conference, LGK, box 4).[378] This self-description shows continuity from KRF, however, emphasising its members' professionality and medical and psychological orientation.

A paramount example that illustrates the fragmentation, collaboration, international nature, and ongoing popularity of kundalini research during the 1990s was the fifth international conference of KRN. Titled "Kundalini and Consciousness: Understanding Spiritual Experiences", the conference occurred in Todtmoos, Germany, in September 1996.[379] Participants arrived from Canada, the United States, France, Switzerland, South Asia, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and different parts of Germany.

It is striking that only Krishna's supporters addressed Krishna-related topics in their talks; the remaining presenters predominantly discussed medical or transpersonal psychological perspectives. Accordingly, former KRF members, including Margaret Kobelt and Tontyn Hopman, seemed to operate only on the margins at the Todtmoos conference. In contrast, members of KRN and transpersonal psychologists dominated the event. Moreover, Swami Chandrasekharanand Saraswati (1930–2016), who was invited to represent South Asian

[377] The reference to Tompkins' "Bio-Energy Research Foundation" is a scarce piece of information. As discussed above, Tompkins founded his organisation in 1976; however, no further material ever mentions his organisation except for the above-quoted letters issued by KRN (Affiliated members and organisations of KRN, LGK, box 4). In an informal conversation with Degler and Bradford, they confirmed that aside from publication activities, Tompkins' foundation was unsuccessful (Bradford and Degler 2022). However, this KRN document and a letter sent to Kason in 1996 underpins that the Bio-Energy Research Foundation lasted at least until the mid-1990s (Tompkins to Kason, January 6, 1996, LGK, box 4).

[378] German original: „Das Kundalini Research Network (KRN) ist eine internationale Gruppe von Ärzten, Psychologen, Wissenschaftlern und anderen Gelehrten, Therapeuten und Einzelpersonen, die an der Verbreitung, Zusammenarbeit und Erforschung von spirituellen und paranormalen Bewusstseinszuständen und deren Beziehung zu dem Phänomen, das in der Yogi Tradition als Kundalini bekannt ist, interessiert sind" (KRN conference, LGK, box 4), translated by M.T.

[379] Graf Dürckheim and Maria Hippius (1909–2003) founded an educational centre at Todmoos-Rütte (Germany) in 1951. Baier defined this centre as an "existential-psychologische Bildungs- und Begegnungsstätte" (Baier 2017, 91, "existential-psychological educational and encounter centre"). It is likely that this centre served as the venue for the conference of KRN.

perspectives and was introduced as a descendant from a lineage of "kundalini experts", supposedly had assumed Krishna's role as a South Asian authority on kundalini.

The main organisers of the Todtmoos conference, Yvonne Kason, Joan Shivarpita Harrigan (n.d.a.), and Bonnie Greenwell (n.d.a.)[380] – all co-founders of KRN – underpin KRN's departure from KRF. Each of these women has a background in psychology or/and medical science, coordinated regional sections of the Spiritual Emergence Network (SEN) (see Chapter 23.3.3.), such as Kason in Toronto and Harrigan in Tennessee, and headed or founded institutes associated with research, counselling, or therapy of "spiritual emergencies", including Greenwell's involvement with the "Transpersonal Counseling Center" at ITP (California) and Kason's leadership position at the "Spiritual Emergence Research and Referral Clinic" (Toronto) (LGK, n.d.). These pieces of information suggest that counselling and therapy increasingly impacted kundalini research.

Canadian supporters of Krishna carried out some of the most essential activities after Krishna's death. Although KRFC ceased to exist in its original shape, some of its core members continued to walk down the path. One example was FIND, an informal group committed to supporting Krishna's work. Already formed during Krishna's lifetime, one of FIND's first activities was the active support of those volunteers who had remained in South Asia after Dippong's funding ended (see previous chapter). As Degler clarified, FIND was ultimately established as ICR (Degler 2023, 267, 312).[381]

On their webpage, ICR summarises their activities with the following words: "ICR holds conferences, distributes a newsletter, publishes articles, books, CD's [*sic*] and DVD's [*sic*] and maintains a reference library on the subject of Kundalini and consciousness" (ICR 2011). Additionally, they are creating e-books and audiobooks and encouraging cross-cultural research into historical cases of kundalini as part of Krishna's ongoing Anthology Project (see Chapter 13.2.1.2.). ICR has stayed true to these objectives now for thirty-eight years. Their unofficial centre is in Markdale, north of Toronto, at Paul and Dale Pond's private

[380] Bonnie Greenwell did her PhD in transpersonal psychology in the 1980s and published extensively on kundalini, including her contribution to *Kundalini Rising. Exploring the Energy of Awakening* (2009) and her book *The Kundalini Guide: A Companion for the Inward Journey* (2014). Moreover, she has played key roles in the dissemination of views on kundalini since the 1990s, has been involved in several events, and became a famous advocate of kundalini research and therapy (Greenwell 2015; Sovatsky 2023).

[381] There is no information on when this transition occurred or which other projects FIND was engaged with. However, it most likely happened somewhere between 1994 and 1996. A document of KRN, issued in 1994, mentions a FIND Research Trust, indicating that FIND then still existed (Affiliated members and organisations of KRN, LGK, box 4). Moreover, an archival document lists voting members of ICR's 1996 general meeting, suggesting that by then, FIND has transformed into ICR (ICR voting members list, LGK, box 4).

home. It houses ICR's main library, stores a copy of Krishna's legacy, and has served as the venue for their annual conferences for thirty-five years; ever since the COVID-19 pandemic, the annual conference moved online (Bradford and Degler 2022; Degler 2023, 299).

A rather recent development was the formation of the "Emerging Sciences Foundation" (ESF), devoted to kundalini research based on Gopi Krishna's thought. Michael Molina (n.d.a.) and Linda Molina (n.d.a.) founded the organisation in 2009 to investigate "a new phase of human evolution known as Higher Consciousness" (ESC, n.d.). Based in Southern California, ESF mainly operates online.[382]

While Krishna's kundalini interpretations underpin and motivate their work, they intentionally avoid the term "kundalini". According to the Molinas, their work's primary focus is higher consciousness, which they consider the potential goal of kundalini's rise (L. Molina and Molina 2022). Accordingly, their main research goal is the collection of empirical and quantitative data to find evidence for what they call higher states of consciousness. This is also evident from their webpage, where direct references to kundalini are scarce.[383] Instead, they speak of "humanity's dormant evolutionary potential" and "biological mechanisms behind [higher consciousness]" (ESC, n.d.).

The most interesting aspects of ESF are its research projects and employment in modern media and technology. Michael Molina especially designed an application for participants of their "Kundalini Experimental Project".[384] Brilliano – the name of the application – intends to support the "spiritual development" of its users. Praised as the "World's #1 Free App for Spiritual Experiencers, Seekers, and Meditators" ("Brilliano", n.d.), Molina was hoping that Brilliano could serve similar purposes to a sports application (L. Molina and Molina 2022). In other words, by tracking the sum of one's religious activities, such as meditation, yoga, or listening to a religious podcast, the application claims to "provide data-driven insights into your spiritual process" ("Brilliano", n.d.). Aside from the application, ESF made use of several online platforms to collect data and disseminate the achieved results, including the AI-powered platform github.com (M. Molina 2023). Closely affiliated with ICR, the Molinas have attended ICR's annual meetings, have invited ICR members to

[382] Their YouTube channel counts 4,190 followers (as a comparison, the YouTube channel of ICR has 390 followers), and they are equally active on Facebook and Instagram.

[383] Michael Molina underscored that by focusing on higher consciousness instead of exclusively on kundalini, they hoped to reach a broader audience (L. Molina and Molina 2022). As stated above in Chapter 13.1.1.3., Kieffer suggested a similar adjustment of KRF's research orientation in 1973 when he recommended omitting the term kundalini.

[384] The resemblance between ESC's "Kundalini Experimental Project" and Krishna's Yoga Experimental Project is striking. I was not able to discover if this resemblance was intended.

their own (online) symposia (held yearly from 2016 to 2021), and share some board members (Michael Bradford and Myrna Filman). Besides ICR, ESF collaborates with the "Kundalini Collective", a British support group that was founded in 2018 with the help of Bonnie Greenwell and the Centre for Biofield Sciences, a South Asia-based educational and training centre revolving around "bio-energetic research" (ESC, n.d.).

13.1.3. Summary

This chapter introduced the institutional organisation structure of Krishna's kundalini research project. The initial research centre, CIKR, expanded into an international organisation with many offshoots. Numerous examples underline Krishna's core position within the movement. Several documents and conversations suggest that the international KRF branches mainly served as institutions to propagate Krishna's ideas and books, with research projects playing a marginal or no role. Considering Krishna's hope of increasing kundalini research, these research centres suggest the ultimate failure of his vision.

Krishna's approach closely resembles that of other modern Hindu gurus who founded ashrams, meditation centres, and yoga centres and had a world-peace agenda. However, Krishna, in contrast, did not establish yoga centres but research foundations, assuming the role of a guru of a scientistic kundalini religion. His charisma, rather than well-thought-out research projects, was the primary factor in gaining followers who believed in his "authentic" experience. Therefore, it is not surprising that his closest supporters were profoundly impacted following Krishna's death in 1984. The transition of a movement without its central figure, a challenge many religious and political groups faced, became a significant hurdle for KRF. Despite this, some of his most dedicated supporters continued to promote kundalini research. The 1990s saw a surge of interest when KRA and KRN collaborated with transpersonal psychologists and SEN. However, except for ICR and ESF, research activities on kundalini have significantly diminished or ceased altogether.

13.2. Gopi Krishna's Yoga Experimental Project

Throughout his international career, Krishna advocated the need for empirical research and clinical studies to attest to his kundalini hypothesis (see Chapter 10.2.2.). He assumed a scientistic stance to meet this goal and collaborated with scientists. Some research projects

were initiated but never truly gained momentum, such as two government-funded research projects in South Asia (see Chapter 17.3.); other promising projects never materialised, including Krishna's invitation to Duke University by the parapsychologist Edward F. Kelly (see Chapter 12.6.). In light of these setbacks, Krishna decided to launch his own research project to further literary and empirical research into kundalini.

This chapter sheds light on Krishna's anticipated Yoga Experimental Project in Dehra Dun (Uttarakhand, India).[385] First, I will detail Krishna's distinct understanding of practice and research, with an explicit emphasis on research, and second, I will illustrate Krishna's vision of the Yoga Experimental Project and its incipient implementation.

13.2.1. The Interplay Between Practice and Research

Despite having practised meditation since the age of seventeen, Krishna did not consider himself a practitioner. Additionally, he emphasised that he was not a religious teacher. Instead, he underscored his sole interest in research. John White, a close collaborator of Krishna, underpinned Krishna's self-perception with the following statement: "At the moment, you are (unfairly) classed by some people along with various swamis, yogis, psychics and religious evangelists as a person with a Message. Your emphasis on scientific research is lost in the aura of mystification surrounding this whole area" (White to Krishna, May 7, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5).[386] The following chapters will examine Krishna's understanding of practice and research and scrutinise White's statement. Did Krishna truly have neither practice nor message? Or was his claim of kundalini's provability, in fact, the gospel he taught?

13.2.1.1. Practice

Krishna barely shared any information on his practice, refrained from offering general advice on practice-related matters, and certainly did not accept any disciples.[387] Owing to these

[385] Krishna and his supporters referred to the planned research centre as the "Yoga Experimental Project" and "Yoga Experimental Centre". To ensure coherence, I will use the designation "Yoga Experimental Project" when referring to both the centre and the planned project as a whole.

[386] I am indebted to John White for granting me permission to quote from his letters to Gopi Krishna (personal email communication).

[387] As discussed in Chapter 11.4., Krishna's final book *The Way to Self-Knowledge* (1985) poses an exception, as he details and recommends a particular meditation practice.

principles, Krishna earned a distinct reputation as different from other South Asian teachers. Perhaps Krishna and his supporters had pursued this strategy following frequent rejections due to Krishna's classification as a yogi. One notable example was the New York-based Magazine *Esquire. The Magazine for Men*: "Oh, dear – this is our third yogi query this week. Must be the season, I guess. Sorry, not for us" (Pesta to Kieffer, August 7, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.; W. I. Thompson 1974, 85–86; J. W. White 1975a, 66). It is more likely, however, that Krishna refrained from suggesting a practice because he never obtained, let alone developed, one. Talking to M. S. S. Gurucharan Singh Khalsa and the (para)psychologist Stanley Krippner (b. 1932) during their visit to Kashmir in 1974, Gopi Krishna underscored that he had no distinct technique to offer.[388] According to Khalsa, he said, "I cannot teach you anything, I can only encourage inquiry" (Fowlis to White, December 14, 1974, LGK, box 6.10.6.).

However, there are some exceptions to this rule: Krishna's supporter Joseph Dippong and the South Asian journalist R. K. Karanjia reported some practices they (theoretically) learnt from Krishna. Although Krishna did not present these practices as his own, they nonetheless warrant attention, given his prevailing dissociation from practices that targeted kundalini's activation. In the case of Dippong, the practice that Krishna described was perhaps rather intended as a deterrent against forcing kundalini's ascent:

> A [*sic*] unusual practice [that some yogis undertake] is that of cutting part of the ligament at the base of the tongue, a practice which takes months to complete since each new incision is made only after the previous one has healed. When the tongue is finally cut back far enough at its base, the yogi would then swallow his own tongue in order to induce suffocation. All of this is done in the great hope that under such extreme conditions, the Kundalini would rush up the spinal column to the brain and cause illumination. However, as Gopi Krishna explained, a great majority of these weird practices usually end in death. (Dippong 1977, 6)

[388] M. S. S. Gurucharan Singh Khalsa was a close disciple of Yogi Bhajan and Director of Yogi Bhajan's KRI (see Chapter 8). Despite tensions between Yogi Bhajan's KRI and Gopi Krishna's KRF, Khalsa seemed to hold a high opinion of Krishna. In his contribution to *Kundalini. Evolution and Enlightenment* (1979) and in a letter to John White, he expressed his respect for Krishna, emphasising that he "found him to be a very open and a very nice individual" (Fowlis to White, December 14, 1974, LGK, box 6.10.6.; G. S. Khalsa 1990, 134). This respect notwithstanding, Khalsa condemned Krishna's emphasis on the downsides of his experience. Krishna's agony, Khalsa maintained, was a consequence of the lack of a teacher and a technique and criticised Krishna's report as he claimed it "puts fear into many students. A warning without a technique is valueless. It only creates insecurity and misunderstanding" (G. S. Khalsa 1990, 135).

This practice is known as khechari mudra. Aside from Krishna, Mircea Eliade also mentions this practice in reference to kundalini. Unlike Krishna, Eliade suggests in his book *Yoga Immortality and Freedom* (1958) that khechari mudra is a potential yet rare practice to activate kundalini (Eliade 1958, 247–248).

Krishna was critical of modern South Asian yoga and meditation teachers and their suggested practices to raise kundalini. This implied, in particular, practices that involved external force or intervention, such as shaktipat, as advocated by Swami Muktananda, transcendental meditation, as introduced by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga.[389] However, khechari mudra is an unusual and extreme practice. Therefore, Krishna's supposed disapproval of it does not indicate a generally low opinion of yogic practices aimed at inducing kundalini's rise.

In any case, it is more likely that exercises involving meditation and breathing appealed to Krishna – presumably because his meditation practice resulted in the singular experience that altered the course of his life. Urdhva-retas was a notable practice that recurred in his writings and that R. K. Karanjia prominently featured in his "Kundalini-Yoga" series (Chapter 18.2.) (Krishna 2015, 44; Karanjia 1976f, 11). What Karanjia defined as the "reversal of sex power" (Karanjia 1976f, 11) refers to an ascetic practice traditionally associated with the sublimation of semen (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 180).[390] A suitable example of Krishna's perspective on urdhva-retas is available in Krishna's posthumously published book *Kundalini: The Direction of Future Research* (2016):

> It is this upward flow of the reproductive secretions that is known as *urdhva-retas* in Sanskrit. […] The internal suction of the genital secretions […] becomes distinctly perceptible on the arousal of the Serpent Power, as the process is then highly accelerated. The complete ascent of Kundalini into sahasrara signifies a complete reversal in the working of the reproductive mechanism. The whole produce of the genital organs, […] instead of pressing downward for an outlet through the usual channel of sensual excitement, now streams into the head in an unending stream of life-giving elixir to model and tone up the brain. (Krishna 2015, 44, original emphasis)

From this quote, it is evident that Krishna based his understanding of kundalini on the *haṭhayogic* model of *ūrdhvaretāḥ*. This indicates that Krishna approached urdhva-retas

[389] For an introduction to South Asian teachers who propounded theories and practices of kundalini, refer to Part II. Krishna's critique of such theories and practices is exemplified by his opposition to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, which is detailed in Chapter 16.3.2.

[390] Chapter 4.2.2.1. details the practice and philosophical background of *ūrdhvaretāḥ*.

rather from a theoretical than a practical point of view. According to Karanjia, however, Krishna did not merely consider urdhva-retas an explanatory model to better illustrate the internal changes following a kundalini awakening. Instead, Karanjia claimed that urdhva-retas was an exercise that Krishna suggested for evolving one's consciousness: "Gopi Krishna recommends the hoary yogic practice of Urdhav-reta [*sic*] that is, reversing the sexual process to sublimate the male semen or female ovum into subtle psychic energy, and make it stream up to irrigate and evolve the human mind to higher consciousness" (Karanjia 1976f, 11).

Despite Karanjia's assertion, Krishna never explicitly endorsed a specific exercise related to the kundalini process. Instead, he prioritised the outcomes over the methods. In other words, the particular techniques used to raise kundalini were not of primary concern to Krishna; what mattered most to him was the breadth of the experience and its aftermath. However, as noted earlier, Krishna only deemed a kundalini experience genuine and valuable if it occurred without external interference. This observation will require further examination in the context of Krishna's Yoga Experimental Project.

13.2.1.2. Research

Krishna envisioned kundalini research to consist of three complementary approaches: empirical investigations, literary research, and data collection through interviews, case studies, and questionnaires.

Owing to Krishna's interest in the experience and its psycho-physiological effects, he assumed an empiricist stance, comprehending religious practice as a scientific experiment that warrants scrutiny. Accordingly, Krishna asserted that he tried to place kundalini research "on the footing of regular science, demonstrable with empirical methods of which the laboratory has to be the human body itself" (Krishna 2009, 289). The "bodies" in question that Krishna hoped to investigate fell into four distinct categories of case studies: those with congenitally active kundalini, those with varying levels of kundalini activity from birth, those whose kundalini was activated later in life without any impact on their mental faculties, and those who participate in experiments with the goal to awaken their kundalini (Krishna 1990, 229–238). The final case among the four, i.e., individuals who had not yet experienced kundalini, became Krishna's primary focus for empirical investigations and will be detailed below.

As early as 1969, he advocated empirical research, which he eventually hoped to realise at the Yoga Experimental Project. Krishna's vision of empirical kundalini research mainly revolved around his kundalini hypothesis. In a letter to Krishna's friend and collaborator Carl Friedrich Freiherr von Weizsäcker, Krishna urges empirical experiments with volunteers to verify his hypothesis:

> The only conclusive evidence to prove my hypothesis in the eyes of men of science, will lie in making this mechanism abnormally active on the evolutionary side in the case of one, who is not gifted with it genetically, and to show that it can lead him to the same height of spirituality or genius as is naturally present in one who is born with the gift. (Krishna to Weizsäcker, August 5, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.)

Krishna's experiential research orientation traces back to efforts carried forward by Swami Vivekananda, whom Baier describes as "a pioneer of modern experiential religiosity oriented on scientism" (Baier 2019, 246).[391] Under the heading "Vedic science", Vivekananda propounded Hindu dharma as a scientific religion and religious practices as scientific experiments. Against the backdrop of "Vivekananda's homologizing of yogic experience with scientific empiricism" (Brown 2010, 244), meditation halls developed into laboratories, yogic exercises into experiments, and yogic practitioners into research subjects. Baier described this homologue with the following words: "Religious truth claims are […] seen as factual knowledge founded on reproducible perceptions. Spiritual practices are cast as experiments, serving to verify asserted truths. The relevant guidance to practices are understood as akin to experimental setups which in turn lead to demonstrable results" (Baier 2019, 249).

Gopi Krishna's writings resemble Vivekananda's promulgation of Vedic science, underscoring the primacy of empiricism and bodily experience for advancing scientific insights and new knowledge. The body assumed a particularly central role in Krishna's understanding of research: It enables the experience of kundalini, i.e., the research subject, and it serves as the key vessel for scientific experiments, both for the person experiencing kundalini and for the investigator exploring the experience – in the case of Krishna he united these two roles, meaning that he investigated his own psycho-physiological experience as if it was an empirical experiment. For Krishna, the body thus constituted the foundation upon which to induce epistemic beliefs.

[391] Refer to Chapter 5.3.1. for an overview of Swami Vivekananda's life, work, and contributions to kundalini's scientification.

Another field of research that Krishna bore in mind was consciousness research (see Chapter 20.4.1.). While he was critical of what Charles Tart defined as "altered states of consciousness" (Tart 1972), Krishna showed interest in such frontiers as psychic research, parapsychology, and Kirlian photography (Krishna 2009, 277).[392] His interest in consciousness research derived from associating kundalini with higher states of consciousness, supernormal facilities, and psychic research. Two important notions in this regard are genius and creativity: Genius, as discussed in Chapter 10.2.3., constitutes a central topic in Krishna's oeuvre. However, increased creativity as a marker of an awakened kundalini played an equally important role. He considered "creativity and mystical experience […] the two most productive states of the human mind" (Krishna 1974, 151). Higher states of consciousness, as induced by an active kundalini, would thus not only trigger genius but also foster creativity.[393] The foundation of two committees of KRFC's "Department of Scientific Research", exclusively dedicated to the investigation of creativity and the investigation of genius, respectively, demonstrate Krishna's particular interest in genius and creativity as two possible notions of higher consciousness triggered by kundalini (KRFC album, LGK, box 5.1.).

Krishna's anticipated empirical research projects thus aimed to investigate both the biochemical changes in the body and the evolution of consciousness to higher states. Across Krishna's books, these two research foci are interconnected: the experience of kundalini originates within the body, leading to higher states of consciousness, which in turn affect the body's responses to this evolved state.

In his contribution to White's edited volume *Kundalini. Evolution and Enlightenment* (1979), "The Importance and some Implications of a Scientific Investigation of the Phenomenon of Kundalini", Krishna mentioned another avenue of research into kundalini: In addition to empirically examining individuals with varying levels of active kundalini, Krishna pursued literary research as a complementary approach (Krishna 1990, 228–242).

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[392] Given that Krishna planned to launch a Kashmiri branch of the South Asian Parapsychological Society, perhaps he also investigated other fringe topics (Banerjee to Krishna, July 10 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5). This endeavour was planned with the South Asian parapsychologist H.N. Banerjee. After visiting Krishna in his home in Srinagar in July 1969, Banerjee sent him a letter with rules and regulations, suggesting that Krishna monitored national parapsychological activities: "I am enclosing, herewith, some rules and regulations that I have drafted for the management of Kashmir Parapsychological Society. They can be adopted after modifications (if any) by you" (*ibid.*).

[393] The (para)psychologist Stanley Krippner had already suggested a correlation between creativity and consciousness before Krishna. Creativity has thenceforth developed into a central topic within parapsychology, integral studies, consciousness research, and the Human Potential movement (Krippner 1962, 10–13; M. Murphy 1982, 2).

He believed that this second avenue of investigation offered valuable insights into the experience of kundalini: "In the utterances of the ancient and medieval Yoga-saints of India there are clear hints couched in enigmatic language about the supreme experience, which completely tallies with my own" (Krishna to Weizsäcker, August 5, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.). As Bradford emphasised, Krishna recognised the demanding nature of empirical research, which requires significant attention and effort (Bradford and Degler 2022). In contrast, Krishna considered oral and written traditions related to kundalini as more accessible. However, this perspective appears rather naïve, as it overlooks the philosophical and methodological complexities involved in studying yoga traditions.

Krishna admitted that he was not well versed in premodern concepts of *kuṇḍalinī*: "I do not pose as an authority on the traditional ideas about Kundalini, as expressed in the Tantras, the books on Hatha-Yoga, Shakti Shastras or other works pertaining to it" (Krishna to Kieffer, April 5, 1980, LGK, box 4, file A). Consequently, he suggested that a team of scholars should study ancient treatises, including the *Tantras*, *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and *Puranas*, along with narrations of the lives of great yogis, saints, and mystics from South Asia and beyond (Krishna 1990, 228–229). A notable example of Krishna's literary research was his Anthology Project. Situated at the New Delhi KRF branch and launched during the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Anthology Project aimed to find evidence for an activated kundalini in the lives of mystics, saints, and geniuses (Bradford and Degler 2022).

The literary study differed from Krishna's anticipated empirical research in that it was not intended to provide evidence for kundalini's existence but rather to illustrate its universal character by collecting cases of mystics and illuminated individuals throughout history and the globe:

> With the help of our Canadian friends we also propose to complete a World Anthology of all expanded consciousness experiences of which record is available in different parts of the world. This is a major project and the work may run into three or four volumes of about five hundred pages each. (Krishna to Tompkins, February 10, 1978, LGK, box 6.8.5.)[394]

Moreover, Krishna aimed to underpin his claim of an ever-increasing frequency of exalted states of consciousness evoked by kundalini. According to Krishna, the awakening of

[394] Lee Sannella seemed to share Krishna's interest in the universal character of kundalini and conducted literary research to reach similar conclusions (Sannella 1976, 14–24). Refer to Chapter 22.1. for further information on Sannella and his research.

kundalini used to be an extremely rare phenomenon throughout history (Krishna 1972c, 83). His research into the lives of saints, mystics, etc. however consolidated his conviction of an increasing number of exceptional individuals undergoing an internal transformation towards higher states of consciousness. As one of his supporters underlined: "Gopi Krishna feels that within one or two decades, literally thousands of people will attain this faculty as part of a natural evolutionary jump" (Reed, n.d.).

The role model for this endeavour was Richard M. Bucke, who had engaged on a similar project some seventy years earlier. In his 1901 publication *Cosmic Consciousness*, Bucke suggested a list of outstanding personalities he attributed with an exalted form of consciousness: cosmic consciousness. Notable examples of Bucke's list were Gautama the Buddha, William Blake, Walt Whitman, Emanuel Swedenborg, and Ralph Waldo Emerson (Bucke 1905, xvii–xviii). Moreover, Bucke also had similar ideas regarding the frequencies of instances of cosmic consciousness, maintaining "that cases of cosmic consciousness should become more numerous from age to age, and not only so but that they should become more perfect, more pronounced" (Bucke 1905, 56; Reed, n.d.).

Some of Krishna's supporters carried Krishna's initial anthology project further. Of foremost importance is the Institute of Consciousness Research (ICR). On their homepage, several historical figures are listed and discussed, who presumably attained higher states of consciousness in the wake of their kundalini activation. ICR's selection, including Swedenborg, Emerson, and Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, illustrates Bucke's lasting influence (ICR 2023).

A potential third research province envisioned by Krishna involved conducting interviews, distributing questionnaires among research subjects, and collecting case studies. This approach was intended to complement the empirical and literary research. While the idea of conducting interviews appears to have remained unrealised, several sources indicate that a questionnaire was effectively designed. However, many questions remain unanswered: the source material does not clarify when the idea of the questionnaire was first conceived, when it was actively pursued, or whether it was ever actually implemented.[395]

Modelling the questionnaire was a collaborative effort between Jamuna Prasad, the head of the Allahabad Institute for Kundalini Research, Yvonne Kason, Director of Scientific Research at KRFC, and Gopi Krishna. In a letter to Prasad, Kason indicates that they co-

[395] Unfortunately, I was unable to view an example of the questionnaire. Therefore, evaluating its questions and overall significance is challenging.

developed a preliminary version of the questionnaire: "The current questionnaire was formed on the recommendation of Pandit Krishna as a combination of your original questionnaire, a similar one that I had devised, and several pertinent questions suggested by the Pandit himself" (Kason to Prasad, January 5, 1979, LGK, box 6.7.2.). The questionnaire was designed to function as a standardised form across all branches of KRF and, ultimately, to be implemented at the Yoga Experimental Project. As Kason emphasised, Krishna placed significant value on statistics. This aligns with his scientistic aim to demonstrate the existence of kundalini through scientific methodology. To this end, Krishna proposed that all KRFs use the same questionnaire and research procedures, pool their data, and analyse it with a specially developed computer coding system (Krishna to Prasad, January 17, 1979, LGK, box 6.7.2.).[396] While the development of the questionnaire appears to have progressed, there is no evidence that it was actually implemented at any of the KRFs.

During the 1990s, Kason assumed the role of Chair of the KRN Questionnaire Research Project. While I was unable to obtain additional information about the project, it indicates that the questionnaire continued to be a part of kundalini research efforts after Krishna's passing (Kason 2023). However, due to the absence of published results or even an unpublished report, the questionnaire likely represents yet another instance of Krishna's unsuccessful attempts to advance research into kundalini.

The collection of case histories followed two intersecting approaches: standardised case histories, which aligned with the questionnaire, and freely narrated case reports. As Krishna's books gained prominence, numerous individuals reached out to share their experiences. Krishna hoped that by analysing these personal reports alongside standardised parameters and questionnaire results, the accumulated data would support his kundalini hypothesis. While all experience reports and case histories were deemed valuable for the data pool, Krishna appeared to prioritise cases from renowned scientists, scholars, and other distinguished individuals (Degler 2023, 294–295).

In a letter to a supporter, Krishna discussed the possibility of placing advertisements in magazines and newspapers in South Asia and the United States to invite individuals to contribute their experiences to scientific study (*ibid*.). Additionally, he proposed issuing a specific call for case histories focusing on "symptoms" associated with the "activity" of urdhva-retas. He stated: "A call for case histories from those who display this telltale

[396] It is striking that Krishna suggested omitting mention of the word kundalini. Perhaps he hoped to increase the number of participants if kundalini was not explicitly mentioned (Degler 2023, 295).

symptom should clearly show to what wide extent this still-unknown activity of the reproductive system prevails among people. It should also bring confirmation to what I am asserting" (Krishna 2015, 44). Thus, Krishna anticipated that this approach would confirm the universal nature of kundalini's influence on the physical body.

Referring to the proposed investigations within the three research avenues outlined in this chapter, Krishna highlighted the significance of his project of kundalini research: "For the first time in history the veil of mystery is being lifted from this anscient [*sic*] system to place the real secret in the hands of scholars for study and investigation" (Krishna to Weizsäcker, August 5, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.). Despite Krishna's claim of a unique and innovative approach, his overall research strategy closely resembles earlier efforts to explore yogic principles and their physiological effects.

A notable historical example is Swami Kuvalayananda's yogic research at the Kaivalyadhama Yoga Ashram during the 1920s (see Chapter 5.3.5.). Kuvalayananda's investigations into yogic physiology and philosophy are similar to Krishna's own approach of using both empirical and literary research to support his kundalini hypothesis (Alter 2004, 86). Another parallel pertains to Kuvalayananda and Krishna's shared Hindu nationalist inclinations, with both pursuing their research within the context of a vision for India's leading role in yoga research.

Despite these similarities, it is surprising that Krishna did not reference Kuvalayananda's work or visit Kaivalyadhama's laboratory. Initially, Krishna's engagement with South Asian research projects may have been limited due to early disappointments with South Asians during the initial phase of his kundalini experience.[397] Additionally, in the early stages of his kundalini research, Krishna focused on collaborations in Europe and North America, to build his international reputation. However, in the 1970s, he began collaborating with the Indian government and two medical institutions in New Delhi and Bangalore.

Given Kaivalyadhama's esteemed reputation and ongoing yoga research, it seems unlikely that Krishna was unaware of it. However, since kundalini research played only a marginal role at Kaivalyadhama Krishna might have had limited interest in it, even if he was aware.

[397] Krishna describes his frustration and disappointment during his initial efforts to gather information throughout his publications, including *Kundalini. The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967), where he writes: "I looked around desperately for guidance, only to face disappointment on all sides" (Krishna 1967, 106).

Christopher Hills' *Nuclear Evolution* (1977) is the only source that references both Krishna's research endeavours and activities at Kaivalyadhama.[398] Hills's statements are somewhat ambiguous. He critisised Krishna's appeal to scientific research, suggesting it lacked merit compared to the previous studies at Kaivalyadhama (Hills 1977, 130), yet he also praised Krishna's call for a more thorough investigation of kundalini, stating, "it is good to have Gopi Krishna come out and sound a note of caution and send out a clarion call for [kundalini's] proper investigation" (*ibid*., 72). Hills' positive view of Krishna's research is further reflected in his correspondence with Krishna in 1977 and 1978, where he expressed admiration for Krishna's work, describing it as "a powerful vibration of the truth" (Hills to Krishna, July 25, 1977, LGK, box 6.8.5.).[399]

In sum, whether intentional or incidental, Krishna's research approach mirrored Kuvalayananda's empirical investigations into the efficacy of yogic techniques. Consequently, Kaivalyadhama can be seen as a precursor to Krishna's Yoga Experimental Project.

13.2.2. The Yoga Experimental Project (1982)

In the final years of Krishna's life, his main attention was focused on launching what he would call the Yoga Experimental Project. Although the Project was never realised due to Krishna's passing, it nonetheless yields significance since it represented the culmination of his project of kundalini research. Initially intended as a permanent branch of his South Asian wing of KRF, Krishna eventually decided to plan it as a laboratory. According to Degler, this was "a major shift in Gopi Krishna's focus" (Degler 2023, 267). By "major shift", Degler refers to Krishna's active engagement in opening a research centre himself instead of aiming to persuade others to undertake such a task.

The project began to take shape in early 1981 when Krishna's son, Nirmal, successfully scouted a property in Dehra Dun, Uttarakhand.[400] Krishna considered it to be ideally suited for their envisioned project: "I recently paid a visit to a small town, known as Dehra Dun,

[398] The first edition of Hills' *Nuclear Evolution* was published in 1968, before Krishna promulgated kundalini research. Consequently, the first edition does not mention Krishna (Hills 1968).

[399] John White, an old friend of Hills, had encouraged Hills to contact Krishna (Hills to Krishna, July 25, 1977, LGK, box 6.8.5.).

[400] Krishna's correspondence reveals that he and his team spent several years searching for a suitable property before ultimately selecting Dehra Dun as the ideal location for their kundalini experimental centre (Krishna to Ferrantani, January 19, 1981, LGK, box 6.7.6.).

about 260 kilometers from Delhi, nestling at the foot of the Himalayas. There, I found a piece of land which suited our needs perfectly" (Krishna to Ferrantani, January 19, 1981, LGK, box 6.7.6.). Launching a centre in Dehra Dun would allow Krishna and his supporters to evade extreme temperatures and avoid Srinagar's ongoing political conflicts.[401] Moreover, as his international fame increased, Krishna saw the need to offer a suitable facility to house his international guests, with Delhi being too busy and Srinagar too remote and politically unstable (Krishna to Prasad, January 3, 1980, LGK, box 6.7.2.).

Degler designated May 10, 1981, as the official start date of the Yoga Experimental Project. On this day, Krishna and several close supporters moved some of their belongings and office materials to Dehra Dun (Degler 2023, 268). However, the property Krishna purchased required extensive restructuring. Therefore, although the official move occurred in May 1981, the project was far from complete. Over the next three years, Krishna's dedicated supporters worked to construct a fence and several buildings, set up the garden, and manage the finances needed for the project.[402] Michael Bradford, one of the volunteers, described the considerable effort required to build the centre. A small group of volunteers stayed in South Asia for several years under challenging conditions, fully committing themselves to the project. In addition to buildings for staff and volunteers, the construction team developed an office, a bookshop, and a reference library (Bradford and Degler 2022; Beattie, Bradford, and Koops 1984).[403]

Plans were also underway to establish a kundalini clinic on the premises of the Experimental Project. The clinic was intended to monitor, guide, and assist individuals who believed themselves to be undergoing a potentially challenging kundalini awakening. Although not explicitly mentioned, the clinic would have likely been modelled after Kaivalyadhama's Yogic Hospital and the San Francisco-based Kundalini Clinic (ICR 2002, 9).

[401] Throughout the year, Krishna typically alternated between Delhi in the winter and Srinagar in the summer, as Delhi was too hot in the summer and Srinagar too cold in the winter. Considering his health and age, Krishna hoped to find a location where he would not need to relocate twice a year. Despite this desire, he continued to move between Srinagar and Delhi to manage tasks related to Samiti in Srinagar and oversee the Research and Publication Trust in Delhi (Degler 2023, 269).

[402] As previously mentioned, after Dippong ceased funding Krishna's projects in 1979, the situation grew even more difficult, with volunteers living modestly. Despite efforts by FIND, the successor organisation to ICR, to raise funds, financial resources became increasingly scarce. Nevertheless, a monthly amount was continuously sent to the remaining volunteers in South Asia. This was organised mainly by Michael Bradford (Bradford and Degler 2022; Krishna to Koops, October 18, 1983, LGK, box 6.1.1.).

[403] According to Bradford, language barriers with the local construction workers represented a central strain. Moreover, the group did not possess modern tools for construction works (Bradford and Degler 2022).

According to Bradford, the Experimental Project was completed in early 1983. However, Krishna never returned to Dehra Dun before his passing. As a result, the centre was never inaugurated and was eventually sold (Bradford and Degler 2022).[404] Consequently, the Yoga Experimental Project remained a never-realised vision. Nevertheless, given the importance Krishna attributed to the project, it remains valuable to discuss his original idea.

In a letter to his supporter Evelyn Ferrantani, Krishna elucidated on the anticipated undertaking:

> The purpose of the Experimental Centre is to invite volunteers for training in intensive forms of Yoga, which lead to the arousal of Kundalini. Unless we are able to demonstrate the physiological aspects of an awakened personality, the views I am expressing will not receive the hallmark of a scientific discovery. (Krishna to Ferrantani, January 19, 1981, LGK, box 6.7.6.)

Although Krishna's envisioned empirical research aimed to include individuals with varying levels of activated kundalini, the Experimental Project primarily focused on one particular group of individuals: "*Those cases who voluntarily offer themselves for the bold exploit of rousing the serpent power*" (Krishna 1990, 239, original emphasis). Krishna underscored that a minimum of one hundred research subjects was required for the successful execution of the experiment and to achieve the desired outcomes. These subjects would need to be monitored for at least five years (Krishna 1990, 239; ICR 2002, 9).

It is unclear how Krishna initially planned to determine the suitability of candidates for the Experimental Project. While he emphasised the importance of careful selection, his writings do not specify the criteria he and his team intended to use for choosing participants. In contrast, ICR's *A Memorandum for Kundalini Research* (2002) provides vital information on this topic.[405] It outlines several criteria for participant selection, with the primary requirement being "excellent physical and mental health in order to minimize the chance of any physiological or psychological distress" (ICR 2002, 9). The document also notes other important factors, such as personal attitude and heredity, to ensure successful participation.

[404] Chapter 13.1.2. discusses events that occurred after Krishna's passing.

[405] ICR's proposal for kundalini research rests on Krishna's kundalini hypothesis and aligns with his three avenues of kundalini research, as outlined in his article *The Phenomenon of Kundalini* (1975). Therefore, the content described in ICR's *Memorandum* likely conforms with Krishna's initial views on the Experimental Project at Dehra Dun (ICR 2002; Krishna 1990). For these reasons, although it was published much later, I use the *Memorandum* as a primary source for the Experimental Centre at Dehra Dun. I am indebted to Michael Bradford and Teri Degler for sharing the document's current version with me.

The idea that hereditary traits constitute a favourable condition for the awakening of kundalini is a central tenet of Krishna's theory (Krishna 1976b, 33). John White describes Krishna's view on heredity with the following words: "Gopi Krishna maintains that enlightenment is an evolutionary process, with heredity playing an important role by stamping the genes of the enlightened so that their biological gains through spiritual disciplines can be passed to their progeny" (J. W. White 1990b, 354–355).[406] The implications of incorporating heredity into the selection criteria for empirical kundalini research are far-reaching. According to the *Memorandum*, "several generations of favorable heredity are necessary to produce a complete success" (ICR 2002, 11). However, the document does not provide guidance on how to assess an individual's genetic disposition or trace instances of "genius", such as mystical experiences or exceptional philosophical, artistic, or scientific achievements, in one's ancestry.[407] These shortcomings undermine the document's demand for "the most rigorous selection criteria" (*ibid*.).

Regarding the staff of the anticipated Experimental Project, Krishna planned to appoint several resident scientists,[408] scholars, and "yoga specialists" (Krishna 1990, 239). Now, what were the staff's responsibilities, and more specifically, what was the "scientific" objective of the Experimental Project?

A central objective of the project was to monitor, record, and study the physiological and psychological developments of the research subjects. The scientific staff would focus on deviations in functions and parameters such as metabolism, heart rate, blood pressure, and cerebrospinal fluid. The physiological data collected through these observations would be compared with previous results from empirical research and statistical data gathered during case history surveys. Additionally, the project aimed to collect psychological data to verify alterations of consciousness.

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[406] White refers in this quote to Lamarckism. The French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744–1829) proposed that species were not created in their current form but evolved over time through a process he described as the inheritance of acquired characteristics. According to Lamarck, organisms can adapt to their environments and pass these acquired traits to their offspring (C. Zimmer 2002, 14–15).

[407] It would be intriguing to determine whether the Experimental Project investigated the primary research areas of KRFC's "Department of Scientific Research", such as insanity, genius, creativity, and cases of genuine illumination. Unfortunately, there appears to be no available information on whether these aspects were explored (Kason to Prasad, January 5, 1979, LGK, box 6.7.2.).

[408] According to Degler, Jamuna Prasad was selected as one of the scientists-in-residence at the Experimental Centre (Degler 2023, 294). Prasad's involvement from the very inception of the idea of the Experimental Project is well documented. Krishna corresponded extensively with Prasad, particularly in relation to Prasad's association with the Allahabad KRF. From 1979 onward, Krishna continued to share his perspectives on the Experimental Centre with Prasad (Krishna to Prasad, January 17, 1979, LGK, box 6.7.2.).

Krishna posited that changes in consciousness are linked to biological alterations, which theoretically would allow for empirical monitoring. However, as he noted, no effective method had yet been developed to measure brain stimulation in response to the rise of kundalini. Therefore, another key task of the centre would be to compare physiological and psychological data to gain insights into how biochemical variables interact with the "psychic energy used by the brain" (Krishna 1972c, 95). To undertake this complex task, the centre would require experts with multidisciplinary expertise, including biology, medicine, neurology, (para)psychology, and psychiatry. This dual focus on biochemical changes and their psychological implications aligned with Krishna's research interests, as discussed above (ICR 2002, 9; Krishna 1972c, 94–96; Tompkins 1994).

While the scientific staff would primarily collect and evaluate experimental results, the "yoga specialists" would be responsible for preparing the research subjects for their anticipated voluntary awakening of kundalini. The primary goal of this preparatory phase was the "purification of the nervous system" through "both physical and mental discipline" (ICR 2002, 9), including pranayama, physical exercises, a balanced diet, prayer, and meditation. These practices were intended to purify the subjects, not to trigger the awakening of kundalini. Additionally, they served as a means to "locate subjects in whom the energy is active enough to be easily detectable" (*ibid*., 10).

Unlike the purifying practises, neither the *Memorandum* nor Krishna's writings addressed specific methods for triggering kundalini. The *Memorandum* merely emphasised that various methods existed and needed to be tested to assess their effectiveness:

> The next stage of the research would be primarily concerned with the development of safe and effective methods for the arousal of the mechanism [kundalini] and also to establish which methods work best for an individual given his or her particular psychological and physiological makeup. The wide range of techniques developed in the past for awakening the mechanism tend to indicate that such inherent differences are a major factor in the probability of success of any given method. (*ibid*.,11)

The *Memorandum*'s omission of specific methods for triggering kundalini aligns with Krishna's overall approach. As noted earlier, Krishna rejected external interventions, such as shaktipat and the use of psychoactive substances, insisting that a genuine kundalini experience should result solely from individual effort combined with favourable factors like heredity, lifestyle, and attitude. Nevertheless, for research purposes, he appeared to deviate from these principles.

As Degler highlighted, Krishna planned to personally oversee a small group of selected research subjects who had demonstrated promising results in empirical tests. These individuals would receive specialised insights and teachings not available to other participants, with Krishna aiming to teach "them techniques that could potentially awaken kundalini" (Degler 2023, 267). Despite Krishna's repeated assertions that he did not guide individuals' rise of kundalini, accept disciples, or teach specific techniques, his intentions at the Experimental Project contradicted these claims. While it is possible that Krishna intended to introduce members of this "inner circle" to practices related to urdhva-retas, no further details are available to confirm this possibility.

A final note is due regarding the Experimental Project's technological equipment. In addition to utilising various devices to gather physiological and psychological data, Krishna sought to develop a device capable of measuring subtle energies.[409] He asserted in several publications that kundalini and prana, despite their subtle nature, were empirical facts, and thus measurable, given the right technology (Krishna 1976b, 206; 2015, 48). This, however, denoted the crux of the problem, as John White aptly underscored: "The potential scientific and social significance of kundalini research should be clear. But the research itself is no simple matter. For one thing, the necessary technology for detecting and measuring pranic energy exists only in rudimentary form" (J. W. White 1990a, 216).

Adhering to the principle that "there are no problems, only solutions", Krishna and his team identified another key research goal: "One of the primary goals of the experimental project will be to develop technologies which will enable the suspected energies involved to be measured quantitatively" (ICR 2002, 11). It remains unclear who would be responsible for (and capable of) developing such a device and whether concrete plans were in place.[410] The only additional information about the technological device is its vague association with the Kirlian photographic technique, which could serve as a model for more advanced methods (Krishna 1990, 230). Given that this is the sole technological reference for the Experimental Project, Kirlian Photography merits closer examination.

Olav Hammer described Kirlian photography as a "paratechnology" (Hammer 2004, 239) situated "on the contested borderline between science and belief" (*ibid*., 241). This technique

[409] Krishna initially had reservations about using technological devices. Chapter 21.3. discusses Krishna's views on biofeedback machines and his relationship with some of their key proponents.

[410] As Chapters 21 through 24 demonstrate, the use and prevalence of technological devices for kundalini research were more advanced in the United States. In particular, the staff at the Kundalini Clinic (see Chapter 22) employed and developed innovative technological devices.

dates back to the late 1930s when Semyon Davidovitch Kirlian (1898–1978) and his wife Valentina Khrisanfovna Kirlian (n.d.a.) inadvertently discovered an electrographic method, later known as Kirlian photography. The method is relatively straightforward: an object is placed on a photographic plate, and when a high voltage is applied, the plate is exposed to create an image. Kirlian photographs are characterised by vibrant halos around the photographed objects. Proponents claim that this technique reveals the objects' energy fields, or what are known as their "auras", which supposedly vary depending on the object's energetic state (*ibid*., 240).

Several parapsychologists scrutinised these claims, hoping to validate Kirlian photography as a diagnostic tool or as evidence of psychic healing (Amos et al. 1972, 63; Moss and Johnson 1972, 43). Notably, the US-American (para)psychologist Thelema Moss (1918–1997) conducted significant follow-up research at UC Los Angeles' Neuropsychiatric Institute in 1972. Moss examined individuals claiming healing powers and an equivalent number of individuals undergoing energy-healing treatment. Using Kirlian photography, Moss captured images of their fingertips before and after treatment. Moss noted changes in the halo's dimensions and brightness, interpreting these as evidence of the existence of an etheric body and the energy transfer from the healer to the patient (Moss and Johnson 1972, 27–43).

Despite various studies discrediting Kirlian photography as unscientific and implausible, it has continued to intrigue many believers (Watkins and Bickel 1991, 221). Krishna and his followers also closely followed the developments in Kirlian research. In *The Direction of Future Research*, Krishna mentioned Kirlian photography as an initial step toward studying subtle energies: "A beginning has been made with the Kirlian photography, but further advancement is needed to bring this elusive substance [prana] within the orbit of research" (Krishna 2015, 40). Moreover, Kirlian photography was celebrated in Karanjia's "Kundalini-Yoga" series (see Chapter 18.2.) as "scientific proof of Prana-Shakti" (Karanjia 1976g, 11). For these reasons, any technological device Krishna anticipated for measuring subtle energies would likely have been modelled after Kirlian photography.[411]

The Bihar School of Yoga also expressed interest in Kirlian photography and shared other ties with the Experimental Project. Established in 1963 by Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1923–2009), the Bihar School of Yoga accommodated from 1977 the "International Yoga

[411] Another potential technological device for measuring subtle energies could have been Motoyama's "Chakra Instrument" (CI). Given Krishna's contact with Motoyama, Krishna must have been aware of Motoyama's CI. This subject will be addressed in more detail as part of the excursus on Motoyama, Chapter 3.

Fellowship Research Co-ordinating Centre".[412] This centre included several of Satyananda's disciples, notably the psychologist Swami Anandakapila Saraswati (Jonn Mumford, b. 1937), who authored several books on kundalini. The centre initially aimed to collect and consolidate information on various research centres and yoga-related projects and make this data available to the public. Topics covered included kundalini yoga, psychic surgery, pyramidology, Kirlian photography, biofeedback, and extrasensory perception (ESP), among others. Although the centre had not conducted physical experiments as of 1977, it intended to do so in the future (Shankardevananda to Krishna, February 10, 1977, LGK, box 6.6.2.).

Bradford and Degler noted that the Bihar School of Yoga had a particular interest in kundalini research and sought to collaborate with Krishna's KRF (Bradford and Degler 2022; Degler 2023, 228).[413] George Tompkins, in particular, worked to facilitate this collaboration while staying in South Asia for several years after Krishna's passing. With the assistance of some members of the Bihar School of Yoga, Tompkins aimed to recruit participants for a follow-up Experimental Project. A brief note in the 1994 KRN Newsletter mentions: "George Tompkins recently traveled to Europe from India with Swami Naranjan of the Bihar School of Yoga. George spent several weeks soliciting candidates for the Kundalini Research Association International's Kundalini Experimental Project" (KRN 1994, 3). Despite Tompkins' efforts, no collaborative projects materialised.

With the Yoga Experimental Project, Krishna hoped to finally institutionalise his vision of the interplay between practice and research. Although the centre never operated, the Experimental Project denotes a key outcome of Krishna's project of kundalini research. This is evident from ICR's elaborated research proposal. It highlights the Experimental Project as one of three avenues for investigating Krishna's kundalini hypothesis and has played a role to date among Krishna's successors. Aside from Krishna's supporters, his research endeavours had no lasting effect, perhaps precisely due to his unique stance, aligning with the picture that White conveyed.

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[412] Satyananda Saraswati emerged from the modern yoga lineage of Swami Sivananda. In 1963, Satyananda established his own yoga brand, known as Satyananda Yoga, and founded the Bihar School of Yoga. For a comprehensive overview of Satyananda's contributions within the context of transnational yoga, see Bartos (2021). The excursus on Motoyama, Chapter 3 provides further details on Satyananda's collaborations with Hiroshi Motoyama.

[413] According to Krishna, the research centre at the Bihar School of Yoga was a direct reaction to the research carried out by the government of India at NIMHANS in Bangalore: "The Bihar School of Yoga has formed an international committee for research on Kundalini and altered states of consciousness on the lines followed by the Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences Bangalore" (Krishna to Iengar, February 28, 1977, LGK, box 6.6.2.; Degler 2023, 228). Refer to Chapter 17.3.3. for more details on the kundalini research at NIMHANS.

14. Summary

In the previous chapters, I introduced Pandit Gopi Krishna, who claimed to have experienced kundalini and pioneered international research collaborations to validate its existence. While Krishna aimed to demonstrate kundalini as a biological mechanism through empirical research, his broader objective was not merely to convince others but to chart a path for advancing humanity and to emphasise India's leadership in this global endeavour. To this end, Krishna adopted a humanistic stance, advocating for peace and social justice while simultaneously promoting a Hindu nationalist agenda (see Chapters 17 and 18).

Despite the substantial impact of his books, which attracted a global following, Krishna's kundalini research ultimately did not achieve its intended success. A key reason for this failure was his adherence to a religious agenda without fully committing to the role of a religious leader. While he promoted the idea of empirical research, his hypotheses were grounded primarily in personal, bodily experiences rather than conventional scientific methodologies. Krishna's attempt to straddle the line between religious and scientific communities, seeking to bridge these distinct frameworks, failed to resonate with either group as he had hoped.

However, Krishna did garner a dedicated following among the few hundred members of KRF and close collaborators, who revered him as a "master" (Weizsäcker to Krishna, March, 10, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.2.) and viewed his research project as a "holy mission" (Kason to Prasad, January 5, 1979, LGK, box 6.7.2.). Despite this veneration, Krishna's kundalini research did not evolve into a new religious movement akin to those founded by figures like Swami Muktananda and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. The absence of essential elements such as initiation, practice, rituals, and other unifying aspects prevented Krishna's movement from achieving the status of a religious community.

After several setbacks, the Yoga Experimental Project can be seen as a final effort to establish a centre dedicated to the empirical investigation of kundalini, where Krishna and his supporters could work independently. This project was not just an attempt to validate his research; it was also a culmination of his international collaborations, achievements, and challenges. Ultimately, however, it served as a last-ditch effort to salvage a research community that never truly materialised.

In sum, Gopi Krishna was globally recognised primarily for his publications rather than for his kundalini research, reflecting a narrative of both success and failure.

PART IV

Gopi Krishna's Key Collaborators

This part highlights four seminal collaborators involved with Krishna's project, illustrating its international nature: The German scientist Carl Friedrich Freiherr von Weizsäcker, the US-American author John White, the South Asian politician Karan Singh, and the South Asian journalist R. K. Karanjia. Unlike those figures portrayed in previous chapters, the individuals introduced in this part did not officially participate in Krishna's KRFs. They might have established their own research foundations with Krishna, as in the case of Weizsäcker, or have navigated government-funded research projects, as Karan Singh did. However, while Krishna's charisma and the content of his theories motivated these individuals to promote his cause, they assumed a different, more independent role. John White's distinct function within Krishna's international web of contributors, then again, eludes accurate categorisation. While not an official member of Krishna's KRF, his level of commitment resembled that of Krishna's closest supporters. White, therefore, counted among Krishna's supporters and still maintained a certain critical stance. Several other individuals who showed genuine interest in Krishna's project included Sinai, Carl Friedrich Basedow, William I. Thompson, and Edgar Mitchell; these others will be discussed as part of the examinations of Weizsäcker and White.

The primary objective of Part IV is to elucidate the influential actors whose support enabled Krishna's project to gain traction nationally and internationally – despite its ultimate failure. The underlying hypothesis posits Krishna's project as a collaborative endeavour involving individuals from diverse professional and social backgrounds. While kundalini served as the unifying topic of Krishna's project, loyalty to his person and commitment to his views were essential conditions of participation. Therefore, despite Krishna's differentiation from other religious teachers, such as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Swami Muktananda, his strategy nonetheless resembled theirs.

This part is divided into four chapters, each dedicated to one of the above-mentioned collaborators. Weizsäcker, White, Singh, and Karanjia will be introduced chronologically according to their initial commencement of support. While Weizsäcker and White's presentations will demonstrate the international aspect of Krishna's project, Singh and Karanjia's example underscores its nationalistic implications.

A European and US-American Collaborators

15. Carl Friedrich Freiherr von Weizsäcker and other European Voices of Support

Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker was not the first European to collaborate with Krishna but developed into one of his fiercest supporters in Europe. This chapter will introduce the person and work of Weizsäcker, shed light on his friendship and partnership with Krishna, and explore two of their key projects. As a brief excursus, I will introduce Barbara Rotraut Pleyer (Sinai), whose "activism" was decisive for Krishna's first steps in Europe. The interactions and relationships of the figures introduced in this chapter exemplify peace efforts during the 1970s – an observation that will be revisited in the chapter's concluding remarks.

15.1. Weizsäcker's Life and Work

Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker (1912–2007) belonged to a prominent German family raised to the status of inheritable nobility in 1916.[414] Throughout his life, Weizsäcker, married with four children, lived in Germany but travelled extensively. Today, he is primarily recognised as a physicist and philosopher. Politics, religion, and peace research, however, were also integral aspects of his interests and life (Bartosch 2015, ix).

Initially aspiring to study philosophy, Weizsäcker, guided by his mentor and friend, Werner Heisenberg, opted to pursue physics instead.[415] According to Heisenberg, genuine insights into philosophical questions are attainable only to those trained in physics (Weizsäcker 1977, 556). Hence, Weizsäcker studied physics under Heisenberg, achieving his habilitation at the age of twenty-four. During his career, he was associated with prestigious research institutes, including the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Physics in Berlin and the Max Planck Institute for

[414] Other renowned members include Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker's father, Ernst von Weizsäcker (1882–1951), who was a diplomat and politician, and Weizsäcker's younger brother, Richard von Weizsäcker (1920–2015), German president from 1984 through 1994. By the end of World War I, most German-speaking countries had abolished their monarchies, and titles such as "Freiherr" lost their recognition. This notwithstanding, the Weizsäcker family continued carrying "Freiherr", which might be translated as "Baron", as a dependent part of their legal family name.

[415] Werner Heisenberg was among the most famous physicists of the twentieth century. Cassidy (1993) introduces his life and work.

Physics in Göttingen. He held positions as a Professor of Physics at the University of Strasburg and later as a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hamburg. Notably, during his tenure at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Physics and the University of Strasburg, which coincided with the Third Reich, Weizsäcker was involved in Nazi Germany's nuclear weapons program alongside Heisenberg.[416] This involvement prompted later reflections on the ethical implications of nuclear research, leading to Weizsäcker's commitment to global peace initiatives (Lorenz 2019, 111–112).

His experiences during the Third Reich resulted in his engagement in peace research "through a sense of obligation" (Bartosch 2015, ix) and his political considerations that concentrated on what he termed "Weltinnenpolitik" ("world domestic politics").[417] In a globalised world, Weizsäcker emphasised, there is a need to translate foreign affairs into global domestic affairs. This gave rise to the field of "Weltinnenpolitik". As a direct outcome of Weizsäcker's expressed concerns for a peaceful future, the Max Planck Society established the "Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung der Lebensbedingungen der wissenschaftlich-technischen Welt" ("Max Planck Institute for the Research of Living Conditions in the Modern World"), based at Starnberg in Southern Germany. Weizsäcker served as the primary head of the Institute from 1970 to 1980, with Jürgen Habermas being the Second Director from 1971 to 1981, when the Institute ultimately closed (Drieschner 2008, 13–14; Lorenz 2019, 114).

Modelled after Weizsäcker's ideas and concerns, the Institute served as a laboratory for exploring science's potential contributions and responsibilities for the future, promoting peaceful coexistence of the nations and thus addressing "Weltinnenpolitik".[418] Accordingly, the Max Planck Society succinctly characterised this short-term experiment with the following words:

> This Institute was a first for the MPG [Max Planck Society]. The idea behind its foundation had come from questions surrounding the scientific world's responsibility to

[416] Numerous publications address nuclear research programmes during the Second World War. Herbig (1976) and von Schirach (2015) provide detailed introductions, and Weizsäcker expressed his views in several publications, such as *Der bedrohte* Friede (*The Threatened Peace*, 1981).

[417] Weizsäcker's concept of "Weltinnenpolitik" challenges traditional notions of foreign policy by advocating for multilateral global governance. Bartosch and Gansczyk's edited volume *Weltinnenpolitik für das 21. Jahrhundert: Carl-Friedrich von Weizsäcker verpflichtet (World Domestic Politics for the 21st Century: Commited to Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker*, 2008) addresses the topic from various angles.

[418] In that sense, "Weltinnenpolitik" aligns with the topics explored in futurology. As previously discussed, the brief surge in enthusiasm for futurology or future studies was particularly prominent during the latter half of the twentieth century. Chapter 10.2.2. introduces the interdisciplinary field of futurology.

> society. Espousing a socially critical approach compatible with many of the ideas from the '68 movement, the Institute quickly became legendary. […] Weizsäcker […] came to hold the belief that scientists were responsible for the consequences of their discoveries and lobbied politicians in the 1950s for the peaceful use of nuclear power. It was in the intellectual climate of the 1960s that the idea for an Institute developed, which was to be dedicated to peace and future research [futurology] within the context of political consultation. (Max-Planck-Gesellschaft 2024)[419]

Weizsäcker engaged with futurology and world peace from a different angle during the same period through another research foundation. In 1970, along with Gopi Krishna and other German scientists, he established the "Forschungsgesellschaft für östliche Weisheit und westliche Wissenschaft" ("Research Foundation for Eastern Wisdom and Western Science", FWW), integrating religious and scientific perspectives to address urgent questions concerning peaceful coexistence and the role of religion in shaping humanity's future.

Weizsäcker's interest in religion started at a young age. Especially the reconciliation between science and religion was a recurring topic throughout his life. According to Weizsäcker, he recalls his twelfth birthday as a point of departure for his interest. Gazing at the starry sky with awe, he observed the following:

> God was present, somehow, in the indescribable magnificence of that starry night. Concurrently, I was aware that stars are balls of gas consisting of atoms and obeying the laws of physics. The tension between these two truths must not be unresolvable. But how could they be reconciled? Is it possible to find the reflection of the glory of God also in the laws of physics? (Weizsäcker 1988, 1)[420]

Weizsäcker related his contemplations while watching the sky to his recent study of the *Sermon on the Mount*, found in the Gospel of Matthew. Hinting at Kant, Weizsäcker emphasises the moral imperative of the teachings of Jesus (*ibid*., 591–592).[421] His nocturnal

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[419] Translated version of the Max Planck Institute's homepage.

[420] German original: "In der unaussprechbaren Herrlichkeit des Sternhimmels war irgendwie Gott gegenwärtig. Zugleich aber wußte ich, daß die Sterne Gaskugeln sind, aus Atomen bestehend, die den Gesetzen der Physik genügen. Die Spannung zwischen diesen beiden Wahrheiten kann nicht unauflöslich sein. Wie aber kann man sie lösen? Wäre es möglich, auch in den Gesetzen der Physik einen Abglanz Gottes zu finden?" (Weizsäcker 1977, 553)

[421] In *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 1788), Kant wrote: "Zwei Dinge erfüllen das Gemüt mit immer neuer und zunehmender Bewunderung und Ehrfurcht, je öfter und anhaltender sich das Nachdenken damit beschäftigt: der bestirnte Himmel über mir und das moralische Gesetz in mir" (Kant 1978, 253). English translation by Mary Gregor: "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me*" (Kant 2015, 129, original emphasis). Kant remained a significant influence on

encounter with the divine, along with the Sermon, profoundly impacted the young Weizsäcker, prompting him to commit himself to the service of God (*ibid*., 554). Ultimately, he pursued a career in science instead of religion. Nevertheless, his personal life remained marked by a deep fascination with religious views and practices. Influenced initially by his Lutheran upbringing, Weizsäcker's interest in Asian religions, philosophy, and contemplative practices began early in his life and continued to intrigue him: "Since my student years I have been fully aware of the fundamental significance of the Oriental tradition of meditation and philosophy. I felt close to it but waited a long time before I studied it seriously" (Weizsäcker 1972, 1). In a 1976 interview, he reflected on his meditation experiences, which encompassed interactions with both a Lutheran Brotherhood and South Asian meditation teachers.[422] Essentially, as Weizsäcker emphasised, he approached meditation less from a theoretical point of view but instead as a practice and experience. These experiences, Weizsäcker underscored, solidified his admiration for Asian traditions (Weizsäcker 1977, 533–536). Moreover, a journey to South Asia in 1969 notably intensified his interest. During this trip, which will be discussed in more detail below, he encountered several South Asian religious teachers and philosophers, including Gopi Krishna (whom he had met before in Germany), the religious teacher Anandamayi Ma (1896–1982), monks and students at the Aurobindo ashram, and the Advaita philosopher T. M. P. Mahadevan (1911–1983). In particular the time and experience spent with Mahadevan left a lasting impression on Weizsäcker. He accompanied Weizsäcker to the tomb of Sri Ramana Maharishi at the saint's ashram in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu. Meditating at the saint's tomb, Weizsäcker had an experience which he deemed mystical and life-changing (*ibid*., 593–596).[423]

In essence, Weizsäcker's fascination with Asian religion, preoccupations with peaceful coexistence in the imminent future, and aspirations to reconcile science and religion represented key topics in his life. These interests eventually led to his collaboration with Gopi Krishna. The details of their interaction, which extended beyond professional matters into a close friendship, will be elaborated in the following chapter.

Weizsäcker's philosophy of "Einheit" ("unity"), which he extended to the integration of disciplines such as physics and philosophy as well as to the idea of global political unity, as articulated in his "Weltinnenpolitik" (Scheibe and Süßmann 1973, 8–9).

[422] Baier (1984) addresses the role of meditation in Weizsäcker's thought.

[423] In a letter to Krishna, Weizsäcker emphasised the life-changing nature of his experience. Not only did his torturing nightmares of an impending world war vanish, but he also equated his experience with finding meaning in life (Weizsäcker to Krishna, December 12, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.4.).

15.2. The Relationship between Weizsäcker and Krishna

Weizsäcker and Krishna formed a friendship from the day they first met, a bond that endured until the end of Krishna's life in 1984. Initially, though, Weizsäcker was suspicious and not particularly interested in meeting Krishna: "In early 1968 some German friends asked me to meet Pandit Gopi Krishna of Srinagar, Kashmir, who at that time was completely unknown to me. I was tempted to make excuses, pleading lack of time. […] Fortunately, I did overcome my initial reluctance" (Weizsäcker 1972, 1). Based on statements in published material and letters exchanged between 1968 and 1974, one can comprehend the deep connection between the two men. This study, therefore, posits that Weizsäcker's affection for Krishna, along with his pursuit of religious experiences, motivated his engagement in Krishna's cause.

Well aware of the recognition Weizsäcker had received for his achievements in (astro)physics and philosophy, Krishna hoped to find an ally in the famous scientist and drafted a letter to Weizsäcker before their initial meeting. In that letter, Krishna shared his experience, expounded on his interpretation thereof, and expressed his wish to meet Weizsäcker: "I have come all the way from India to meet you and other leading intellectuals of the day, not to satisfy my curiosity nor to seek any favour but to place a secret of salient importance in the hands of science" (Krishna to Weizsäcker, December 29, 1967, LGK, box 6.1.7.).

Omitting mention of "kundalini" in the letter, Krishna instead refers to the previously mentioned secret as "the same mental condition as associated with mystics and saints" and "a psycho-somatic apparatus […] of spiritual energy in man" (*ibid*.). In addition, Krishna reinforced his sincere wish to meet Weizsäcker by indicating that it is "in the interest of science and service of humanity that I seek the privilege of meeting you" (*ibid*.).

While Weizsäcker's response is unavailable, a meeting with Weizsäcker was arranged about a week after Krishna's letter (Krishna to Weizsäcker, January 10, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.7.; Weizsäcker 1972, 1). Perhaps Krishna's letter raised Weizsäcker's interest despite his reluctance to meet the Pandit. Their initial meeting occurred in Hamburg in early 1968, during Krishna's first journey to Europe. Krishna was invited to lecture at the University of Hamburg, where Weizsäcker held a position as Professor of Philosophy. Organised by

mutual friends, it seemed suitable to meet at Weizsäcker's home in Hamburg.[424] Krishna recalls his first meeting with Weizsäcker:

> My first impression was of the simplicity of his habits. In contrast to the rich furnishings of the houses I had visited earlier, Professor von Weizsäcker, resided in a simple apartment. […] There was no sign of ostentation or luxury anywhere. When I looked at him, his face appeared familiar, like friends I had in Kashmir. (Krishna 1982, 212)

Weizsäcker appeared to be equally sympathetic towards Krishna: "He was unassuming and sure of himself, a man who did not show his almost seventy years, who looked his partner firmly in the eyes […]; he answered precise questions precisely, in a sometimes surprising way and with a deeply human sincerity which was often enhanced by a smile" (Weizsäcker 1972, 2). Weizsäcker's words support this assessment in a personal note sent to Krishna: "I have been deeply impressed by your visit and I wish to thank you for your coming" (Weizsäcker to Krishna, January 10, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.8.).[425]

Besides their sympathies for each other, they also shared the perspective of the utmost importance of reconciling what they called "Eastern" wisdom and "Western" science (Krishna 1972c). Weizsäcker's willingness to explore Asian religions through the lens of "Western" science was an important signal for Krishna's mission. Finding staunch allies on this matter among European scholars and scientists was, after all, Krishna's primary goal during his first journey to Europe. Krishna underscored how, "unlike most of the interviews with other scholars and scientists, in Germany, [Weizsäcker's] questions touched the very core of the subject on which I wished to talk to him" (Krishna 1982, 212).

Weizsäcker, on the other hand, saw Krishna as a refreshing counterpart to the "current flood of salvation literature, of traveling Yoga masters, and of generally superficial imitations of Eastern practices" (Weizsäcker 1972, 2) – a development that Weizsäcker had grown tired of. While he pointed out that Krishna was an autodidact in both yoga and "Western" thought, he also underscored Krishna's role as an "eyewitness to the truth he represents" (*ibid*., 5).

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[424] The "friends" who organised the meeting between Krishna and Weizsäcker are not explicitly named. Considering Krishna's limited number of European acquaintances at that time, it is reasonable to assume that Sinai and Mangoldt arranged Krishna and Weizsäcker's meeting. These women had also initially planned Krishna's journey to Europe and his itinerary, as discussed in the Chapters 12.1. and 13.1.1.2. The omission of their names might be related to the conflict between Weizsäcker and Sinai that ultimately resulted in Sinai's break with Weizsäcker and Krishna. This will be addressed in more detail below.

[425] Weizsäcker's handwritten letters were scarcely legible. I am indebted to my friend Alexander Aschenbrenner, who helped me meticulously transcribe these letters into typed documents to ensure their readability.

Weizsäcker thus regarded the insights Krishna had gained from his experience as a valuable complement to scientific understandings of psychosomatic phenomena (Weizsäcker 1977, 594).

These, then, were the prerequisites for several years of friendship and professional collaborations: "At the parting", Krishna recalled, "[Weizsäcker] gave me his hand in friendship, which has lasted to this day" (Krishna 1982, 212). Particularly in the first years, between 1968 and 1974, they actively nurtured their friendship, exchanging numerous letters and paying each other several visits.[426] The growing intimacy of their friendship is also reflected in the salutations found in their letters: In 1968, they addressed each other formally as "Professor Freiherr von Weizsäcker" and "Pandit Gopi Krishna", respectively. By 1972, their relationship had significantly evolved, as seen in a 1972 letter where Krishna refers to Weizsäcker as an "honoured friend" (Krishna to Weizsäcker, April 21, 1972, LGK, box 6.3.3.) and in a 1974 letter where Weizsäcker calls Krishna his "friend and master" (Weizsäcker to Krishna, March 10, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.2.).

Figure 13: Letter envelope Weizsäcker to Krishna, 1969, front and back (LGK, box 6.1.5., photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich).

These salutations demonstrate the evolution of their friendship and further indicate a shift in Krishna's status. When Krishna initially visited Weizsäcker in the latter's home in 1968, Krishna came there as a supplicant. Six years later, the eminent scientist Weizsäcker

[426] Their second meeting occurred just a few weeks after the first one, in Zurich in February 1968, prior to Krishna's departure to South Asia. The brief interval between their meetings was yet another indication of Weizsäcker's sincerity in his efforts to support Krishna and deepen their relationship. In 1971, Weizsäcker visited Krishna in Kashmir, and saw him on several other occasions while the latter was staying with Margaret Kobelt in Zurich. Additionally, Krishna spent a considerable amount of time with Weizsäcker in Starnberg. These visits are described and contextualised in Chapter 12.

considered Krishna his master and religious guide. However, this change in their relationship had already commenced earlier during their first meeting in Hamburg (1968) and the subsequent one in South Asia (1969).

In his book *Der Garten des Menschliche*n (1977),[427] Weizsäcker emphasises that while he had encountered South Asian philosophy and religion already in 1957, it was not until Gopi Krishna's visit that he felt ready to receive it: "In a split second [I] realized this was one to whom I could listen" (Weizsäcker 1988, 28).[428] This statement is reinforced by an emotional letter by Weizsäcker drafted during his 1969 journey in South Asia. In this letter, Weizsäcker describes his experience while meditating at the tomb of Sri Ramana Maharishi.[429] He concludes his account of the bliss he had encountered with his appreciation for Krishna: "I tell you all this without attaching a question. You will know how to judge it. […] Most cordially yours – since without our meeting this might not have happened" (Weizsäcker to Krishna, December 12, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.4.). His letters suggest that Weizsäcker respected and even admired what he considered Krishna's expertise in religious matters.[430]

In essence, Weizsäcker's religious experience fundamentally altered Weizsäcker's relationship with Krishna (*ibid*.).[431] All collaborative activities thereafter must be understood against the backdrop of this experience. Without Weizsäcker's support, Krishna's project might never have achieved its international reach. This study, therefore, argues that a German scientist's pursuit of religious experience served as a crucial precondition for the institutionalisation of kundalini research in Europe and beyond.

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[427] Paragon House published an English translation of Weizsäcker's *Der Garten des Menschlichen* in 1988 under the title *The Ambivalence of Progress: Essays on Historical Anthropology*. When quoting from Weizsäcker's *Der Garten des Menschlichen*, I use the Paragon House translation.

[428] German original: "Im Blitz einer Sekunde sah ich: hier kann ich hören" (Weizsäcker 1977, 594).

[429] Weizsäcker also narrated his experience at the tomb of Sri Ramana Maharishi in his *Der Garten des Menschliche*n. Drafted nearly ten years after the letter to Krishna, Weizsäcker's account in his book appears more reflective, albeit lacking the immediacy conveyed in the letter (Weizsäcker 1977, 594–596).

[430] Yet another indication of Weizsäcker's admiration was a letter composed by his mother, Marianne von Weizsäcker, in March 1968. In the letter, Marianne von Weizsäcker expresses her gratitude for the German edition of Krishna's *Kundalini*, which he gifted her. Moreover, she articulates the singularity of her encounter with Krishna, whom she seemed to regard as an elevated religious being: "That at my age, I was granted to encounter an enlightened one is a gift for which I cannot be grateful enough" (Marianne von Weizsäcker to Krishna, March 18, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.7.). German original: "Daß es mir in meinem Alter noch beschieden war, einem Erleuchteten zu begegnen, ist ein Geschenk, für das ich nicht dankbar genug sein kann", translated by M.T. While the archival material does not provide direct evidence, Marianne von Weizsäcker's opinion of Krishna's religious status had likely been influenced by her son's assessment.

[431] In a letter to Krishna, Weizsäcker emphasised the life-changing nature of his experience. Not only did his torturing nightmares of an impending world war vanish, but he also equated his experience with finding meaning in life (Weizsäcker to Krishna, December 12, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.4.).

Krishna and Weizsäcker's relationship was mostly harmonious and characterised by mutual respect. However, one incident overshadowed it and caused a significant delay in their reunion: a severe conflict between Weizsäcker and Sinai, one of Krishna's earliest supporters. The conflict revolved around Sinai harbouring a paternal affection for Weizsäcker, and erupted in 1969, as is well documented in the correspondence between Krishna, Weizsäcker, and Sinai. Considering her important role as Krishna's early collaborator, a few words shall be dedicated to her conflict with Weizsäcker and her life.

Excursus: The "Peace Angel" Barbara Rotraut Pleyer (Sinai)

Sinai (b. Barbara Rotraut Pleyer, 1929–2000) has been mentioned in previous chapters as a well-connected German peace activist and early supporter of Krishna's project.[432] Several significant achievements during the initial phase of Krishna's project were thanks to her: The establishment of the first Kundalini Research Foundation (Nishat), Krishna's invitation to Europe by Ursula von Mangold, and a contract for the publication of a German version of *Kundalini* with Otto Wilhelm Barth publishing house. Her role as one of Krishna's most pivotal supporters is beyond question. At the same time, the conflict between Sinai and Weizsäcker also affected Krishna's relationship with Weizsäcker, introducing a troublesome element into Krishna's initial efforts in Europe. This excursus will briefly shed light on Sinai's fascinating life and controversial activities.

Barbara Rotraut Pleyer was born in Germany in 1929 as one of seven children of the Nazi politician and historian Kleo Pleyer, who died during the Second World War. Although references to her life are limited, one incident brought her global fame: A failed protest initiative at the Olympic Games in Helsinki, Norway, in 1952.[433] Dressed in a white gown and carrying a flaming torch, Pleyer disrupted the Opening Ceremony, attempting to deliver a message of peace. After uttering only words of salutation, "Dear Ladies and Gentlemen", she was (in an elegant manner) arrested. Owing to her white robe and overall appearance, she was thereafter renowned as the "peace angel" (Degler 2023, 120–121; Winkler 2018).

[432] Owing to a newly aroused fascination with religion by the end of the 1960s, Barbara R. Pleyer assumed a new name inspired by Mount Sinai, Egypt: Sara-Rotraut Fatima Sina-Moria (Winkler 2018). In her letters and other documents, which were part of Gopi Krishna's legacy, she exclusively used the abbreviated form Sinai (LGK, box 6). For this reason, I will use her given name, Pleyer, only to describe her earlier personas.

[433] I mainly rely on Degler (2023) and letters from Krishna, Sinai, and other protagonists to reconstruct Sinai's role in Krishna's project.

In the subsequent fifteen years of her life, Sinai was involved in peace activism. During that period, she met numerous political leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, Mao Zedong, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, attempting to convince them of the necessity of attaining world peace.[434] Eventually, she fused her increasing interest in religious traditions with her peace activism. Perhaps, after being disillusioned by her "diplomatic" endeavours, she hoped that disseminating religious knowledge might serve as a superior contribution to world peace (Degler 2023, 122).

Sinai first heard of Gopi Krishna from Tontyn Hopman, one of Krishna's earliest supporters, whom Sinai met in 1967 on a flight to Japan. Shortly thereafter, perhaps in late spring but not later than the summer of 1969, Sinai travelled to Kashmir to meet Krishna (Degler 2023, 120; Sinai to Sadiq, August 22, 1967, LGK, box 6.1.6.). In Krishna, she believed, she had found a religious teacher and a like-minded activist desiring to achieve world peace.[435] Therefore, her support of Krishna was initially motivated by involvement in peace activism. Krishna's early relationship with Sinai is best described as a teacher-disciple relationship. This becomes evident from a letter she drafted during her visit to Kashmir in the summer of 1967. As mentioned in Chapter 9, Krishna's political engagement resulted in his imprisonment during that summer. In her efforts to free Krishna, she was in contact with several officials, among them Mr Renzoo, the Home Secretary of Srinagar. In the letter, she asks for his help, underscoring Krishna's role as her teacher: "You know how much I suffered this summer when my teacher was taken before my eyes to prison […] Hoping that You will kindly help as You did already in August when You allowed me to see Gopi Krishna in prison, that I will never forget" (Sinai to Renzoo, December 12, 1967, LGK, box 6.1.7.). Several other situations account for Sinai's dedication to Krishna and his project, documented in her countless letters to Krishna (LGK, box 6).

[434] References to Sinai's initiatives as a peace activist are limited. An article published in the German newspaper *Südddeutsche Zeitung* suggests that Sinai received funding from the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), Germany's foreign intelligence agency. According to *Süddeutsche*'s archival research, Sinai maintained close contact with Reinhard Gehlen (1902–1979), BND's founding president. While Gehlen denied any involvement of Sinai with the BND, archived letters indicate otherwise. Between 1959 and 1967 (when Sinai met Krishna), the BND, under Gehlen's leadership, purportedly financed Sinai's lifestyle and travels worldwide. However, Sinai appeared to have achieved little success in her diplomatic endeavours for peace, aside, perhaps, from her extensive travel reports addressed to Gehlen, whom she referred to by the code name "lieber Onkel Gerhard" ("dear uncle Gerhard") (Winkler 2018).

[435] Degler suggests that Sinai's trust in Krishna's cause was rooted in his association of peace with disseminating knowledge about kundalini (Degler 2023, 123). However, at their initial meeting, world peace had not yet become a dominant topic in his thought. Refer to Chapter 11 for further context.

Krishna's introduction to German bohemian and elitist circles counts among Sinai's greatest achievements of their collaboration.[436] From her previous history as an international peace activist, she clearly acquired an outstanding talent: Networking. However, she was not satisfied with merely being introduced to interested parties who could contribute to Krishna's project. Instead, she took active steps by organising several conferences and establishing research societies. A notable example was the "Institute for the Practice and Scientific Observation of Meditation", founded in January 1970.[437] The Munich-based research society listed Gopi Krishna as the director of a branch for "Research on Kundalini, the Spiritual Energy in Man". Though this might have sounded like a promising opportunity, considering Krishna's wish to promote research on kundalini, the Institute was more likely simply a façade. Accordingly, no information is available regarding whether the research institute carried out any research on kundalini. Other individuals listed included the neurologist Johann Kugler, the physiologist Hans Reichel, Werner Heisenberg,[438] and the Professor of Psychosomatics Arthur T. Jores (LGK, box 6.1.6.).

Sinai's active engagement with European scholars and scientists resulted in the expansion of Krishna's European network. Notably, Krishna's meeting with Weizsäcker in January and February 1968 was also a fruit of Sinai's commitment. These achievements notwithstanding, conflicts with Hopman and Weizsäcker overshadowed her efforts, resulting in her loss of recognition among Krishna's entourage.[439] Both men independently felt the need to dissociate themselves from her – even at the cost of avoiding Krishna. In a letter, Hopman informed Krishna of his stance regarding Sinai:

> I had a letter from Miss Sinai which, though it seemed to deal with ordinary matters only, upset me again to the extent of endangering my mental balance. As a result I realise that I can take no other step than avoiding communications of any kind with her […]. For the same reason, however keen I am to use this long yearned for opportunity to see

[436] Krishna's dedication of the German edition of *Kundalini* (*Kundalini: Erweckung der geistigen Kraft im Menschen*, 1967) to Sinai is a notable expression of gratitude for the possibilities she opened up to him (Marianne von Weizsäcker to Krishna, March 18, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.7.).

[437] The "Gesellschaft für Religion und Wissenschaft" ("Society for Religion and Science") was an earlier initiative co-established with Gerhard Wolfram; see Chapter 12.2.

[438] Degler doubts whether Heisenberg was interested in Sinai's Institute (Degler 2023, 150–151). In a letter to Sinai, however, Krishna mentions the attendance of Heisenberg at a preparatory meeting for the "Statesmanship and Virtue" conference at Starnberg in December 1969 (Krishna to Sinai October 23, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.7.). Although this does not necessarily entail Heisenberg's interest in Sinai's new Institute, it nonetheless suggests that he was not fully opposed to Sinai's activities.

[439] This is also evident from letters included in the literary legacy of Werner Heisenberg (LWH, n.d.).

> you, I can only ask you to arrange this in such a way that we could meet without my encountering her. (Hopman to Krishna, December 26, 1967, LGK, box 6.1.7.)

Several correspondences between Weizsäcker and Krishna attest to the resemblance between Weizsäcker's and Hopman's experiences with and reactions to Sinai.

According to Weizsäcker, Sinai had developed what he considered a paternal "obsession" towards him. After numerous unsuccessful attempts to dissuade her from this belief, Weizsäcker ultimately decided to avoid contact with Sinai. Consequently, despite Krishna's return to Germany in the summer of 1969, Weizsäcker and Krishna did not meet.[440] In a letter to Krishna, Weizsäcker explained his reasons and expressed his regret:

> Dr. Pleyer has not been able to overcome her obsession that I should be her father and after several fruitless attempts to make her understand my position I decided that I should no more in any way see her or be in any contact with anything she arranges. […] Hence […] I cannot in any way meet the participants of the meeting she has prepared for Munich [in July 1969]. I hope you will understand my attitude and forgive my not seeing you in this connection even if it deprives us of a much wished-for opportunity of a conversation. (Weizsäcker to Krishna, July 2, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.)

Initially, Weizsäcker regarded Sinai as a "highly gifted" (Weizsäcker to Krishna, November 9, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.7.) individual who could contribute to the project of reconciling "Western" science and "Eastern" wisdom (*ibid.*). A letter written by Weizsäcker's mother, Marianne von Weizsäcker, issued in early 1968, attests to Sinai's respected position, underscoring her role as Krishna's close collaborator and bridge to Europe (Marianne von Weizsäcker to Krishna, March 18, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.7.).[441] Weizsäcker further mentions that he had assumed the position of a teacher and "paternal friend and advisor" (Weizsäcker to Krishna, September 24, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.7.) to Sinai. However, by August 1968, when Sinai confessed to Weizsäcker that she had understood him to be her father, he ultimately decided to part ways with her (Weizsäcker to Krishna, November 9, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.7.). Most of the letters exchanged between Krishna and Weizsäcker in 1968 and 1969 addressed Weizsäcker's ongoing conflict with Sinai, which increasingly also strained Krishna. Despite

[440] Krishna's second journey to Europe followed a similar itinerary as the first one and was entirely organised by Sinai; see Chapter 12.2.

[441] Even Hopman, who was by then no longer on good terms with Sinai (see above quote), acknowledged this: "I am very happy that a German edition of [*Kundalini*] is on the way. For this and for bringing you to Europe to make your first personal contact with Western Science, Miss Sinai's incredible energy certainly prove [*sic*] to be extremely effective" (Hopman to Krishna, December 26, 1967, LGK, box 6.1.7.).

Krishna's assessment that "the unfortunate obsession is now over", the situation did not improve (Krishna to Weizsäcker, September 12, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.). The recent events also overshadowed Krishna and Weizsäcker's second encounter during the latter's trip to South Asia in 1969. Ultimately, however, their personal meeting in Delhi in November 1969 reinforced their connection, and no future letter addressed Weizsäcker's conflict with Sinai (Krishna to Weizsäcker, October 15, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.7.).

Due to Sinai and Weizsäcker's conflict, her contact with Krishna ultimately ceased. In 1970, she organised another Europe trip for Krishna, but their last recorded correspondence was no later than 1972. Today, while acknowledging her initial achievements, Krishna's remaining supporters denounce Sinai's behaviour as "extreme" and "erratic" (Degler 2023, 137).

Despite her gradual expulsion from Krishna's inner circle, her role as the instigator of Krishna's European connections is unquestioned. Therefore, in the history of modern kundalini research, Sinai warrants acknowledgement. The next chapter addresses two central projects of Krishna and Weizsäcker's collaboration in which Sinai was no longer involved.

15.3. Weizsäcker and Krishna's Key Projects

Gopi Krishna and Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker not only shared a friendship and common interests, but they also engaged in two major projects together: The establishment of a Germany-based research foundation titled "Forschungsgesellschaft für östliche Weisheit und westliche Wissenschaft" (FWW) and their co-authored book *Die Biologische Basis der religiösen Erfahrung* (1971).[442] As this study argues, these two outcomes of Krishna's and Weizsäcker's collaboration represent notable landmarks in modern kundalini research.

[442] English translation: *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* (1972).

15.3.1. Weizsäcker and Krishna's "Forschungsgesellschaft für östliche Weisheit und westliche Wissenschaft" (1971)

After meeting in Delhi in 1969, Weizsäcker and Krishna decided to advance their collaboration by establishing a foundation.[443] This undertaking corresponded to Krishna's initial desire, which he expressed at the outset of their friendship:

> Your help […] will be of immense value to the research and, I hope, it will be granted. The intellectual heritage of Germany should make her the first in starting a scientific investigation of the subject, as Kundalini provides a common meeting ground […] between the followers of different religions and faiths and opens up possibilities of lasting peace and universal brotherhood of mankind. (Krishna to Weizsäcker, January 10, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.7.)

The official establishment was not realised until 1971, but by late 1970, considerable progress was underway. During Krishna's third trip to Europe, he visited Carl Friedrich Basedow, whom he knew through Weizsäcker.[444] While Krishna had initially embarked on the project with Weizsäcker, Basedow was instrumental in realising FWW. His active involvement was perhaps partly influenced by his loyalty to Weizsäcker and partly motivated by his long-standing desire to establish such an institute himself (Degler 2023, 153–154; LWH, n.d.).[445]

Weizsäcker agreed to serve as the nominal head of FWW. However, due to his demanding schedule, Basedow, in his role as "Secretary-General", led FWW and oversaw its operations (Degler 2023, 154).[446] Krishna's position was not explicitly specified but presumably entailed his first-hand knowledge with regard to religious experience (Weizsäcker 1972, 5).

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[443] The above-mentioned initiatives, "Society for Religion and Science" and "Institute for the Practice and Scientific Observation of Meditation", denote earlier examples of Krishna's participation in German research societies. Refer to the previous chapter for more details.

[444] The literary legacies of Krishna and Heisenberg contain numerous letters from Basedow. Despite his regular correspondence with them, these legacies do not provide further biographical information on Basedow. Neither primary nor secondary literature seems to include details about him. The only available information pertains to his friendship with Weizsäcker and Heisenberg, his services to FWW, Krishna's recurring visits to his Starnberg home, and his unexpected death in March 1978 (LWH, n.d.; LGK, n.d.).

[445] Basedow's wish to establish an institute dedicated to exploring the relationship between science and religion and the connections between "East" and "West" traces back to at least 1955 and was repeated earnestly throughout the 1960s. Throughout this period, Jean Gebser and Heisenberg expressed their interest in supporting Basedow in this endeavour (Basedow to Heisenberg, October 19, 1955, LWH, n.d. [1705/147-148, Mappe 1]).

[446] Throughout the years, his role might have evolved, as Degler refers to him as the director of FWW in 1978 (Degler 2023, 246).

Other members included the Professor of Neurology Johann Kugler (1923–2014) and the scientist and philosopher Klaus Meyer-Abich (1936–2018),[447] among others (Basedow to Kieffer, May 29, 1971, LGK, box 6.2.1.).

All members were interested in "Eastern" wisdom and "Western" science. However, beyond this, little is known about the activities carried out by FWW. Even Krishna's closest supporters expressed doubts about its actual contribution to Krishna's cause: "I never understand from Mr. Basedow what in fact they [Basedow and Weizsäcker] are doing in regard to your work. […] do you know in fact what steps they are undertaking in connection with the Kundalini-research?" (Kobelt to Krishna, February 19, 1974, LGK, box 6.10.1.). The most probable explanations suggest that FWW offered lectures and seminars on kundalini, possibly combined with networking gatherings. Overall, Krishna's collaboration with Weizsäcker increased the radius of his fellowship and opened several doors for Krishna–even beyond Europe.

One such door led to the United States: During the summer of 1971, while Krishna resided with Weizsäcker and Basedow in Starnberg, the US-American social philosopher and author William I. Thompson (1938–2020) travelled to Germany "to meet Gopi Krishna and the physicists around him" (W. I. Thompson 1974, 85).[448] In his book *Passages About Earth: An Exploration of the New Planetary Culture* (1974), Thompson dedicated a chapter to his visit to Starnberg, providing first-hand information on Weizsäcker and Krishna's activities at FWW.[449] Despite Thompson's criticism of Krishna's ideas, Krishna believed that Thompson's examination could potentially aid in the dissemination of his books. This was due to Thompson's recognition as the founder of the Lindisfarne Association[450] and his involvement with the Esalen Institute:

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[447] Klaus Mayer-Abich was Weizsäcker's assistant, first at the University of Hamburg and from 1972 to 1972 at the "Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung der Lebensbedingungen der wissenschaftlich-technischen Welt". Their close relationship is evidenced by Mayer-Abich's editing of the *Festschrift* for Weizsäcker's seventieth birthday–to which Gopi Krishna also contributed (Meyer-Abich 1982).

[448] Astronaut Edgar Mitchell also expressed interest in Krishna and Weizsäcker's collaboration. Chapter 16.2. introduces Mitchell and his Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS).

[449] Thompson offers a rare description of Weizsäcker and Krishna's FWW. However, the lack of additional source material makes it difficult to evaluate his statements. Equally involved in academia and the New Age movement – not uncommon during that period – I consider his work a valuable source from an emic perspective.

[450] The Lindisfarne Association, founded by Thompson, was envisioned as a catalyst for a new planetary culture. It functioned as a decentralised institution focused on education and religion, aiming to foster the emergence of a new age. The Association organised conferences, seminars, and retreats to promote this vision of a new planetary culture (Hanegraaff 1996, 96–97).

> [Thompson] says that in his forthcoming book he has discussed my views in one of the chapters along with those of Heisenberg, Weizsacker [*sic*] and Aurobindu [*sic*], […] I am glad even if there is a healthy criticism about the social and political implications of my ideas about Kundalini. The only way to popularize our message is that it should be discussed in papers and books. (Krishna to Kieffer, November 14, 1973, LGK, box 6.10.4.)

Thompson had initially heard of their collaboration from his students in the United States, who distributed "rumors of the mysterious happenings in Starnberg" (*ibid*., 84) and speculated on Weizsäcker and Krishna conducting "esoteric research" (*ibid*.). The students' speculations mainly revolved around Krishna's presumably supernormal abilities: "Legend had it that when they would photograph him, he would irradiate the film so that only an outline of light would show up in the picture" (*ibid*., 85). According to Thompson, these rumours were prompted by stories about the Menninger Institute's biofeedback experiments with the South Asian yogi Swami Rama, sparking the students' imagination about similar happenings in Starnberg (*ibid*., 84–85).[451]

He maintained that these speculations had an accurate basis, as FWW in Starnberg indeed measured Krishna's electrical brain activities while meditating (*ibid*.). This statement is particularly intriguing given the later accusations of fraud directed against Krishna. As discussed below in Chapter 23.4, several intellectuals raised doubts about the authenticity of Krishna's claims following his alleged refusal to submit to examinations (White to Krishna, May 7, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5.). However, Thompson does not provide further information, and I was not able to secure any archival material to validate or refute Thompson's claim. Kugler, a renowned expert in electroencephalography, was a research associate of FWW and could have certainly conducted such experiments (Basedow to Kieffer, May 29, 1971, LGK, box 6.2.1.; Mathis and Hess 2014).[452] In that case, it is puzzling why Krishna did not emphasise his participation in potential biofeedback tests at Starnberg in response to the

[451] Refer to Chapter 21 for a discussion of the research carried out at Menninger and the role of biofeedback and other devices in kundalini research.

[452] Thompson indicates that the biofeedback research conducted at Starnberg did not match the scale of similar experiments in the United States. He explicitly mentions one study by Joe Kamiya, a neurofeedback pioneer, at the University of California, San Francisco, in 1962 and another by Robert Keith Wallace and Herbert Benson at Harvard in 1972. It is striking that Thompson did not include Elmer and Alyce Green on the list of US-American biofeedback pioneers. The Greens enjoyed a far-reaching reputation resulting from their research with Swami Rama and shared Thompson's tie with Esalen (W. I. Thompson 1974, 85; J. W. White 1975b, 15). Refer to Chapters 16.3.1. and 21.2. for further information on these researchers.

accusations against his integrity. Perhaps he prioritised highlighting his role as a research associate rather than as a research subject.

In contrast to Krishna's mystification on the part of Thompson's students, Thompson described his initial encounter with Krishna as distinctly underwhelming:

> The meeting [with Gopi Krishna] was something of an anticlimax. Nothing could be further from the truth of Krishna's simple and unassuming manner than the American legends of initiatic wonder-working. […] He gave me little set-pieces and mini-lectures that answered questions I did not have and missed the questions I did have. (W. I. Thompson 1974, 85–86)

Despite Thompson's disenchantment, several months later, in 1972, he visited Krishna in his native Kashmir. During their second meeting, Krishna apparently made a better impression on Thompson. Reconsidering his initial judgement, Thompson praised Krishna's humbleness and kindness (*ibid*., 86). His assessment was that Krishna's attitude in Germany must be regarded as a defensive reaction to doubts and criticism from European intellectuals (*ibid*.).

This affirmative reappraisal notwithstanding, Thompson condemned what he regarded as Krishna's elitism. In a letter to Krishna, he emphasised that "my main reservations have to do not with your religious ideas but with the political extensions of them" (Thompson to Krishna, October 20, 1973, LGK, box 6.10.4.). This warrants a closer examination.

According to Thompson, rooted in Krishna's socio-economic background as a Hindu Brahmin and amplified by his psychosomatic experiences, Krishna addressed kundalini in terms of evoking the evolution of consciousness and forming a new class of evolved human beings. Krishna's hope that kundalini would alter humanity's attitude and morals, as Thompson continued, did not target religious equality. On the contrary, Krishna would primarily turn his attention to a prospective religious elite, illuminated by the experience of kundalini, that would receive the task of guiding and educating humanity (W. I. Thompson 1974, 113–118). Thompson's critique was rooted in what he considered Krishna's background as a member of an elitist caste, suggesting that he aimed to replace an elitist order with another. Let us now examine whether Krishna and Weizsäcker's writings substantiate Thompson's allegations.

Krishna belonged to the priestly Brahmin caste. However, his biography demonstrates that he did not exclusively interact with elitist circles. For instance, the foundation of his social reform movement, Samaj Sudhar Samiti, attests to his interest in social justice, with his direct

involvement indicating a commitment that went beyond mere welfare (Degler 2023, 84–86). At the same time, throughout his writings, Krishna adhered to the vision of a prospective ruling class comprising illuminated individuals:

> A new class of human beings, combining the knowledge and art of the genius with the love and intuition of the ecstatic, will come into being and increase in numbers year by year to guide mankind in every sphere of thought and activity. It is this lofty class of Enlightened Savants which shall slowly lead the race to the Pinnacle of Glory destined for her. (Krishna 1979a, 135)

As Krishna envisioned, this religious elite should replace the current materialistic world leaders (*ibid*., 133). Furthermore, the prospective ruling class would be responsible for the education of the less privileged: To "this lofty class of men, adorned with the knowledge of the inner and the outer worlds, will fall the herculean task of educating humanity in the essentials of this almighty spiritual Law [kundalini] to guide the race to the glorious estate ordained for it" (Krishna 1972c, 115–116). By "education" Krishna likely referred to "true spiritual education" (Krishna 1976a, 45), which he considered more important than conventional education. Accordingly, in an interview, he underscored that a poor education might be of benefit for the experience of kundalini: "almost all that the great mystics and the great prophets were very poorly educated. The brain was free for the experience. This loading of the brain […] with facts and figures and information, it does not satisfy your curiosity […] and also it can act as a hindrance to the evolution" (*ibid*.).

However, contrary to Thompson's claim, Krishna was not solely concerned with the ruling class of a prospective new age. He pictured future societies, where general citizens were guided to activate kundalini, without specifying any distinct class: "Millions will eagerly take to the discipline needed to arouse the Power [kundalini] and, in this way, try to make their lives sublime" (Krishna 1979a, 134). Krishna's statement reflects the late twentieth-century trend of what Hammer called "the democratization of religious experience" (Hammer 2004, 340), implying that "we all harbor […] quasi-supernatural capabilities" (*ibid*., 306) that can be activated through a learning process (*ibid*., 435). Therefore, the alleged democratisation of privileged experience comes with a limitation: Only those capable of controlling these capabilities will be members of Krishna's idealised vision of a "transfigured humanity" (Krishna 1979a, 132). Moreover, without the religious elite to guide the general public's religious processes, these developments cannot reach the global level imagined by Krishna. In sum, Krishna's perspective on kundalini's ability to transform

society exhibits an elitist inclination. However, he acknowledges the universal right and potential for individuals across all social classes to experience kundalini.

Another critique by Thompson concerned Krishna's European networks, which, according to Thompson, reinforced his allegation of elitism. Thompson took particular issue with Krishna's collaboration with the aristocrat Weizsäcker in that regard:

> The elitist strain in Gopi Krishna's thought is slightly unsettling, for as he writes about hereditary predispositions leading toward a sensible social order, one has visions of a reinstitution of the caste system.[453] Because Freiherr von Weizsäcker is a German aristocrat and Gopi Krishna is a Brahman, the union of their sensibilities seems doubly aristocratic. (W. I. Thompson 1974, 115)

There is no doubt about Weizsäcker's status as a former member of Germany's elite who lived a life of privilege. However, his belonging to the German aristocracy did not account for his political orientation, and neither did it necessitate any elitist stance. In fact, Weizsäcker's perspectives of society, politics, and future developments are saturated by realism, pragmatism, and the hope for an egalitarian world order against all odds (Weizsäcker 1988, 45–50).[454] This notwithstanding, he reflects on the pragmatic benefit of an elite, which could be the "avant-garde, a vanguard of progress" (*ibid*., 157). While Weizsäcker addressed questions of economic progress, what truly triggered his considerations was the sense of urgency in terms of political progress. His experience in the German nuclear program made him understand that humanity had been on the brink of catastrophe. With scientific insights, he underscored, comes political responsibility (Weizsäcker 1976, 204; Lorenz 2019, 113). Therefore, Thompson's claim that Weizsäcker envisioned a "Pythagorean Brotherhood of Scientists" (W. I. Thompson 1974, 69),[455] yields a certain relevance against the backdrop of Weizsäcker's peace considerations. However, Weizsäcker did not see this elite as a consolidated and irrefutable condition. Instead, he highlighted that such a formation must be temporary and is only reasonable when operating

[453] There is an old debate in South Asia about who should hold the highest authority in society: The politically ruling warrior caste (the aristocratic Kshatriyas) or the religiously ruling Brahmins – to which Krishna belonged. Consequently, his reasoning for the dominance of a religious elite (those enlightened by kundalini) could also be read as advocating for Brahmin, i.e., religious, over Kshatriyas, i.e., political, authority. In this case, Thompson's allegation might have touched upon a genuine issue; however, this remains speculative.

[454] See also Weizsäcker's *Wege in der Gefahr* (*Paths in Peril*, 1976) and Lorenz's article "Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker" (2019) for further details on Weizsäcker's thoughts on politics, ethics, and future developments.

[455] Thompson's "Pythagorean Brotherhood of Scientists" is a reference to Herbert G. Well's notion of a "Freemasonry of Efficiency – the Brotherhood of Science" (Wells 1975, 60), as mentioned in the typescript of the science fiction film *Things to Come* (1935) (W. I. Thompson 1974, 69).

in compliance with world peace (Weizsäcker 1988, 157–159). Thompson's accusation that Weizsäcker had an elitist stance, which solely rested on his observation of Weizsäcker's socioeconomic background and involvement in a scientific elite, must therefore be rejected. In essence, Weizsäcker and Krishna discussed in their writings the potential impact of an elitist circle of individuals charged with scientific insights and an activated kundalini, respectively, on world peace. These discussions, however, are on a theoretical level, with none of them targeting the political installation of a scientific or religious elite.

The actual intent behind FWW, whether it was meant to be a think-tank or an institutional and scientific stepping stone for Krishna's career, remains questionable. Nevertheless, Krishna regarded it as a crucial prerequisite for his international expansion: "The founding of […] [FWW] provided an incentive for the formation of similar groups in […] India and abroad" (Krishna 1982, 223). However, aside from Krishna's grown German network and some scattered interest from individuals from overseas, FWW yielded no significant outcomes. It exemplifies another failure in Krishna's attempts to promote kundalini research. In contrast, the co-authored book *Die Biologische Basis der religiösen Erfahrung* (1971) achieved a broader impact, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

15.3.2. Weizsäcker and Krishna's co-authored Book *Die Biologische Basis der religiösen Erfahrung* (1971)

From his experience with *Kundalini* (1967), Krishna was aware of the effect of having a well-established contributor to his books. After Spiegelberg and Hillman, Weizsäcker constituted the third intellectual voice to contextualise Krishna's ideas for a scholarly audience.

The genesis of *Die Biologische Basis der religiösen Erfahrung* can be traced back to Krishna's invitation to the conference "Religion and Science, and Statesmanship and Virtue", organised by Sinai and scheduled to take place in Florence in the Fall of 1970. The prestigious list of confirmed speakers gave Krishna the impetus to prepare what he envisioned as a groundbreaking speech. This preparation culminated in a ninety-page essay. Upon reading Krishna's essay, Kieffer was convinced of its significance and the urgency of publishing it without delay. Therefore, Kieffer spontaneously established his own publishing company, New Concept (N.C. Press), intending to self-publish the essay (Degler 2023, 157–158; Kieffer to Heisenberg, April 28, 1971, LGK, box 6.2.2.).

In early 1971, Kieffer published it under the title *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius*. To enhance the book's visibility, he devised a targeted marketing strategy, compiling a list of over two hundred well-established individuals whom Kieffer believed could play a role in further disseminating Krishna's ideas. Degler narrates how Kieffer, "fired with a sense of urgency […] zealously labelled over 200 envelopes and stuffed them with the books" (Degler 2023, 158–159). To Kieffer's disappointment, his dissemination strategy did not yield the anticipated result.[456] Krishna's European supporters decided to take proactive measures despite, or perhaps precisely because of, Kieffer's setback. Ursula von Mangoldt, who had published the German edition of Krishna's *Kundalini. The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1968), agreed to publish a German edition of *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius*. This endeavour was further bolstered by Weizsäcker's commitment to introduce the short book (*ibid*., 159–160).

Degler points out that "how this [Weizsäcker's commitment] occurred is not certain" (*ibid*., 160). However, a letter from August 5, 1969, might offer insights into Weizsäcker's initial involvement. Therein, Krishna requested Weizsäcker to write an introduction for a book he was currently drafting. While he referred to the book in question as *The Master-Key to Cosmic Consciousness*, there is little doubt that this was the first draft of what was to become the essay *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* – particularly since Krishna never published a book titled *The Master-Key to Cosmic Consciousness* (Krishna to Weizsäcker, August 5, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.5.). While further evidence is required to substantiate this claim, I consider it probable that Weizsäcker's commitment to write an introduction to the book traces back to Krishna's 1969 request.[457]

In any case, by 1969, Krishna had begun to discuss some of the book's main tenets with Weizsäcker, emphasising the significance of persuading scientists of his theses:

> I fully well realise how difficult it is for me to convince […] the world of science […]. What I say appears, at first sight, to be too fantastic to be true. I say that the cerebro-spiral system with the reproductive organs at one end and a region in the brain at the other perform in man the dual function of reproduction and evolution, and that mankind

[456] As will be argued in the next chapter, one notable outcome was White's collaboration with Krishna (Degler 2023, 173).

[457] Moreover, by 1971, when Weizsäcker joined forces with Krishna, their bond had strengthened considerably. As mentioned earlier, Weizsäcker's religious experience at the tomb of Ramana Maharishi increased his willingness to support Krishna's cause. His commitment to contribute to *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* must, therefore, be seen as another gesture of affinity for Krishna (Weizsäcker 1977, 596; Weizsäcker to Krishna, December 12, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.4.).

> owes the occasional appearance of prophets and mystics as also of men of genius to the amazing fact that in some individuals this mighty mechanism is abnormally active in the evolutionary direction from birth, resulting in the development of extraordinary spiritual or intellectual talents in them. (*ibid*.)

Weizsäcker returned to South Asia in 1971 and visited Krishna in Kashmir. During his stay, he completed the first draft of his introduction to Krishna's book. At its final stage, Weizsäcker's introduction spanned thirty-eight pages. Compared to Krishna's fifty-five-page essay, Weizsäcker's part is less an introduction than a full-fledged contribution to a joint publication.

Structured into ten sections, it comments successively on the chapters of Krishna's extensive essay from a philosophical perspective informed by Weizsäcker's knowledge of physics and other fields of science like biology, psychology, and evolutionary theory. He also refers to Krishna's first book, Kundalini (1967), and summarises Krishna's experience reported there because he regards it as fundamental to Krishna's entire message. In the first sections (1–5), Weizsäcker sets himself the task of making the biological-medical and psychological aspects of Krishna's ideas, as well as his attitude towards religion, plausible for an educated European, and especially German, audience.[458] Similarly to Hillman, Weizsäcker posited that academics necessitated a "scientific translation" of Krishna's concepts (Weizsäcker 1972, 4). He openly sympathises with Krishna's cause and states that his introduction is meant to facilitate the understanding of Krishna's book and thus enhance its impact. To do so, it would be necessary to highlight its weaknesses as well (*ibid*.). He particularly addresses Krishna's naivety and autodidactic approach with regard to "Western" modern science and European intellectual concepts: "He does not always clearly distinguish between the customary academic classification of a scientific doctrine and its more subtle meanings. He is therefore not always a competent analyst, but he is something far more important: he is an eyewitness to the truth he represents" (*ibid*., 5).

In the subsequent sections (6–10), Weizsäcker discusses Krishna's theses with reference to his own philosophy of nature and history (*ibid*., 38). He states that his concept of evolution is close to the thought of Krishna, Aurobindo, and Teilhard de Chardin: "The spiritualizing of this concept, which we find in all three thinkers, seems to me inescapable if man is included in evolution as the spiritual being he happens to be" (*ibid*., 39). Nevertheless, he

[458] Initially the book was only intended as a German publication. Its English translation was only a later development. Therefore, Weizsäcker primarily wrote for German-speaking scientists and other interested parties in German-speaking countries.

does not follow the three "spiritual evolutionists" in their rejection of Darwinism and is convinced that the principle of selection can be upheld if it is interpreted in a certain way. According to Weizsäcker, the evolution of the cosmos, as well as of life on earth, can be explained by the basic structure of time – what he calls the "historicity of time" (*ibid*.) – namely that it unites in every given presence the accomplished fact of the past and the openness of the future.

> The "biologism" of the evolutionary thinkers then [*sic*] is nothing but the idea that the historicity of time manifests itself already in the organic sphere of life. Their "spiritualism" signifies on the one hand, that even the spirit obeys the structure of time insofar as it appears in time. On the other hand it implies the claim that time itself should be understood spiritually. (*ibid*., 40)

In an earlier section, Weizsäcker, when analysing Krishna's understanding of evolution, had already described the term prana, as used by Krishna, as an "all-penetrating, subtle life substance" (*ibid*., 23); a substance that is material as well as it is a manifestation in time of the "energy of the highest cosmic intelligence" (*ibid*.) that "meaningfully builds all of life" (*ibid*.). In Krishna's theory of evolution, kundalini would be the "evolutionary potency" (ibid., 24). At the end of his reflections on the role of the historicity of time in modern physics, he concludes that "the concept of *Prana* is not necessarily incompatible with our physics. *Prana* is spatially extended and vitalizing. Hence above all it is a moving potency. The quantum theory designates something not entirely remote from this by the term 'probability amplitude'" (*ibid*., 42, original emphasis). He does not say it explicitly, but it is quite obvious that Krishna's kundalini, insofar as it incorporates the evolutionary aspect of prana, fits in a similar way into Weizsäcker's philosophy. In the context of this work, I must leave it at these hints and cannot go into Weizsäcker's interpretation of Krishna any further.
The remaining portion of the book encompasses Gopi Krishna's essay, initially published by Kieffer through N.C. Press. Spanning five chapters, the essay commences with a critique of religion and science as two fields inadequate to address the urgent issues of the time. Predictably, Krishna then proposes his own theory of kundalini's evolutionary potential as the logical solution to these problems. He elaborates on the implications of this theory for our understanding of the brain, consciousness, and moral actions. Kundalini, he concludes, hints at the divine potential inherent in humanity. Reflecting on the radical nature of his interpretation of evolutionary theory, he writes: "I stand alone in the disclosures that I am making. There is every likelihood that both from the sides of religion and science eyebrows

will be raised and open doubts expressed at what I say" (Krishna 1972c, 115). Given his scepticism regarding support from religious or scientific communities, Weizsäcker's collaboration appears even more fundamental to his cause.

Von Mangoldt translated Krishna's (English) essay and published the book, as anticipated, with the publishing house Otto Wilhelm Barth in late 1971 (Krishna 1971). Soon after, in early 1972, Ruth Nanda Anshen, editor of Harper & Row's "Religious Perspectives" series, published an English version of *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* – including Weizsäcker's introduction (Degler 2023, 160–161; Krishna 1972c). The book created quite a stir, particularly owing to Weizsäcker's commitment to introducing Krishna's views. Perhaps the most significant outcome of the Harper & Row edition was Julian Huxley's assessment of Krishna's hypothesis.

The evolutionary biologist Sir Julian S. Huxley had a short but significant correspondence with Krishna in 1972.[459] While Krishna and Huxley did not agree about the central tenets of their evolutionary theories, critical and appreciative words kept a balance. The point of departure for their correspondence was Harper & Row requesting Huxley to review *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* prior to publication (Degler 2023, 172). It is somewhat surprising that the publishing company decided to publish the book despite Huxley's criticism of it as muddled, unscientific, highly subjective, and lacking key sources on contemporary evolutionary theories. In his letter to Cass Canfield at Harper & Row, Huxley assessed that both Weizsäcker and Krishna fundamentally "misunderstood the nature and mechanism of evolution" (Huxley to Cass, n.d., LGK, box 4, file F; Kieffer to Krishna, April 14, 1972, box 6.3.3.). This criticism will be examined in more detail.

He commenced his review by dismantling Krishna's key argument of kundalini's evolutionary nature: "There is no such thing or force or agency as 'an evolutionary impulse'– which I presume (?) is what Bergson called 'l'elan vital'– This is a vitalistic and unscientific concept – biological evolution takes place primarily and essentially by the objective process of natural selection" (Huxley to Cass, n.d., LGK, box 4, file F). Huxley further pointed out that neither Krishna nor Weizsäcker had read his books on evolution – particularly his *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis* (1942) – and consequently, in his opinion, inaccurately addressed the topic of biological progress. However, Huxley not only criticised Weizsäcker's and Krishna's alleged misunderstandings of the biological principles of evolution; in

[459] Huxley was mentioned in Chapter 10.2.2. in reference to Teilhard de Chardin's Evolutionary Mysticism.

addition, Huxley underscored their ignorance of what he called "psycho-social evolution" (Huxley to Cass, n.d., LGK, box 4, file F).

According to Huxley's "evolutionary humanism" (J. Huxley 1957, 279), the human race undergoes psycho-social or cultural evolution alongside biological (Darwinian) evolution (*ibid*., 48). He suggested that human evolution is no longer driven solely by biological factors but further by the development of cultural and social realms. Moreover, this strain of evolution categorises religious traditions and rituals in correspondence to the evolution of "man's possibilities" (*ibid*., 14). Referring to his brother Aldous's *Doors of Perception* (1970), Huxley underscored his interest in transcendence, assessing its great value for an evolutionary humanistic approach.[460] As Huxley emphasised, meditation and its results also belong to this strain of evolution (Huxley to Cass, n.d., LGK, box 4, file F). Assuming a progressive interpretation of religion and, ultimately, transcendence, he suggests that religious experience constitutes a latent capacity within humans that can be cultivated. In his 1957 essay "Transhumanism" (published in his book *New Bottles for New Wine*, 1957), Huxley stressed how the majority live "far below [their] capacity, and that most human beings develop not more than a small fraction of their potential mental and spiritual efficiency" (J. Huxley 1957, 18).

Krishna and Huxley shared the perspective that humanity was on the threshold of a new level of evolution. However, Huxley distinguished between biological and psycho-social evolution, with neither driven by an underlying agency – his major issue with Krishna's evolutionary ideas.

Thus, while Krishna emphasised that kundalini represented the evolutionary potency, Huxley underscored a synthesis of scientific insights and social, cultural, psychological, and religious factors as catalysts for activating humanity's "inherent potentialities" (Bowler 2003, 309–310; J. Huxley 1957, 13, 48).

Owing to his interest in the "latent capacities" of humanity and the experience of transcendence, Huxley did not, after all, completely dismiss Krishna and Weizsäcker's book. While condemning their "naivety" regarding their understanding of religion and evolution, he nonetheless valued their attempt "to emphasize possible advantages of meditation" (Huxley to Cass, n.d., LGK, box 4, file F). He concluded his review by assessing that while somewhat valuable, it was "unfortunately also a muddled book as it postulates a creator God

[460] Julian Huxley's considerations about the ties between religion and evolutionary theory were a major departure from his grandfather, Thomas H. Huxley, who pled for the incompatibility of science and religion (Bergunder 2016, 92).

or creative life-force – both [the postulation of a God or life-force] erroneous in my view, but anyhow quite different" (*ibid*.).

Huxley had not heard of Weizsäcker and was unfamiliar with his work: "von Weizsacker [*sic*] […] I fear I do not know, or know about – who is he and what are his specialties [*sic*] and qualifications?" (*ibid*.). Given Weizsäcker's limited reception beyond German-speaking discourses on physics, philosophy, and religion, Huxley's unfamiliarity with him is unsurprising (Bartosch 2015, ix). Huxley's unbiased perspective on Weizsäcker and Krishna makes his review even more valuable: Otherwise, Weizsäcker's authority might have influenced his judgement.[461] Not knowing of Weizsäcker's background, he suggested Harper and Row include a second introduction or epilogue, preferably written by a "first class evolutionary biologist if possible acquainted with psychological phenomena like transcendence" (Huxley to Cass, n.d., LGK, box 4, file F).

Krishna reacted to Huxley's review with a sixty-page-long response in verse.[462] Throughout the two thousand lines of verse, Krishna elucidated his argument for kundalini's evolutionary potential, suggesting that kundalini was the impetus of evolutionary change:

> As a biologist you also know
> It well that mankind did not rational grow
> By its own wish or will, but deep within
> Some cog began to move, some wheel to spin,
> Which caused amazing changes in the brain
> No one can doubt for they are all too plain.
>
> But can you tell us how this change occurred
> And what mechanism in the body stirred
> To action to contrive the amazing rise
> That made a savage brute astute and wise,
> With such remodeling of the complex brain
> Only a perfect wisdom could ordain.

[461] A letter from Huxley addressed to Kieffer supports this assumption. After receiving basic information on Weizsäcker's status and profession, Huxley praises Weizsäcker as "clearly an outstanding man, both in his speciality and in his philosophical and personal attitude to our modern problems" (Huxley to Kieffer, April 5, 1972, LGK, box 4, file F).

[462] Gopi Krishna accomplished his response to Julian Huxley in March 1972 (Krishna 1972b). This letter was also published as an appendix to the 2019 edition of Krishna's *From the Unseen* (Degler 2023, 172; Krishna 2019). I am indebted to Michael Bradford for sharing Krishna's response to Huxley.

The same mechanism is active still,
Building the future man with matchless skill,
Invisible to our eyes but all the same
Changing by slow degrees man's mortal frame. (Krishna 1972b, 55–56)[463]

Of the numerous examples, these lines demonstrate Krishna's attempt to convince Huxley of the existence of a hitherto unknown mechanism within the human body, which would explain the unsolved riddle of the "prime mover" of evolutionary processes. He also reiterated his call for empirical verification of his claims:

Pray rest assured this is no fairy tale,
Though what I say is yet beyond the pale
Of present knowledge, but one single test,
One lone experiment, above all the rest,
Done with perseverance, can clearly prove
What I affirm, for Truth can mountains move.

The trials I propose will not be made
In close or darkened rooms nor in the shade,
But in laboratories at any time,
Open to scientists of every clime. (*ibid*.)

In addition to expounding on his own ideas, he criticised Huxley's position regarding evolution, underscoring what he considered to be the biologist's ignorance about the impetus of evolution:

Although your [evolutionary] theory lacks decisive proof,
You have commenced to drum it from the roof,
Forgetting in your haste to show your worth,
That still the riddle of how life took birth
Has not been solved, and that your learned words
Are, like the attempts at flight of fledgling birds […]
Excuse me, if I say that you are wrong. (*ibid*., 3–4)

Indeed, as mentioned above, Huxley denied the involvement of an underlying agency in evolutionary change. While contemplating religion as an aspect of humanity's psycho-social

[463] Typical of Krishna's rhetorical strategy, he barely (only twice) uses the term "kundalini" in his letter to Huxley.

evolution, he emphasised that these evolutionary processes depended on a composition of scientific and technological advancements and sociocultural factors (J. Huxley 1957, 13, 280). Krishna also reacted to Huxley's criticism of their book being "muddled", particularly defending Weizsäcker's status as an esteemed scientist:

> You call me muddled as I have made bold
> To challenge the out-worn views that you hold!
> Pernicious views that have already done
> More harm to mankind than the knowledge won. (Krishna 1972b, 2)
>
> It is so tragic you call muddled too
> Von Weizsacker [*sic*], your next door neighbor, who,
> An honored scientist, truth lover and
> A staunch ally of world-peace in his land,
> A known philosopher too, who has not
> His broad mind closed to fresh inflow of thought. (*ibid*., 49–50)

According to Krishna, his letter assuaged Huxley's initial dismissal of Krishna and Weizsäcker's work. Huxley, who called Krishna's response "a remarkable achievement", nonetheless underscored that Krishna "appears to misunderstand my position in various ways" (Huxley to Kieffer, April 5, 1972, LGK, box 4, file F). Despite persisting differences, Huxley acknowledged certain parallels between his and Krishna's endeavours: In his follow-up response, addressed to Kieffer, he wrote: "Please give my best regards to Mr. Krishna – and say that I think we are partners in the great adventure, even if we don't agree over details and methods" (*ibid*.).

15.4. Concluding Remarks: Kundalini's Initiation into European Scientific Circles

This chapter introduced one of Krishna's most crucial collaborators: Carl Friedrich Freiherr von Weizsäcker. Remembered as a physicist, philosopher, and humanist, Weizsäcker also had a keen interest in South Asian religions. This fascination led to a mutually beneficial friendship: Weizsäcker saw Krishna as a master of South Asian mysticism, while Krishna viewed Weizsäcker as a scientific facilitator who could help introduce his views on kundalini to scientists. The significance of this friendship for the present study lies in the collaborations between Weizsäcker and Krishna. As this chapter demonstrated, particularly their co-authored book, *Die Biologische Basis der religiösen Erfahrung* (1971), can be understood

as kundalini's official initiation into scientific circles – first in the German-speaking area, and then with its English translation in 1972 also internationally. Julian Huxley, a respected evolutionary biologist, reviewed the book. While critical, Huxley did not dismiss Krishna's hypothesis outright, as a follow-up correspondence revealed.

The establishment of FWW, in contrast, did not lead to any substantial outcome. Nevertheless, when reconstructing the history of kundalini research, Weizsäcker and Krishna's FWW warrants recognition as the first interdisciplinary and international organisation aimed at investigating kundalini. Krishna's inclusion in FWW was never intended to depict him or his work as scientific. Contrary to the speculations of US-American students, Krishna was also not the subject of research within FWW. Instead, the establishment of FWW and Krishna's membership were solely aimed at introducing Krishna to Germany's scientific elite and disseminating his ideas within these circles: Weizsäcker "wished to do all he could in providing the support and the resources needed for the research I had in mind, and the cooperation of competent scientists in the undertaking" (Krishna 1982, 223).

This chapter further introduced Carl Friedrich Basedow and Barbara Rotraut Pleyer, better known as Sinai. While Basedow maintained a devoted disciple until his passing, Sinai, a passionate peace activist, left Krishna's inner circle after a short period of dedicating her life to his cause. Sinai was one of the few women who actively participated in Krishna's project. While Margaret Kobelt, Evelyn Ferrantani, and Monica Koops represented loyal supporters, they assumed passive roles, contributing to administrative tasks instead. Sinai, however, got things going. She accomplished Krishna's release from prison, his initial invitation to Europe, the publication of his book in a leading German publishing house, and the encounter with Weizsäcker, Heisenberg, and other esteemed German personalities. Despite her involvement and dedication, a conflict with Weizsäcker led to her breaking not only with Weizsäcker but also with Krishna. This conflict revealed the basic dynamics of affinity and disfavour within Krishna's inner circle. As demonstrated earlier with the case of Joseph Dippong, Sinai's expulsion from Krishna's fellowship was not an isolated incident. Neither Sinai nor Dippong were explicitly asked to step aside. However, both experienced a loss of credibility due to a behaviour that Krishna disapproved of. This chapter, therefore, not only illustrated kundalini's initiation into European scientific circles on the part of Weizsäcker but also demonstrated how the relationship between Krishna and his supporters was characterised by a reciprocal nature: loyalty and commitment in exchange for Krishna's trust and affinity.

On a final note it is important to underscore that the interactions and activities of Weizsäcker, Sinai, and Krishna shed light on broader developments and reflect the zeitgeist of the 1970s. United by a fear of a nuclear third world war – a common sentiment during the Cold War – they all dedicated their efforts to world peace: Sinai engaged in diplomacy with world leaders; Weizsäcker lectured and published on peace research and developed his political concept of "Weltinnenpolitik", aiming for global political alliance to prevent humanity's self-destruction; and Krishna maintained that his evolutionary theory revolving around kundalini was the key to world peace.

Their efforts can be best described as fostering a "planetary awareness". In line with ideas of "planetary consciousness" and "planetary spirituality", as propagated by the New Age movement (Hanegraaff 1996, 155–156), they explored not only the political but also the religious conditions necessary for world peace. In particular Weizsäcker adopted an interdisciplinary perspective, considering political, philosophical, religious, economic, and ecological dimensions, asserting that "peace is the embodiment of a truth" (Weizsäcker 1988, 41).[464] Weizsäcker assumed the existence of various forms of peace (e.g., peace of an individual with themselves or their society, peace in the overall society, peace of a society with its natural environment, peace between nations, etc.). In all cases, peace for Weizsäcker is "the possibility of living without conflicts that endanger existence" (*ibid.*)[465] and a truth was a distinct perspective of reality. Consequently, he suggested speaking of "a" peace and "a" truth, as truth can never be fully perceived. Therefore, insight and peace have only a limited range (*ibid.*, 40–41).

Krishna maintained that the experience of kundalini would reveal one distinct truth, foster "planetary awareness" (Krishna 1972b, 52),[466] and thus facilitate world peace. Disillusioned by traditional diplomacy, Sinai placed all her trust in Krishna's evolutionary kundalini theory. In sum, Weizsäcker's "Weltinnenpolitik", Krishna's religious evolutionism, and Sinai's peace activism united them as allies in their quest for world peace.

[464] German original: "Ein Friede ist der Leib einer Wahrheit" (Weizsäcker 1977, 40).

[465] German original: "Friede ist hier gemeint als eine Moglichkeit. zu leben. Genauer: ohne existenzgefährdende Konflikte zu leben" (Weizsäcker 1977, 40).

[466] Krishna did not use the term "planetary awareness".

16. John White and the US-American Discovery of Krishna

Unlike Weizsäcker and Singh, White was not of aristocratic descent, nor was he a renowned figure whose ideas or actions shaped history. Nonetheless, White played a seminal role by advocating Krishna's work in the United States without compromising his independence. White did not credulously follow Krishna's teachings as flawless truths, but also criticised them and credited other teachers' ideas. Despite these differences, he remained one of Krishna's closest supporters. This chapter is divided into three parts. First, I will introduce John White, detailing his relationship with Krishna and Kieffer and discuss his supportive activities. The second part will shed light on the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), where White was employed for a while and appeared to be a promising collaborator for Krishna's project. Finally, the chapter will examine the tensions that arose from White's involvement with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation. Given Krishna's rivalry with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, this chapter will discuss their efforts to discredit each other's theories and methodologies.

16.1. John White and His Collaborative Support for Krishna's Work

John W. White (b. 1939) has assumed several roles during his life: Educator, journalist, author, editor, lecturer, and a flying-saucer enthusiast. First and foremost, however, he was a writer. He published several books, drafted countless articles for magazines and newspapers, and edited a few impactful volumes, including *The Highest State of Consciousness* (1972) and *Kundalini. Evolution and Enlightenment* (1979). Unlike Weizsäcker and Singh, White did not compose an autobiographical account; generally, information on his life and work is relatively limited.

White has resided in the United States his entire life. He studied English and Education at Dartmouth College (1961) and Yale University (1969), respectively, spent four years in the Navy, and worked as an English teacher. In 1971, his life took a new turn as he started to work for and with the NASA astronaut Edgar Mitchell. As will be detailed below, in 1972, Mitchell established the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), a centre to study paranormal phenomena and their link to the mind. White remained at the Institute for two years and assumed the role of its Director of Education. After he left, he mainly worked as a freelance writer and assumed another leadership role at an educational institution striving for self-directed growth. In addition, White lectured at colleges and universities throughout North

America and has served on the editorial boards of scholarly and popular publications (Mitchell 1996, 5; J. W. White 2021).

White's first exposure to Krishna's writings dates to 1971 and was facilitated by Kieffer's publishing company, N.C. Press. As mentioned earlier, as part of his promotional strategy, Kieffer distributed approximately two hundred copies of Krishna's short essay, *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius*, to individuals he deemed influential in public life and the media. One of the recipients was John White (Degler 2023, 159, 173).

White's interest in the paranormal began in childhood when he chronicled sightings of flying saucers and encounters with extraterrestrials. He later hosted annual conferences on extraterrestrial life and technology and lectured widely on consciousness and human development. These fascinations would ultimately result in his employment through Mitchell (Furlong 2021). Aside from extraterrestrials and psychic abilities, White was also familiar with literature and teachings revolving around kundalini. However, something caught his attention in Krishna's writings. Therefore, after receiving the book, White decided to join forces with Kieffer to disseminate Krishna's ideas in the United States (Degler 2023, 173).

16.1.1. The Relationship Between White and Krishna

Over the next few years, White became one of Krishna's foremost supporters in the United States. Contrary to his custom, Krishna exchanged only a few letters with White, particularly until their first meeting in 1977 in Zurich. This is supported by a letter composed by White in 1975, wherein he writes: "I presume my name is familiar to you. Since 1971 I have actively supported your work" (White to Krishna, October 29, 1975, LGK, box 6.5.4.). This notwithstanding, both Krishna and Kieffer called White their "very good friend" when referring to him in their correspondence (Kieffer to Krishna, July 31, 1972, LGK, box 6.2.5.; Krishna to Kieffer, August 6, 1974, box 6.4.5.).[467]

White's decisive advantage was his far-reaching network within the field of consciousness research, and his presumed neutrality.[468] This becomes particularly evident when

[467] Krishna's referral to White as his "very good friend" in a letter to Kieffer dated 1974 seems somewhat exaggerated, considering White's formal introduction in his letter from 1975. Krishna's exalted assessment was likely reasoned by White's accomplishments promoting Krishna's cause (Krishna to Kieffer, August 6, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.).

[468] Refer to Chapter 20.4.1. for an explanation of "consciousness research" and its difference from the scholarly discipline of "consciousness studies".

highlighting his role at the Council Grove Conference, scheduled for April 30 through May 1, 1973.[469] Organised by the US-American author Gay G. Luce, it was the "Fourth Interdisciplinary Conference on the Voluntary Control of Internal States", centred on the topic of "Altered States of Consciousness". Despite their invitations, neither Krishna nor Kieffer could attend the event. Instead, White travelled there as their representative. By 1973, Krishna and Kieffer had achieved a certain level of prominence among transpersonal psychologists, consciousness researchers, and representatives of biofeedback research – arguably the target audience at the Council Grove Conference. However, according to Kieffer's narrative, this prominence came along with significant bias. Therefore, as Kieffer underscored, "John [White] is the most neutral person I can imagine in this situation" (Kieffer to Krishna, April 29, 1973, LGK, box 6.10.4.). In addition, as Kieffer emphasised, "he probably knows more of the participants personally than anybody else" (*ibid*.).

White's task as a "neutral" ambassador of Krishna's cause included reading a speech in place of Kieffer, distributing written material by Krishna, and generally promoting Krishna's project of kundalini research. He approached these assignments seriously, as evidenced by a seven-page report he prepared to inform Krishna and Kieffer about the event's highlights, such as the most important encounters with conference participants, including Charles Tart and Stan Grof. Moreover, he provided an overall assessment of Krishna's reputation within the field of consciousness research (White to Krishna, May 7, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5). The report also contained substantial portions of criticism. For instance, White criticised Krishna's writings as fragmented, arguing that his central message became obscured amid the various topics he addressed. Beyond stylistic concerns, White also took issue with Krishna's rejection of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and TM. Perhaps Krishna's lack of correspondence with White may have been influenced by White's open support of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and his candid criticism of Krishna's approach – a topic which will be discussed below. Whatever the reasons behind Krishna's behaviour toward White, in 1976 their relationship utterly changed after White interviewed Krishna in Zurich.

Kieffer and George Tompkins (Krishna's close supporter in California), initiated the interview. In agreement with Margaret Kobelt, with whom Krishna was residing in the fall of 1976, the two men arranged to undertake an extensive film production of White and Joseph Dippong interviewing Krishna in Zurich. Tompkins's Bio-Energy Research

[469] The Council Grove Conference was decisive for Krishna's reputation in the United States. Several associates of Esalen and proponents of New Age science attended the meeting. Refer to Chapter 21.3.2. for a closer examination of the event and its consequences for Krishna's project.

Foundation (California) and Joseph Dippong's Kundalini Research Institute (Canada) sponsored the whole undertaking, including travel costs and equipment.[470] The outcome of this interview project was eight short video clips, each lasting half an hour, which have been broadcast on several occasions, and segments are still available online (Degler 2023, 225–226; J. W. White 1977, 58).[471]

Crucially for this chapter, White seems to have been captivated by Krishna's charismatic presence upon their initial meeting. Despite underscoring his critical attitude, White could not deny his increasing fascination with Krishna, describing their encounter with the following words:

> All day long, for the entire four days, I questioned him intensively – probing, scrutinizing, testing his position for scientific or logical holes. By the end of our discussion, my reason, research and experience had led me to the conviction that what Gopi Krishna has to offer is of paramount importance to science and society. I was also impressed with the man's character – his humility, forbearance, patience, compassion and courage – as much as with his intellect. (J. W. White 1977, 58)

White's statements echo observations made by other close supporters of Krishna. The impression Krishna left on him fundamentally transformed their relationship, with White now openly advocating for Krishna's cause. Similarly, Krishna developed a particular fondness for White, as indicated by this note:

> You are not only a Member of the Board of my Advisors, but also a very close friend and associate of mine. On our meeting in Zürich I was greatly drawn to you and you have now a warm place in my heart. For me those who have the insight to grasp the implications of the Message and who […] dedicate themselves to the sublime task of making this great spiritual Law known to mankind are nearer to me than my own kith and kin. (Krishna to White, February 11, 1977, LGK, box 6.6.2.)

This quote reveals Krishna's affection for White and elucidates the criteria by which he evaluated his supporters: The level of their dedication to his teachings. This assessment also

[470] The interview transcript reveals that Dippong took part in interviewing Krishna. According to Degler, this arrangement was not initially planned but resulted from Dippong's persistent condition for sponsoring part of the project (Degler 2023, 226; Krishna 1976a). However, as previously argued, Dippong's actions disappointed Krishna and his closest supporters. Therefore, it is vital to consider that Degler may frequently refer to Dippong in a biased manner. Refer to Chapter 13.1.1.4. for more information on this matter.

[471] The film was shown, e.g., in New York at the "New Dimensions Symposium" in 1978 (Kieffer to Krishna, February 5, 1979, LGK, box 6.6.1.).

sheds light on his prolonged stays in Europe with his supporters and collaborators instead of dwelling in South Asia with his family.

Another intriguing aspect of this quote warrants attention: Krishna's invitation for White to join his "board of advisors". The term suggests White's involvement with Krishna's KRF and implies the formation of a curated group of supporters in an advisory capacity. However, to my knowledge, Krishna did not employ this designation on any other occasion. Either he adopted it for this specific usage only, or the "board of advisors" was a synonym for an unwritten list of KRF's most dedicated members. Given the speculative nature of this assessment and the lack of evidence, this study nonetheless assumes that White was not an official member of Krishna's KRF but instead maintained an independent supportive stance.

16.1.2. White's Kundalini-Related Publications

White's most significant contributions to Krishna's project stemmed from his writings and journalistic skills. He drafted more pieces on Krishna's work than anyone else, including Kieffer – arguably Krishna's most active supporter. Moreover, White's role as an editor garnered him growing respect in the United States. Consequently, when he undertook the editing of a volume on kundalini, he was able to assemble a remarkable group of authors. As a result, the volume *Kundalini. Evolution and Enlightenment* (1979) maintains one of the most valuable sources on modern perceptions of kundalini. Therefore, unlike Weizsäcker and Singh, White's support was more understated but equally impactful and perhaps even more sustainable.

In a letter, White summarised his literary contributions from 1971 and 1975, offering a comprehensive overview of the extent of his involvement:

> [My support of your work began] with the publication of my review of Kundalini in Psychic magazine (where I am an editor) and later your own article, which I received from Gene Kieffer, "The True Aim of Yoga".[472] In the current issue of East West Journal I have a favorable review of The Awakening of Kundalini. Likewise I have reviewed your other books favorably and have written about your work in several small magazines. I also gave it prominent mention in my major Saturday Review article last

[472] Krishna's article "The True Aim of Yoga" was based on a speech delivered in Basel. Following its publication in *Psychic Magazine* in 1973, White distributed the article among participants of the Council Grove Conference in 1973. Krishna republished the article as part of his 1975 book *The Awakening of Kundalini* (Krishna 1973; 1975b).

> February. Through Gene's cooperation, I included an article of yours in my anthology What Is Meditation? (Anchor Books, 1974) and will have another in my forthcoming book, Future Science. All my other books refer to your work. […] Next month Fate magazine (circulation: 200,000) will carry an article of mine about kundalini and you. Last of all, in my forthcoming book about Transcendental Meditation, I have a chapter about you entitled "TM and Kundalini". (White to Krishna, October 29, 1975, LGK, box 6.5.4., original emphasis)

Some of these references warrant closer scrutiny to grasp White's level of commitment fully. His review of Krishna's *Kundalini* (1967) in *Psychic Magazine* was his first publication on Krishna. There, he introduces the book's author and the content, emphasises Krishna's unique approach, and criticises Hillman's comments – perhaps motivated by Kieffer's opinion (see Chapter 11.2.).

White titled his *Saturday Review* article "The Consciousness Revolution" (1975). Over five pages, White introduces the US-American spectrum of what he called "current mind and consciousness research" (J. W. White 1975b, 15), encompassing thirteen related frontiers such as biofeedback, body-consciousness therapies, psychic research, and yoga. Contrary to his claim that he "gave [Krishna's work] prominent mention" (White to Krishna, October 29, 1975, LGK, box 6.5.4.), he did not mention a single book by Krishna. While he referred to the New York branch of KRF and included some scattered mentions of kundalini, he did not particularly relate research into kundalini with Krishna and his KRFs. Intriguingly, he also employed the designation "kundalini hypothesis". Although it had become a common phrase in Krishna's vocabulary (see Chapter 10.2.2.), White omitted reference to Krishna (J. W. White 1975b, 15–19).

Unlike the contribution for *Saturday Review*, the article in *Fate* exclusively portrayed Krishna and his project of kundalini research. Titled "Kundalini Yoga. Key to Self-Awareness" (1975), the first page of the article featured Krishna's picture with Weizsäcker – the same picture that R.K. Karanjia would print a few months later on the cover of the May 8, 1976 issue of *Blitz* (J. W. White 1975a, 64; Karanjia 1976g, 1). Corresponding to Krishna's picture with Weizsäcker, White depicts Krishna as a "yogi-scientist-philosopher" and "one of the leaders in [the] emerging field" (J. W. White 1975a, 64) of consciousness research. In a clear and lucid manner, White introduced Krishna and his project, elucidating to the "uninitiated" US-American population what kundalini entailed, according to Krishna. A mere introduction, however, was not the main objective of White's article. Instead, he emphasised Krishna's "scientific" approach:

> Now, if this was all Gopi Krishna had to say it would be interesting but not compelling. Others have talked and written about kundalini since earliest times. But Gopi Krishna […] also is a man of science. And in this respect he says something that hasn't been said before: kundalini can be scientifically verified in the laboratory. (*ibid*., 64)

White uses Krishna's collaborations with Weizsäcker, Singh, and Kieffer as key examples to support his claim that Krishna's theories have garnered scientific interest among "Eastern" and "Western" scientists (*ibid*., 70).[473] He concludes his affirmative portrayal of Krishna's project by emphasising that Krishna "is a man to whom we should listen. He is making a breathtaking attempt to heal the split between science and religion by offering the first testable field theory of psychophysical linkages between mind, body and cosmos, covering the entire spectrum of psychological, psychic and spiritual phenomena" (J. W. White 1975a, 71).

White's article "Sex and Sublime Awareness" (1977), published in *Human Behavior Magazine*, mirrors the basic arguments posed in his *Fate* article.[474] It is noteworthy that each of White's articles underscored Krishna's firm opposition to the suppression of sexuality during one's spiritual journey: "He strongly disagrees with those who regard sexual contact as detrimental to spiritual evolution. Moreover, he points out that […] an enlightened person can enjoy an active sex life up to an age of 100 – and even beyond!" (J. W. White 1977, 61). Indeed, Krishna firmly rejected the notion that "celibacy is a mark of sainthood" (Krishna 1993, 334; Weizsäcker 1972, 30–31). Instead, he argued for the necessity of sexuality beyond mere procreation as a means to attain higher states of consciousness (Krishna 1993, 257, 334). According to Krishna, sexuality serves evolutionary purposes and should not be suppressed:

> The damage caused by the sense of guilt experienced by countless men and women in all walks of life when they indulged in the pleasures of love has been incalculable. The great disservice done to humanity by narrow-minded religious zealots who inculcated

[473] White cites Gene Kieffer as another example of a "Western" scientist intrigued by kundalini and identified his New York KRF branch as his corresponding educational centre. However, White fails to acknowledge KRF's close association with Krishna and does not clarify Kieffer's professional background. By broadening the list of Krishna's "scientific" collaborators, White may have aimed to bolster Krishna's credibility (J. W. White 1975a, 70–71).

[474] Other pieces that align with the *Fate* and *Human Behavior* articles include "Kundalini. Sex, Evolution and Higher Consciousness" (1976), published in *World Union*, and White's contribution "Kundalini. Sex, Evolution and Higher Consciousness" to the anthology *Kundalini Rising. Exploring the Energy of Awakening* (2009). Notably, these articles exhibit striking similarities in content, title, and wording, with the latter two precisely matching (J. W. White 1976b; 2009).

> the idea that the procreative act was sinful is beyond expression. This false supposition has acted as a blight on the spiritual aspirations of innumerable human beings who were led to hate and condemn themselves because of their inability to uproot the urge. (*ibid*., 334)[475]

By highlighting Krishna's views on sexuality, White presumably aimed to capture the attention of individuals interested in pursuing a spiritual path without being prepared to renounce worldly pleasures. He thus promoted Krishna's project by aligning some of its tenets with the liberal attitude of US-American spiritual seekers.

In addition to praising Krishna and his "unique" approach to kundalini, White appended an overview of current and past research endeavours. This included Krishna-affiliated projects, such as Karan Singh's "Project Consciousness" (see Chapter 17.3.3.) and Kieffer's KRF, along with several competing projects. Most notably, White introduced Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Research Institute (California), Yogi Amrit Desai's Kripalu Ashram (Pennsylvania), and Lee Sannella's Kundalini Clinic (California).[476] Sannella's approach and his collaboration with Itzhak Bentov seemed to have particularly sparked his interest. Juxtaposing their understanding of kundalini with those of Yogi Bhajan and Gopi Krishna, White underscored what he considered Sannella and Bentov's "scientific" approach.[477] This brief report represents White's unmistakable approach to Krishna's cause: Keeping a balance between affirmation and criticism (J. W. White 1977, 60).

A final remark is due to White's anthology *Kundalini. Evolution and Enlightenment* (1979) (Figure 14). The volume presents an array of opinions, experiences, and scientistic explanations of kundalini. A prime demonstration of White's skill in assembling the most significant voices on a subject, the book features contributions from key figures shaping modern interpretations of kundalini. South Asian "experts" included Gopi Krishna, Yogi Bhajan, Swami Muktananda, Haridas Chaudhuri, Yogi Amrit Desai, and Swami Rama – with

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[475] In his chapter "Exploring the Myths and Misconceptions of Kundalini" (1990), M. S. S. Gurucharan Singh Khalsa claimed that Krishna "wrote that celibacy was needed to raise the energy. So there are many young people who come to the Institute [Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Research Institute] struggling with celibacy and searching for the great kundalini experience" (G. S. Khalsa 1990, 135). Given Krishna's consistent dismissal of celibacy, Khalsa's claim must be regarded as unfounded.

[476] Philip Deslippe offers the best introduction to Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga. However, he omits any discussion of Yogi Bhajan's views on kundalini and his Kundalini Research Institute (Deslippe 2012; 2018). Chapter 8.2. will address these neglected aspects of Yogi Bhajan's teachings. Chapter 22.1.3. then thoroughly examines Sannella's theories on kundalini as outlined in his *Kundalini: Psychosis or Transcendence?* (1976) and the history of the Kundalini Clinic, which Sannella co-founded.

[477] Refer to Chapter 22.1.1. for a comprehensive analysis of Bentov's approach to kundalini, which was characterised by a distinct scientistic orientation.

Krishna contributing two articles to the volume. Non-South Asian voices encompassed European and US-American supporters of the above, self-proclaimed researchers, and scientists, including Gene Kieffer, Tontyn Hopman, M. S. S. Gurucharan Singh Khalsa, Lee Sannella, Itzhak Bentov, Ken Wilber, and Christopher Hills – with Singh Khalsa (a devoted follower of Yogi Bhajan) co-authoring two articles. Composed of five parts, the book comprises articles on the question "what is kundalini?", personal accounts, kundalini research, kundalini's ties with the occult, and advice by "the sages to the seekers" (J. W. White 1990a). In essence, the volume united key voices and addressed central topics, making it the most comprehensive documentation of the modern kundalini discourse.

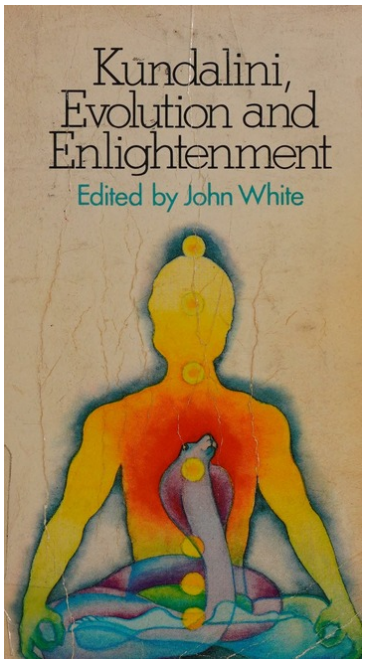

Figure 14: Cover of the first edition of *Kundalini: Evolution and Enlightenment* (J. W. White 1979).

In an effort to incorporate competing views, White granted much space to theories by both Krishna and Yogi Bhajan. However, a closer examination reveals White's prioritisation of Krishna's teachings. In White's two articles within the volume, he frequently refers to Krishna, whom he depicts as "the world's foremost authority on kundalini research" (J. W. White 1990c, 395).[478] White's contribution, "Some Possibilities for Further Kundalini

[478] White's assessment of Krishna evolved between the first edition of *Kundalini. Evolution and Enlightenment* (1979) and its republication in 1990. In the 1979 Anchor Books edition, White simply mentioned Gopi Krishna by name (J. W. White 1979, 392). However, in the 1990 edition, in contrast, which was not explicitly marked as a revised edition, White referred to Krishna as "the deceased Indian yogi-scientist Gopi Krishna, author of *Kundalini, the Evolutionary energy in Man* and widely regarded as the world's foremost authority

Research" (1979), sheds particular light on his high regard for Krishna without, however, explicitly expressing this assessment. Throughout the chapter, he underscores how Krishna "has given specific indications for scientifically demonstrating the reality of kundalini" (J. W. White 1990b, 353). White's confidence in Krishna's project of kundalini research further finds expression in the volume's appendix, which includes nine entries of Krishna's writings – more than for anyone else – and advocates for five distinct branches of Krishna's KRF and their periodical *Spiritual India and Kundalini* (J. W. White 1990a, 467–476).

Kundalini. Evolution and Enlightenment and White's other edited volumes attracted considerable attention and offered a unique opportunity for Krishna to distribute his teachings and research projects. This is exemplified, for instance, by a letter from William G. Stovink, a retired member of M.I.T., who learned of Krishna's project through White's mention of it in his *The Highest State of Consciousness* (1972). Believing he possessed an active kundalini himself, Stovink offered his steadfast service to Krishna's project (Stovink to Kieffer, March 31, 1972, LGK, box 6.3.3). Examples such as this underscore the importance of White's publishing and editing efforts in disseminating knowledge about Krishna's project across the United States. In addition to publishing written material, White also furthered Krishna's cause through social activities, such as attending the Council Grove Conference and interviewing Krishna in Zurich.

16.2. Edgar Mitchell and the Institute of Noetic Sciences

Krishna's ideas have resonated with various individuals: Scientists, politicians, journalists, astrologers, peace activists, and astronauts. This chapter will explore how NASA astronaut Edgar Mitchell became interested in Krishna's project and how together they strove for collaboration between Mitchell's Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) and Krishna's KRF.[479] In early 1971, the US space program launched its Apollo 14 mission. The third crewed mission to land on the lunar surface saw two members of Apollo 14's crew walk for several

on kundalini research, elaborated on the phenomenon" (J. W. White 1990c, 395). While this could be considered an incidental modification following Krishna's passing, it is noteworthy that White did not acknowledge the revision. He might have felt compelled to express his opinion of Krishna, which may have appeared too biased in the volume's initial publication.

[479] The term "noetic" derives from the Greek noun *nous* and can be traced back to conceptualisations by William James and Teilhard de Chardin. The US-American mathematician Charles A. Musès reframed noetics as "the master science of the knowledge of consciousness and the release of its potentialities" (Musès, 1972, 90). According to White, while Mitchell popularised the term, White initially proposed its use in IONS's designation based on Musés's definition (J. W. White 1975b, 15; 2021).

hours on the moon. One of them was Edgar D. Mitchell (1930–2016). Despite the singularity of walking on the moon, Mitchell underscored his experience of "an ecstasy of unity" (Mitchell 1996, 3) during the mission's journey back to the Earth. Later, he related it to the concept of samadhi and fully immersed himself in paranormal explorations (*ibid*., 3–5, 69). Samadhi, as Mitchell maintained, essentially opposed dualistic thinking by enabling the mystical union with the divine (*ibid*., 144). In addition to his definition of samadhi as experience, he also spoke of it as a state of mind that could alter the perception of reality. According to Mitchell, he came across the religious concept in texts that he ascribed to "Buddhist and Hindu mystics" (*ibid*., 144), praising Ken Wilber's *Spectrum of Consciousness* (1977) and Joseph Campbell's *The Power of Myth* (1988) as the most authoritative comment on Asian ideas about "inner experiences" (*ibid*., 137, 144). During this period, he also started to express interest in kundalini, associating it with his views on "inner experiences" (*ibid*., 198). Therefore, while Mitchell is best known as the sixth person to walk on the Moon, his post-NASA career is of foremost importance for the present study. In 1972, over a year after Mitchell's impactful experience, he decided to pursue an idea that had preoccupied his mind ever since:

> In the fall of 1972, I made a radical departure from what I had done for the past twenty years. I left NASA altogether and became a full-time student of […] the totality of consciousness. […] The vehicle for this project would be a nonprofit foundation that would allow me to function as an independent scholar. Academia wouldn't be very receptive to these interests […]. Thus, the Institute of Noetic Sciences was conceived. (*ibid*., 71–72)

This is not an appropriate place to thoroughly narrate the fascinating story of Mitchell and how he developed from an explorer of outer to inner space. Nonetheless, his Institute deserves attention due to its brief interaction with Krishna's KRF.

IONS was established in Palo Alto, California, in June 1973 (Figure 15). Its mission statement reads as follows: "The Institute of Noetic Sciences was founded in 1973 by Dr. Edgar D. Mitchell, Apollo 14 astronaut, to support research and educational programs to expand mankind's understanding of the nature of consciousness and the mind-body link" (IONS, n.d. ARC, box 91). Over the years, IONS has funded and carried forward a broad range of research activities, conferences, and experiments with a decisive focus on parapsychology and consciousness research. Today, the Institute continues to exist, offering online courses and on-site research projects (IONS 2024).

Figure 15: Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), Mission Statement (ARC, Mss 1, Special Research Collections, UCSB; printed with permission of the Special Research Collections, UCSB).

Prior to its inception in 1973, Mitchell began collaborating with like-minded individuals who might help him carry his idea forward. Among them was the journalist John White. It is not clear where and when Mitchell and White initially met. Perhaps Mitchell had heard of White owing to the latter's increasing recognition within the field of psychic research. Another potential point of intersection could have been their common interest in flying saucers and extraterrestrial life (Furlong 2021). In any case, White and Mitchell began joining forces no later than the summer of 1972. White assumed the role of IONS's Director of Education and continued working with Mitchell until 1974 (Kieffer to Krishna, July 31, 1972, LGK, box 6.2.5; J. W. White, n.d.).

Most of the interactions between KRF and IONS occurred in the first half of 1972, prior to the official establishment of IONS – and perhaps prior to White's employment with IONS.[480] Therefore, Degler's claim that "Mitchell's life crossed paths with Gopi Krishna's in 1972 through a connection with John White" (Degler 2023, 173) needs to be qualified. Indeed, 1972 was the year when Krishna and Mitchell's main correspondence and anticipated collaboration took place. However, it was not White but Kieffer who introduced Mitchell to Krishna's project. Moreover, this introduction took place not in 1972 but in 1971.

This is evidenced by a brief note composed by Mitchell in August 1971. The letter's recipient was Weizsäcker, whom Mitchell praised for his commitment to investigating what he called "psychic events" (Mitchell 1996, 91), highlighting Weizsäcker's scientific approach: "I applaud one of your eminence moving seriously into this field of research" (Mitchell to Weizsäcker, March 31, 1972, LGK, box 6.3.3.). Mitchell ends his note with the request to maintain contact, emphasising the significance of making "this area of human experience […] a respectable field of scientific endeavor" (*ibid*.). It is further apparent from the letter that Kieffer had introduced Mitchell to Krishna and Weizsäcker's work. Given that he refers to "Gene Kieffer of N.C. Press Inc. in New York" (*ibid*.), it is possible that Mitchell was one of the two hundred recipients of Kieffer's mass-mailing of Krishna's essay *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius*. Published and distributed by N.C. Press, the initial essay was still without Weizsäcker's introduction. Additionally, as of the date of Mitchell's letter, Harper & Row had not yet published the English translation (1972) of Krishna and Weizsäcker's co-published book *Die Biologische Basis der religiösen Erfahrung* (1971). It is therefore likely that Mitchell's note preceded his reading of Weizsäcker and Krishna's book – if he ever read it at all. The archival material thus demonstrates Kieffer's pivotal role in initially establishing the contact between Mitchell and Krishna. Only upon White's appointment at IONS did he, rather than Kieffer, navigate KRF and IONS's interactions (Kieffer to Krishna, July 31, 1972, LGK, box 6.2.5).

March 1972 marks the month when Kieffer and Krishna actively expressed to Mitchell their desire to collaborate. By mid-March, Krishna had accomplished an almost forty-page letter in verse comprising 1,328 lines of rhyming couplets. The poetic letter was the response to a

[480] There is no definitive evidence for when Mitchell employed White. While IONS was not officially launched before June 1973, White mentions that in 1972, "he worked with Apollo 14 astronaut Edgar Mitchell to begin The Institute of Noetic Sciences" (J. W. White, n.d.). Elsewhere, he writes that in 1972, he "joined with Apollo 14 astronaut Edgar Mitchell to study the human mind and apply our findings to planetary problems" (J. W. White 2021). In a letter to Krishna, dated August 8, 1972, Kieffer indicates White's employment with Mitchell (Kieffer to Krishna, August 8, 1972, LGK, box 6.2.5.).

letter Mitchell had earlier sent to Kieffer, and was essentially aimed at convincing Mitchell to implement kundalini research at his planned institute (Degler 2023, 173–174; Krishna to Mitchell, March 1972, LGK, box 4, file F).[481]

Mitchell enthusiastically responded to Krishna's letter: "The enlightened and profound verse which I received from you, through our friend Gene [Kieffer], has provided great satisfaction for me. It is apparent that we view the crisis of planet Earth and its inhabitants in much the same way" (Mitchell to Krishna, March 26, 1972, LGK, box 4, file F).[482] However, throughout the letter, Mitchell underscores his interest in the "psi phenomena" rather than kundalini or other "Eastern" disciplines. As will be demonstrated shortly, Mitchell's unwavering commitment to parapsychological studies would eventually hinder the progress of KRF and IONS's collaboration.[483] In March 1972, however, Mitchell concluded his letter by underscoring his wish to meet and collaborate with Krishna:

> I have the greatest desire to meet with you at a mutually convenient opportunity and to gain from your wisdom and insight, in order that the task which is mine to carry out can be furthered by the insight, wisdom and empathy which I feel could be gained by a mutual exchange. (*ibid*.)

Krishna surely reciprocated the desire to meet and collaborate with Mitchell, as expressed in a seven-page response. Across these pages, he emphasised what he perceived as the paramount importance of broader research into religious phenomena, potentially overshadowing Mitchell's focus on psi phenomena. Krishna began and concluded his letter by assuring Mitchell that "the object of my writing to you is not at all to dissuade you from the path you have chosen" (Krishna to Mitchell, April 4, 1972, LGK, box 4, file F). Despite this reiterated assurance, it was precisely what he aimed to do: "The point to which I wish to draw your particular attention is that there is another and, perhaps, an easier and more effective way to reach to the bottom of psi phenomena" (*ibid*.). Krishna remains somewhat vague about the nature of this "easier and more effective way". However, reading between

[481] Krishna's poetic letter followed a pattern he pursued during that period. Earlier in March 1972, he composed another letter in verse to Julian Huxley, and more letters followed to Max Lerner, a *New York Post* columnist, and a certain Mr Yorke. Krishna's supporters viewed these letters as evidence of his supernatural capabilities, interpreting them as "inspired verse" (Degler 2023, 172–173, 175; Krishna 2019). For examples of these verses, refer to the previous chapter, where I discuss Krishna's letters to Huxley.

[482] The letter's content aligns Mitchell with the "planetary" concerns of Weizsäcker and Sinai, as discussed in the concluding section of the previous chapter.

[483] According to White, Mitchell further considered the scope of Krishna's project as too all-consuming for his newly established institute (Degler 2023, 174–175).

the lines, it becomes evident that the "more effective way" pertains to his efforts in defining the evolutionary impetus. The changes in consciousness caused by such a biological mechanism may also be responsible for psi phenomena – of course, he subtly referred to kundalini. Krishna tried to persuade Mitchell by emphasising that "viewed from this angle, what I say is not antagonistic but analogous to the research you have in mind" (*ibid*.).

In his April 25, 1972, response, Mitchell politely and respectfully confirmed his intention to investigate psi phenomena exclusively. While he repeated his wish to meet Krishna at their earliest convenience, it became increasingly evident from the ongoing correspondence that their approaches were somewhat incompatible (Mitchell to Krishna, April 25, 1972, LGK, box 4, file F).

Kieffer naturally supported Krishna's efforts to enlist Mitchell for their cause. He corresponded with Mitchell and additionally approached Stanley R. Dean (n.d.a.), a close collaborator of Mitchell. A professor of psychiatry, Dean was known for his research into schizophrenia and also his contributions to the young discipline of "Metapsychiatry", integrating an interdisciplinary approach encompassing religion, psychiatry, parapsychology, and mysticism (Dean 1975). On May 2, 1972, Dean was chairing a panel at the American Psychiatric Association, which convened in Dallas, Texas, for its annual meeting. The panel "Metapsychiatry" revolved around a discussion on the topic "Science and Psi" and attracted much attention among professionals and laypeople (*ibid*., xx).

Before the event, to which Dean also invited Kieffer and Tompkins, Kieffer hoped to generate interest in KRF's work by sending Dean and Mitchell copies of Krishna's *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967) and *Kundalini: The Secret of Yoga* (1971). Kieffer emphasised that he wanted "both Dr. Dean and Mitchell to be particularly well-read on the subject" (Kieffer to Krishna, March 31, 1972, box 6.3.3). Apparently, Kieffer's strategy was successful. After receiving and reading Krishna's *Kundalini: The Secret of Yoga*, Dean contacted Kieffer, underscoring his conviction of Krishna's message:

> Yesterday Dr. Stanley R. Dean telephoned from Florida to tell me that he was now 100% converted to your [Gopi Krishna's] cause, having read [Kundalini:] The Secret of Yoga. He was quite excited and said that while in the past he had been quite reluctant to speak out publically [*sic*] in favor of scientific research on the Cosmic Conscious state, he would not be "timid" any longer. […] He also said that his paper for the American Psychiatric Association's convention May 2, in Dallas, would quote very liberally from your works. (Kieffer to Krishna, April 14, 1972, LGK, box 6.3.3., original emphasis)

Considering Dean's fame, his friendship with Mitchell, and the message his paper would convey, Kieffer was assured of the publicity resulting from the event. Following Dean's assertion to quote extensively from Krishna's work in his paper, Kieffer, full of trust in the far-reaching effect, contacted several newspapers and spoke of the event as "almost historic" (*ibid*.). Dean invited Kieffer and Tompkins to attend the Convention's preparty at a Dallas hotel, where Kieffer was hoping to talk to the participants of the event in person (*ibid*.). However, no further information is available about the event or whether Dean actually mentioned Krishna's project during his presentation.[484] Therefore, once again, the desired impact of the event was limited after all.

Not much correspondence was exchanged between KRF and IONS after Dallas. Later that year Mitchell received a considerable fund, about fifteen million US Dollars, which he intended to distribute among researchers associated with the "psychic field". There is no doubt that Kieffer had great hopes for being among those who would receive parts of the grant. Kieffer did not express his hopes and expectations in his letter to Krishna. Instead, he downplayed the significance of potential funding and pretended that this might be nothing of interest to them anyway:

> [Mitchell] wants to make grants to all kinds of scientists, etc., but he will retain the rights to all of their discoveries and findings, articles, books, etc. They [i.e, IONS] want to go into film, publishing, magazines records, tapes, etc., in fact, everything that we have talked about. I told John [White] that insofar as a grant from Ed's [Mitchell] $15-million-fund was concerned, if such were forthcoming it could not have any strings attached. All in all, I think it is good, since Ed and John will stir up a lot of interest, and then they will be unable to deliver anything of any value. (Kieffer to Krishna, July 31, 1972, LGK, box 6.2.5)

As expected from their rather unsatisfactory correspondence in March 1972, Mitchell did not provide any funding to KRF and showed no further interest in collaboration. Through White, who was by then already working closely with Mitchell, KRF maintained some connection with IONS. By 1974, Mitchell had depleted most of his funding, unable to secure further grants. This resulted in White losing his job and KRF its connection to IONS. Due to these significant financial challenges, Degler concluded that "even if Mitchell had been

[484] The book *Psychiatry and Mysticism* (1975) comprises several contributions from "Metapsychiatry" panels at different conferences. In Dean's contribution "Metapsychiatry: The Confluence of Psychiatry and Mysticism", he refers to Krishna's book *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967) and refers to kundalini as "the ultraconscious" (Dean 1975, 9).

willing to set up the kundalini research project in those early days, it would have not happened" (Degler 2023, 175; Kieffer to Krishna, July 17, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.1). A positive effect of White losing his job was his growing support of Krishna's KRF.

What began as a promising correspondence with the prospect of collaborating and stirring up much attention from scientists and the media ended in disappointment. Mitchell's initial interest steadily waned, and even White's employment could not revive KRF's link with IONS. This underpins once again White's role as an independent supporter of Krishna's KRF, who did not prioritise Krishna's project over his own objectives. The next chapter will further accentuate White's position by discussing his curiosity and receptiveness towards Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Transcendental Meditation.

16.3. Areas of Tension: White's Support for Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

In 1976, White published a book titled *Everything You Want to Know About TM*. The book thoroughly overviews the person of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and the practice of Transcendental Meditation (TM), which became his trademark. One of the book's chapters, "TM and Kundalini", deals with Gopi Krishna's interpretation of kundalini and how this relates to TM. As this chapter will demonstrate, the relationship between Krishna and Maharishi had been fraught with tension from the very inception of Krishna's project. To provide some background, this chapter will first introduce the Maharishi and his Transcendental Meditation, followed by an analysis of the tensions between the two South Asian teachers. Moreover, it will elucidate White's position as "in-between" and how that affected his relationship with Krishna.

16.3.1. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Transcendental Meditation

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (b. Mahesh Verma Shrivastava, 1918–2008) is best known as the "guru of the Beatles" and the founder of the meditation technique "Transcendental Meditation" (TM).[485] His meditation movement counted over a million members in the 1970s and is still thriving today. The fundamental tenet of Maharishi's movement aimed at providing a religious practice to all individuals, regardless of caste, gender, ethnicity, or

[485] This study employs the abbreviation "TM" for both the technique and Maharishi's associated movement.

age.[486] These spiritually enhanced individuals, the TM movement maintained, would usher in a new world order, a new age (Thursby 1995, 194; Williamson 2010, 86, 93).

In 1940, after studying physics at Allahabad University (now Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India), Mahesh met the respected Hindu monk Swami Brahmananda Saraswati (1871–1953) and became his devoted disciple. Soon after their meeting, Saraswati was appointed the Shankaracharya of the North Indian monastery Jyotir Math, one of the four monasteries established in the eighth century by Shankara. Thus, Saraswati became the religious head of one of the four South Asian monasteries responsible for perpetuating Shankara's Advaita Vedanta tradition (Williamson 2010, 83–84).

After Saraswati's passing, Mahesh left Jyotir Math. Eventually, he traveled to the south of India, where he started lecturing and ultimately teaching about Advaita Vedanta and meditation in 1954. He was not associated with any school or institute but instead taught a growing number of followers. After four years of teaching, he established the Spiritual Regeneration Movement, ultimately evolving it into TM. His teachings and the open association of TM with his guru's tradition represented clear departures from the tradition. The Advaita Vedanta tradition, rooted in Shankara's teachings, traditionally restricts the task of teaching to members of the Brahmin caste. Mahesh, however, was born into a family of the kayastha caste, associated with scribes and intellectuals. When Mahesh still resided at Jyotir Math, his guru did not allow him to join his order of monks, owing to his social status. Instead, he assumed the role of Saraswati's secretary. Against this backdrop, Maharishi clearly forsook the tradition's principles by positioning himself as a successor to Saraswati and aligning his global meditation movement directly with his guru's Shankaracharya tradition (Thursby 1995, 193; Williamson 2010, 83–84).

The success of the TM movement rested on various entangled factors: The simplicity of its meditation technique, its advocacy of the compatibility of capitalism with spirituality, its well-established institutionalised global organisation, and its purported scientific credibility. The movement's sophisticated marketing strategy and the cult surrounding the person of Maharishi complemented these factors. Williamson aptly observed that "hippies were attracted to him like bees to honey" (Williamson 2010, 83).

TM is a contemplative meditation technique centred on silently repeating a personalised mantra for a short period twice a day. By paying the corresponding fee for TM's initiation

[486] Most sources simply refer to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi as "Maharishi" (great sage). This study follows Williamson's approach, referring to him as "Mahesh" (great lord) before his self-appointment as a guru in 1958 and as "Maharishi" in his position as leader of TM (Williamson 2010).

process, individuals receive a "specially chosen" mantra, thus becoming members of Maharishi's movement. The simplicity of the practice made it easily applicable to everyday life, attracting a wide array of practioners. However, TM concealed a multi-tiered, fee-based initiation system for teachers, adding layers of exclusivity. The method for determining the appropriate mantra for each individual was kept secret. Moreover, Maharishi, during his numerous world tours, emphasised that this movement was not a path of renunciation. Instead, he taught that spiritual elevation could coexist with worldly life (*ibid*., 86–87). This approach particularly resonated with spiritual seekers in the United States, who desired to integrate spirituality into their lives without renouncing the materialism that surround them. Additionally, TM justified the high costs for initiations and teacher training courses by highlighting its integration into capitalist societies, arguing that the monetary investment reflected the value and efficacy of the practice within a modern context.[487]

During the 1970s, the contemplative technique of TM was further supplemented with the so-called TM-Sidhi program. The somewhat perplexing goals of this technique included the attainment of omniscience, supernormal strength, or levitation. From 1976, the TM-Sidhi program dominated Maharishi's teachings. As the movement grew, these courses were increasingly offered in the movement's own educational institutions. This included the Maharishi International University (MIU), which was founded in Santa Barbara, California, in 1971 and relocated to Fairfield, Iowa, in 1974, where it continues to operate under the name Maharishi International University (Thursby 1995, 195; Williamson 2010, 96–97).[488]

A key principle of the TM Movement was the compatibility of modern science and Hindu philosophy. According to Williamson, during the early 1970s, the movement shifted from a predominantly religious to a scientifically grounded legitimation of the TM technique. This shift was accompanied and encouraged by a host of scientific studies mostly conducted by Maharishi's "scientist followers" (Williamson 2010, 82). This strategy aimed to attract more people by scientifically legitimising the technique. Furthermore, it strove to capitalise on other trademarked techniques and therapies, including astrological consultations, architectural designs, "fire ceremony" performances, and ayurvedic healing techniques (Williamson 2010, 93, 102; Thursby 1995, 194).

[487] During the 1970s, TM charged at least 125 US Dollars for initiation into TM and receipt of one's personalised mantra (Degler 2023, 187).

[488] MIU is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and classified as a 501(c)3 nonprofit education organisation (MIU 2024).

The physicist Herbert Benson (1935–2022) and the physiologist R. Keith Wallace (n.d.a.) represented Maharishi's most pivotal "scientist followers". While Benson remained with the movement only for a short period, Wallace became the founding president of the Maharishi International University and a member of its board of trustees, and still heads its Department of Physiology and Health (MIU 2024).

In 1968, Benson was employed at Harvard Medical School when followers of Maharishi approached him, asking "whether they could be studied, for they felt they could lower their blood pressure through Transcendental Meditation" (Benson 1975, 83). After some hesitation, Benson agreed. Simultaneously, Wallace, who was in the process of pursuing his PhD, was conducting experiments on the physiology of transcendental meditators at UC Los Angeles. After earning his doctorate in 1971, he joined Benson at Harvard. The team conducted several experiments with TM members, who willingly agreed to participate in the testing, convinced "what they were doing was beneficial to themselves and mankind" (Benson 1975, 86). Maharishi welcomed the experiments. Convinced of the advantageous implications of the results for his movement, he agreed to accept the team's research findings, irrespective of the outcomes.[489] His conviction proved correct (Benson 1975, 83–87; Wallace 1970, 1751–1754).

Between 1971 and 1972, Benson, Wallace, and some other physiologists undertook several experiments and published their results in scientific journals (Wallace, Benson, and Wilson 1971; Wallace and Benson 1972). In their influential paper "The Physiology of Meditation" (1972), Wallace and Benson presented the results of their clinical research on transcendental meditators. The research team examined physiological variables, including heart rate and blood pressure, drew arterial blood samples, and read the subjects' frontal and central brain regions with electroencephalographs. During the test, the team investigated thirty-six subjects in three periods, each lasting approximately twenty to thirty minutes: A pre-meditative, meditative, and post-meditative state. The study concluded that the team observed discernible physiological alterations during the meditative state of transcendental meditators. Moreover, it asserted that the physiological changes of transcendental

[489] Despite Benson and Maharishi's initial agreement, Benson fell into disgrace after developing the method of "relaxation response". Based on his research into TM, he questioned the necessity of providing meditators with their personal mantra and ritualising the initiation process. He introduced the "relaxation response" as an alternative method, detached from religious doctrines, which was supposed to enhance one's well-being. In 1975, he published his best-selling eponymous book and, in 1988, founded the Mind/Body Medical Institute of Harvard Medical School. Today, his approach is carried forward at the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine of the Massachusetts General Hospital (Benson 1975, 26–27; BHI, n.d.; Williamson 2010, 87).

meditators, regardless of their level of experience, resemble those of proficient practitioners of yoga and Zen: “These physiological modifications, in people who were practicing the easily learned technique of transcendental meditation, were very similar to those that have been observed in highly trained experts in yoga and in Zen monks who have had 15 to 20 years of experience in meditation” (Wallace and Benson 1972, 89). In essence, Wallace and Benson suggested that their scientific investigations demonstrated the techniques’ benefits for improving one’s health. In addition, they utilised their results to emphasise TM’s superiority over other meditation techniques (*ibid*., 84–89).

Another key argument, particularly submitted by Wallace, pertained to the existence of a distinct state of consciousness triggered by TM: “Physiologically, the state produced by transcendental meditation seems to be distinct from commonly encountered states of consciousness, such as wakefulness, sleep, and dreaming, and from altered states of consciousness, such as hypnosis and autosuggestion” (Wallace 1970, 1754). In subsequent publications, Wallace would label this distinct state as “transcendental consciousness” (Travis and Wallace 1997, 39). In essence, Wallace correlated electrophysiological and biochemical changes with transcendental consciousness while also maintaining that this state of consciousness leads to health benefits. Wallace’s ongoing research, sponsored by TM, explored increasingly fringe areas, including claims of age reversal and research supporting Maharishi’s assertions of “yogic flight” during TM. Notably, aside from his early peer-reviewed articles, published by *Science*, *American Journal of Physiology*, and *Scientific American*, all subsequent publications appeared through the TM-affiliated MIU Press (Williamson 2010, 100; Thursby 1995, 194).

Scientific claims by Maharishi’s followers aiming at underpinning the effectiveness of TM did not only result in the increasing success of TM. These assertions further led to conflicts with Gopi Krishna and other (South Asian) opponents. The following chapter will explore reasons for and expressions of Krishna’s conflict with Maharishi and the TM movement.

16.3.2. The Opposition between Krishna and Maharishi

Krishna faced several difficulties while promoting his kundalini research. One significant challenge was the national and international competition and the influx of yogis into the United States during the 1970s. His main competitors were Yogi Bhajan, Swami

Muktananda, and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.[490] While Swami Muktananda vied for dominance in interpreting kundalini, Yogi Bhajan's and Maharishi's scientific efforts undermined Krishna's own project.[491] He and his supporters openly took issue with Yogi Bhajan and Muktananda, the former for his competing Kundalini Research Institute, which made similar claims as Krishna's KRF, and the latter for his practice of shaktipat, which Krishna labelled as placebo (Basedow to Krishna, July 4, 1972, LGK, box 6.2.5.; Krishna to Kieffer, August 6, 1974, box 6.4.5. Krishna 1978a, 35). These dissonances notwithstanding, among their competitors, Maharishi was the thorn in their side.

When Krishna and Maharishi first met in 1968, Krishna had just published his autobiography and had returned from his first trip abroad. Maharishi, in contrast, had already spent ten years steadily growing his movement and touring the world. In 1976, when they met again during a conference in New Delhi, things had significantly changed: Krishna had published several books, established collaborations with scientists and politicians in South Asia, Europe, and the United States, and travelled to Europe five times. The peak of their rivalry may be situated during the early 1970s when Maharishi's success seemed inexorable, and Krishna's success had not yet gained momentum. This chapter will explore the reasons for the opposition between the two, focusing on the opinions and actions of Krishna and his supporters. As this chapter will demonstrate, John White assumed a distinctive "in-between" position as a supporter of Krishna and an initiate of TM.

Krishna and Maharishi first met during one of Maharishi's public lectures, delivered in Srinagar in 1968. After speaking for over two hours in front of two thousand people, Maharishi encouraged his audience to ask whatever questions had arisen during the lecture. According to a narrative prevailing among Krishna's supporters, Krishna was among the attendees, raised his hand, and was invited to join Maharishi on the speaker's platform. White reiterated this narrative and described how Gopi Krishna

[490] Chapters 7 and 8 introduce Swami Muktananda and Yogi Bhajan's interpretation of kundalini and a more general discussion of the influx of yogis in the United States during the second half of the twentieth century.

[491] Kundalini never assumed a central role within TM. While White claimed that "Maharishi doesn't acknowledge the existence of kundalini in public – he doesn't even admit to knowing the word" (J. W. White 1976a, 95), Williamson stated that he "forbade his disciples from using the word kundalini" (Williamson 2010, 99). In any case, until 1976, kundalini did not play a role in TM. During a one-year course in Switzerland in 1976, Maharishi invited Swami Muktananda. This encounter between Maharishi and Muktananda marked a turning point in Maharishi's stance towards the serpent power. Williamson described how the meeting had altered the nature of TM practice, which increasingly aligned with Muktananda's "Intensives". Shaktipat, however, never played a role within TM (*ibid*., 98–99). Regarding Yogi Bhajan's shortcomings in defining kundalini, refer to Chapter 8.2.

> went to the microphone on stage and talked for fifteen minutes. In that time he absolutely devastated Maharishi and TM, saying that TM was a hypnotic technique of no spiritual worth whatsoever. Maharishi […] was stunned and almost speechless. He asked if that meant he had been hypnotizing himself into bliss all those years. "Exactly", was the reply. (J. W. White 1976a, 94)

Considering Maharishi's esteemed recognition and leadership within a global movement, Krishna's humiliation of Maharishi did not go without consequences. At the urging of his followers (and perhaps to assuage his wounded pride), Maharishi invited Krishna for a response. However, what Krishna had anticipated as a personal debate transpired as a gathering involving Krishna, Maharishi, and numerous Maharishi devotees. While there was no opportunity to exchange perspectives openly, Krishna presented Maharishi with his book *Kundalini. The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967). White emphasised that for Krishna and his supporters, the handing over of Krishna's autobiography marked the inception of their conflict with Maharishi: "According to one of Gopi Krishna's friends, [that] is when Maharishi got the idea for verifying TM scientifically, for Gopi Krishna had been calling on science to validate the claims of true yogis for years. Thus his whole concept of involving science in TM was ripped off from Gopi Krishna" (*ibid*., 95). White, of course, referred to Kieffer, who had frequently shown his disagreement with Maharishi's approach. Accordingly, in a letter, Kieffer confirmed White's assessment, insisting that "the TM people are attempting to exploit your [Krishna's] ideas, watering them down to where they have mass appeal but no substance" (Kieffer to Krishna, August 15, 1975, LGK, box 6.5.1.). He exemplified his accusation with an advertising brochure distributed by TM in 1975. The brochure's heading read "The Physiology of Enlightenment". Kieffer purported that the term "enlightenment" particularly referred to Krishna's theories. Although Krishna obviously had no claim on the religious concept of "enlightenment", Kieffer reasoned that TM's employment of the term in their brochure would evidence "that all of the Maharishi's advertising is influenced solely by the Pandit" (Kieffer to Nirmal and Kaul, March 30, 1975, LGK, box 6.10.5.).

White's account of Krishna's meeting with Maharishi in Srinagar cannot be substantiated through additional source material. However, I propose that the veracity of the meeting is secondary. Whether it actually occurred or was a narrative construct disseminated by Krishna's supporters does not affect the narrative's implications. First, it suggests an open rivalry that none openly expressed. Second, despite earlier research projects, both Maharishi and Krishna claimed to have implemented a scientific stance in yoga and meditation

research. Third, it underpins that White's role as Krishna's supporter had not yet fully consolidated at the time of publication of his book on TM (1976). Exploring these three implications will illuminate the complex relationships between the individuals involved.

Aside from Krishna's initial accusation of TM being self-hypnosis, which, in fact, lacks additional evidence, Krishna carefully paid attention to not openly attacking Maharishi or any of his other competitors. He preferred to be viewed as a considerate "yogi-philosopher" (J. W. White 1976b, 4) and as a "down-to-earth Protestant", as Thompson described him in the book *Passage About Earth* (1974):

> Most students of yoga who feel new energies flowing through them immediately set up shop as gurus and start taking on disciples, but Gopi Krishna will have none of this. The merchandising techniques of the Maharishi are abhorrent to him, and he regards Transcendental Meditation as little more than self-hypnosis […]. He will have nothing to do with modern, pop-culture forms of yoga showmanship with its theater of incense, flowers, red carpets, baubles, bangles, and beads. Among yogis, Gopi Krishna is something of a skeptical and down-to-earth Protestant. (W. I. Thompson 1974, 113)

Thompson's description corresponded to Krishna's self-conception as a philosopher and theoretician. Despite his claim of having attained the highest yogic state through his practice of meditation, he preferred to be known through his theories instead of practices. However, his choice not to teach meditation practices that help activate or tame kundalini was a significant disadvantage compared to Maharishi, Muktananda, and other South Asian meditation teachers. To maintain his credibility as a considerate and thoughtful philosopher, Krishna could not risk openly denouncing Maharishi and TM. At the same time, however, Krishna's reputation as a "yogi-scientist" (J. W. White 1990c, 395) was in jeopardy as a result of Maharishi's "scientific" approach. Krishna, therefore, had to develop a strategy to defend his reputation without causing harm to it.

Perhaps his public attitude was influenced by White's suggestions, as outlined in a letter of 1973. There, White speculates about a passage from Krishna's book *Some Questions Answered* (n.d.a.), which seemed to "[insinuate] a personal attack on Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and transcendental meditation" (White to Krishna, May 7, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5). White urged Krishna to maintain a neutral position and respectful attitude to avoid becoming "embroiled in the sort of undignified, adolescent squabbling that sometimes goes on among the supposedly enlightened, who say in effect, 'My way is better than your way and my guru is higher than your guru'" (*ibid*.). White emphasised that despite being initiated into TM and

having previously practised it regularly, he did not pose his criticism as an apologist for Maharishi but rather as a supporter of Krishna. Despite White's warnings, Krishna continued pursuing his critique of mantras. While Krishna avoided openly condemning Maharishi's TM and risking losing credibility, White underscored that most people would nonetheless recognise Krishna's assessment of "Mantra Yoga" as criticism of Maharishi: "If I, a supporter, subjectively felt that way when reading those passages, it seems likely that others less favorably disposed […] would say, 'Gopi Krishna is picking a fight with Maharishi'" (*ibid*.).

Thomson's estimation of the relationship between Krishna and Maharishi demonstrates the validity of White's warning. Accordingly, Thompson interpreted a passage in Krishna's *Kundalini: The Secret of Yoga* (1972) as a direct critique of Maharishi. The passage in question reads as follows:

> The aspirants seldom suspect that when a Guru breathes a Mantra into their ear and instructs them in meditation in a certain way, with the injunction that they should practice it daily in such-and-such a manner to gain such-and-such results is, without their knowledge, planting a suggestion deep into their subconscious and dealing with them in the same way as some mental healers and psychiatrists deal with the crowds of patients who throng their clinics or gather round them for treatment. (Krishna 1972a, 74)

Thompson did not doubt that Krishna's words referred to Maharishi's TM. He scrutinised Krishna's negative attitude, finding it "strange since he respects and appeals to science, and Transcendental Meditation is one of the few yogic movements with a growing literature of scientific papers behind it" (W. I. Thompson 1974, 113). Thompson thus took Krishna's strategy ad absurdum, questioning his genuine interest in scientific research of yogic phenomena.

White's plea and Thompson's assessment notwithstanding, Krishna continued pursuing his defence strategy, which is most transparent in his *Higher Consciousness: The Evolutionary Thrust of Kundalini* (1974). There, Krishna not only questioned the effectiveness of mantras for one's path to self-realisation but further underscored moral issues associated with their use. By negatively associating mantras with "quack medicines, spells, and charms" (Krishna 1974, 83), Krishna maintained that their efficacy merely rests on suggestion and auto-suggestion. The belief in mantras as "a shortcut to higher states of consciousness" (*ibid*., 85) would, therefore, equate to deception and self-delusion: "I feel that the employment of

mantras or any other kind of chicanery […] can only lead to failure and disappointment" (*ibid*., 84, original emphasis). Owing to his strong conviction on the moral issue of abusing mantras, he even compared the methods of "the *mantra* specialist" (*ibid*., 83, original emphasis) to Hitler's persuasiveness of the masses. Alongside his criticism of the use of mantras, Krishna thus also questioned the role of the guru in spiritual attainment: "The very method of initiation of a *mantra* conveys to the initiate a suggestion that merely by repeated chanting of some sounds he can gain the desired goal by the grace of the Guru" (*ibid*., 87, original emphasis). This passage clearly illustrates how Krishna obscured his implicit criticism of Maharishi and his technique of TM through terms like "mantra specialist" or "initiation of a mantra".

However, Krishna did not acknowledge his criticism of Maharishi, maintaining that he spoke generally. In a letter to Kieffer, he even denied any discord between himself and Maharishi. Instead, he underscored his moral integrity:

> Perhaps you remember that our very good friend Mr. John White was some what [*sic*] critical of what I had written about Mantras and role of Gurus. He inferred that my comments were inspired by some feelings of antagonism to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi on account of the discussion I had with him in Srinagar. As I already wrote to you there was not even the slightest trace of any such feeling in my mind and all that I wrote flowed from me because it was the Truth. (Krishna to Kieffer, August 6, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.)

Krishna's denial of his antagonism towards Maharishi may also stem from a patronising attitude. Two aspects indicate such a perspective. First, Krishna dismissed Maharishi's technique as fraudulent in its ability to induce higher states of consciousness. On several occasions, he underscored the fundamental difference between altered and higher states of consciousness. Regarding the use of mantras, Krishna asserted that "those who believe that they can attain to higher states of consciousness in this way […] deceive themselves" (Krishna 1972a, 74). While there is no evidence for this, Krishna undoubtedly disparaged Wallace's "transcendental consciousness" as illusionary.

Such statements made White ponder whether Krishna approached religious practices that did not focus on kundalini with a certain elitist stance: "I am […] concerned that your own high experience may have instilled a subtle elitist attitude toward lesser spiritual disciplines"

(White to Krishna, May 7, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5).[492] White's accusation centred on the politics of consciousness. He criticised Krishna for considering his consciousness to be higher than Maharishi's.[493] This is a critique that Krishna had to face several times throughout his career – not only for his criticism of other religious practices but also for his dismissal of the use of psychedelic substances.

Aside from Krishna's conviction of the chasm between his and Maharishi's state of consciousness, another reason for Krishna's patronising attitude may refer to Maharishi's social background. As mentioned earlier, Maharishi did not belong to the Brahmin caste, which monopolised the right to teach, initiate, and guide those engaged in religious practices. Swami Swarupanand Saraswati, the successor of Maharishi's guru Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, took major issue with Maharishi's self-ascribed position as a spiritual teacher, underscoring that "he should not do what he is doing. This is against the order of his Guru" (Saraswati, in Williamson 2010, 86). However, the rejection of Maharishi was not limited to representatives of the Shankaracharya tradition. In 1975, Maharishi was invited to the "Seminar on Yoga, Science, and Man" in New Delhi (see Chapter 17.3.2.). The international event was organised by Karan Singh, a minister of the Gandhi administration, and aimed to merge scientific and yogic perspectives. It was Maharishi and Krishna's second official meeting, but Krishna did not challenge Maharishi. Instead, Dhirendra Brahmachari, Indira Gandhi's yoga mentor and another conference participant, contested Maharishi's TM (Degler 2023, 210). Given Brahmachari's esteemed position in South Asia, his objection amplified the headwinds Maharishi had to face in South Asia. Moreover, it endorsed Krishna's views and demonstrated Maharishi's overall standing in South Asia. Maharishi's disregard for the Brahmin caste likely exacerbated such sentiments. White speculated that the widespread rejection of Maharishi in South Asia may relate to a desire to safeguard "India's spiritual heritage":

> The reason, in my opinion, is the Indian spiritual heritage. Because of it, Indians are hip to the fact that TM is beginner's meditation, that Maharishi is not as "high" as some of

[492] As argued in Chapter 13.2.1.1., information on Krishna's practice is scarce, and he frequently underscored that he did not follow a distinct practice. In *Kundalini: The Secret of Yoga* (1972), Krishna acknowledges that a diverse array of methods can potentially lead to higher states of consciousness, including meditation in a seated posture, pranayama, the dedicated performance of daily work, and devotional worship, to name but a few. Among these, Krishna clearly favours seated meditation – presumably because he claimed to have attained higher states of consciousness through this practice (Krishna 1972a, 15).

[493] As outlined in the previous chapter, Thompson accused Krishna of elitism, too. Unlike White, Thompson's accusation pertained to Krishna's social background and vision of a future elitist ruling class comprising spiritually enhanced individuals (W. I. Thompson 1974, 115).

> the holy men who have remained in India, and that there is more to enlightenment than Maharishi has told the public in the west. (J. W. White 1976a, 91)

These two aspects, Krishna's presumed higher state of consciousness and Maharishi's disregard for South Asia's traditional system of social classification, may have confirmed Krishna's perception of his superiority over Maharishi.

All indications suggest that Krishna's rivalry with Maharishi rested on their respective attempts to assume leading roles in yoga research. While Maharishi dominated the international arena, Krishna secured support from the highest ranks in South Asia. In 1975, Karan Singh announced a large-scale government-funded research project that revolved around kundalini, with Krishna assuming a key role (see Chapter 17.3.1.). B. K. Anand, one of the pioneers of yoga research in South Asia and a central initiator of the project, emphasised the priority of research into kundalini instead of TM. Anand's prioritisation of kundalini stemmed from his assumption that TM could not induce anything beyond an increased state of relaxation: "Indian physiologists […] had already studied thousands of cases of the 'brain-soothing' effects of transcendental meditation, but […] now [they plan] to investigate the more intense practices prescribed in certain ancient Tantric manuals" (Anand, in Unknown, n.d.).

However, Singh and Anand were not opponents of Maharishi's TM per se. In Singh's case, this is evident from Maharishi's invitation to the "Seminar on Yoga, Science, and Man" and from letter exchanges between Kieffer and Singh. Unlike Krishna, Kieffer openly expressed his belittling views of Maharishi and TM, which, in turn, prompted Singh to assume a defensive attitude. In his letter, Kieffer drew Singh's attention to research conducted by the US-American psychologist Jonathan C. Smith. Essentially, Smith claimed scientific evidence for TM's non-effectiveness: "My conclusion […] is that the technique of TM in and of itself has no therapeutic value, and that the therapeutic impact of the discipline of TM is due primarily to […] placebo effects" (Smith to White, July 18, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5., original emphasis). Kieffer relied on Smith's study to underpin his conviction that kundalini was superior to TM and would, therefore, deserve prioritisation in research. In Singh's response, he politely but firmly dismissed Kieffer's approach. He underscored that he was not inclined to agree with Kieffer's statement about TM's lack of value and his general strategy of enhancing scientists' interest in kundalini:

> From your letter it seems that your Foundation is tending to take the view that the discrediting of meditational methods will in some way help the cause of Kundalini

> studies. If this is so, I feel, quite frankly, that this is not a correct approach to take. The two things are not mutually exclusive, and it seems to me that there is nothing to be gained by a "scientific" debunking of meditational techniques. (Singh to Kieffer, August 30 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5)

As argued below, Singh was one of Krishna's most pivotal supporters. Nonetheless, Kieffer's outspoken criticism of TM resulted in Singh's explicit irritation. While Singh's reaction confirmed Krishna's strategy, it fuelled Kieffer's suspicion. In a letter to Krishna, he wondered who Singh actually supported (Kieffer to Krishna, September 10, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.). This demonstrates that Krishna's opposition to Maharishi also involved a constant competition for voices of support – particularly influential ones such as Karan Singh's.

The preceding chapters shed light on the life and work of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, one of Krishna's foremost competitors in kundalini research. While Maharishi's "scientific" interest was restricted to the benefits and effectiveness of TM, he nonetheless acted within the same field of yoga research, equally vying for support and credibility. Despite meeting only twice, Krishna and Maharishi were fierce competitors in the global arena of securing scientific credibility for their respective theories. As argued in this chapter, Krishna and Kieffer attempted to discredit TM and instead gain supporters for their kundalini project. Their letters indicate that both viewed TM as ineffective at best and potentially harmful. Officially, Krishna and Kieffer justified their criticism of Maharishi and TM by expressing a desire to prevent individuals from falling victim to fraud (Degler 2023, 213).

Key points of criticism concerned the method of mantra meditation and the questionable role of Maharishi as guru. Another motivation behind their denunciations was their desire to reveal the ineffectiveness of TM, which was solely grounded in the suggestions implanted in the students. Moreover, the measurable changes resulting from TM were attributed to the placebo effect. Consequently, Kieffer, and to a lesser extent Krishna, aimed to diminish Maharishi's credibility. Moreover, given Krishna's emphasis on scientific research and his relentless efforts to persuade scientists of his cause, Maharishi's attempt to legitimate TM through scientific studies threatened the core of Krishna's strategy. Therefore, the competition with Maharishi was much more substantial than with Yogi Bhajan or Swami Muktananda.

The key intermediary between these two camps was undoubtedly John White. On the one hand, White pled for TM to be a valuable practice and for Maharishi to have respectable intentions. The outcome of his interest (and initial commitment) to TM was his book *Everything You Want to Know About TM* (1976). On the other hand, he campaigned for

Krishna's cause, wrote numerous articles, and edited the seminal volume *Kundalini. Evolution and Enlightenment* (1979). Kieffer frequently expressed his frustration over White's ambiguity in his correspondence with Krishna:

> John [White] still cannot see why TM is not a good thing for the masses. He is 100% for Kundalini Research, but he believes TM is the way for the beginners to get started. So here we have one of our best supporters, a man who has read almost everything you've written and more, and he still can't figure anything out by himself. It should be obvious that TM is a fraud. (Kieffer to Krishna, May 7, 1975, LGK, box 6.5.2.)

Despite White's sympathy for TM and his previous membership in Maharishi's movement, White's campaigning for Krishna resulted in his acceptance and appreciation as a staunch supporter of Krishna.

This chapter focused primarily on Krishna's perspective, but adding Maharishi's views would have exceeded its scope. However, substantial archival material suggests that Maharishi's followers were aware of Krishna's KRF and clearly opposed it. Narratives, such as that of Maharishi stealing Krishna's ideas, exacerbated the mutual dissent. In essence, this study posits that Krishna and his supporters felt personally deceived and professionally threatened by Maharishi, prompting them to act accordingly.

16.4. Summary

This chapter explored the relationship between Krishna and John White, highlighting White's distinguished role among Krishna's many supporters. Several reasons accounted for his dedicated yet wary position, including his prior involvement with Maharishi's TM, his pursuit of his professional interests while working at IONS, and his criticism of several aspects of Krishna's approach. Despite joining forces with KRF in 1971, White did not meet Krishna before 1977, when he was invited to interview him in Zurich. White's correspondence with Krishna indicates that upon meeting Krishna in person, White wholeheartedly committed to Krishna's cause. His primary contribution was his extensive written material aimed at furthering Krishna's project. Moreover, while working at IONS with Edgar Mitchell, he sought to maintain the link, hoping to secure funding. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, White was clearly part of Krishna's inner circle, earning Krishna's appreciation: "I can never sufficiently thank Mr. John White for the invaluable service he

has rendered to the Mission of Kundalini" (Krishna to Kieffer, April 5, 1980, LGK, box 4, file A).

Despite holding a key position among Krishna's entourage, White's commitment was only temporary and followed a certain pattern, recognisable from his biography: After being initiated into TM, he embraced Krishna's purpose of kundalini research. Later, he encountered Ken Wilber, whom White regarded as the foremost authority on higher consciousness. Convinced by Wilber's theories on the spectrum of consciousness, he compared his dedication to Wilber with Kieffer's commitment to Krishna: "Just as you have pledged yourself to support the work of Gopi Krishna, I've made the same pledge to help support Ken's [Wilber] work. I feel it is utterly brilliant" (White to Kieffer, January 9, 1982, LGK, box 6.9.2.). Not without disappointment, Kieffer observed White's new orientation after he discovered Wilber:

> Our good, old friend John [White], whom we have known for more than a decade, [is] still back where he was 10 years ago. He was much, much nearer knowing the truth in 1975 than he is in 1985. At least in his writings he would say that Gopi Krishna was the Enlightened person, whose message was unique, etc. Now he doesn't even remember it. (Kieffer to Kobelt, April 19, 1985, LGK, box 6)

While White was accepted into the inner circle, he never reached the level of commitment that Kieffer or Kobelt did and was hence was never regarded as a member of Krishna's KRF. However, as evidenced by Kieffer's quote, KRF considered this to be a significant loss.

This chapter further illustrated the opposition between Krishna and Maharishi, a paramount example of competing charismatic religious leaders struggling for recognition. While Krishna and Maharishi kept up their façade, the actual conflict occurred among their followers, who competed for the spiritual supremacy of their teachers. As briefly outlined, Maharishi's global success was tremendous, but his technique was poorly received in South Asia. In contrast, Krishna's reputation in South Asia grew steadily alongside his expanding international network. His collaboration with Weizsäcker and the numerous articles published by White propelled interest in Krishna's kundalini hypothesis among South Asian scientists, politicians, and media. In addition to kundalini's international dissemination, it was revitalised as a spiritual heritage asset and became a national emblem, as the following chapter will demonstrate.

B South Asian Collaborators

In 1975, Rustom Khurshedji Karanjia, a South Asian journalist and editor of the South Asian tabloid *Blitz*, presented *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* (1972) to Prime Minister Indira P. Gandhi. Krishna and Weizsäcker's co-published book left a lasting impression on Gandhi, who "found it fascinating" and underscored the lack of research on "such a vital topic" (Gandhi to Karanjia, May 30, 1975, LGK, box 6.5.2.). Gandhi's indirect request did not go unanswered. Under her government, Krishna's work, with which she had been familiar for several years, developed into a prioritised subject (Degler 2023, 130). The following two chapters explore the role of South Asian politicians, scientists, and journalists in promoting Krishna's ideas and reclaiming what was now glorified as an emblem of South Asian cultural heritage. As I will demonstrate, Singh and Karanjia joined Krishna in situating his project in a Hindu nationalistic context.

17. Karan Singh and the Nationalistic Politicisation of Kundalini

Karan Singh (b. 1931), a central figure in South Asian politics and a member of Gandhi's Cabinet, emerged as South Asia's foremost supporter of Krishna's research project. Therefore, the argument for kundalini's nationalisation is best approached by highlighting Krishna's collaboration with Singh. Although Singh lived such a rich life that it cannot be adequately described in a brief chapter, some central cornerstones will be detailed, particularly during the transition period as India gained independence. This chapter introduces the figure of Karan Singh, discusses his relationship with Krishna, and explores projects and events encompassing their shared objective of kundalini's nationalisation.

17.1. Karan Singh's Early Life and Patriotism

Karan Singh was born in 1931 as the son of Sir Hari Singh (1895–1961), the Maharaja (ruler) of the Dogra dynasty of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir.[494] Being the "Yuvraj", the heir of Colonial India's largest princely state, Karan Singh's life would have been

[494] From 1846 to 1947, the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was depicted as a nominally sovereign entity under British rule. In the wake of the Partition of India in 1947, they ended and acceded to the rule of either India or Pakistan. Refer to Schofield (2003) for a thorough account of Jammu and Kashmir's religious and political challenges.

predetermined as the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir. However, with India gaining its independence, his life took an unexpected turn. In the wake of the Partition of India in 1947, the princely states ceased to exist, leaving them with the choice to accede to either India or Pakistan. Karan Singh's father, Hari Singh, faced considerable pressure from the two newly independent countries to pledge allegiance to the rule of one or the other. He ultimately acceded to the Union of India, which Pakistan immediately contested. The events of 1947 not only led to the first of a total of four Indo-Pakistani Wars but also to decades of (ongoing) ethnical and religious conflicts (Singh 1982, 1:49–148; Schofield 2003, 25–76).

After his father's forced abdication as the Maharaja in 1949, Karan Singh, at the age of eighteen, was appointed Prince Regent. In 1952, under political pressure, he acquiesced to the abolition of the monarchy, marking the end of the Dogra Dynasty. These changes led to a significant transformation in his status and political roles. He first served as "Sadr-i-Riyasat" ("Head of State") of Jammu and Kashmir and subsequently, in 1965, assumed the role of Jammu and Kashmir's first Governor. With his parents compelled to leave the state, Singh bore the burden and responsibilities of his new positions largely alone. Throughout this period, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, with whom Singh had maintained a father-like relationship since a young age, offered Singh steadfast support in navigating this pivotal chapter in Jammu and Kashmir's history (Singh 1985, 2:vii; Schofield 2003, 77). Upon his questionable appointment as "Sadr-i-Riyasat", Nehru congratulated the young Singh:

> My dear Yuvraj [crown prince], I write to congratulate you on the high honour that has been conferred upon you by the people of Jammu and Kashmir State on your election as Sadar-i-Riyasat. […] A new chapter opens now in the Jammu and Kashmir State. And yet, although it is new, it is a continuation of the old but in a different form. (Singh 1982, 1:147)

Despite losing aristocratic privileges, Singh's extensive network and social background nonetheless enabled him to assume prestigious roles within the Republic of India. Beyond his roles in his native Jammu and Kashmir, this career included two ministerial positions under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and one under Prime Minister Charan Singh (Singh 1985, 2:viii). In other words, despite political restructurings in the wake of India's independence, Singh continued to be part of the political elite of the new state and pursued a successful career.

Owing to these developments, Singh's experiences following India's independence did not diminish his profound sense of patriotism, which was primarily directed towards Jammu and Kashmir and now also encompassed India as a whole; quite the contrary, in fact. In his book *Towards a New India* (1974), Singh envisioned India's future as a progressive state, emphasising that its progress must be propelled by a young generation equipped with "a glowing yet enlightened patriotism" (Singh 1974, 104). Singh's patriotism was likely influenced by what he referred to as Aurobindo's "spiritual nationalism" (Singh 1962, 10).

In *Prophet of Indian Nationalism* (1962), derived from his doctoral thesis, Singh discussed Aurobindo's nationalism while providing a detailed exploration of its religious foundation.[495] He conducted his study while serving as Jammu and Kashmir's governor, witnessing the transition from monarchy to republic and occupation to independence, profoundly impacting Singh. For him, patriotism was the basis, and Aurobindo's religious nationalism increasingly added spice to it. Although he did not explicitly declare his adherence to Aurobindo's "religion of nationalism" (*ibid*., 149), it is evident that his love for his nation increasingly took on a religious dimension. Unlike his father, who struggled to accept India's changing political and social landscapes, Singh, supported by Nehru, prioritised his patriotism over his aristocratic privileges. Accordingly, Singh's assessment was that Aurobindo's "love for India and his concept of India as a nation was far deeper than the normal patriotism that everyone is expected to feel for one's country" (*ibid*., 72).

Additionally, Singh adopted Aurobindo's views on India's impact on global developments. In his analysis of Aurobindo's religious "internationalism", Singh remarked on how Aurobindo "looked upon India's emancipation as only an essential vantage point from which she could fulfil her destiny as the spiritual guide of humanity at large. His nationalism thus develops logically into an internationalism that has as its goal the elevated ideal of human unity" (*ibid*., 76). In other words, rooted in his theory of religious evolution, Aurobindo believed that India should assume the role of humanity's guide to an elevated stage of existence – an assessment that Singh agreed with.

As a member of the ruling elite of India, Singh had been raised as a fervent patriotist. This patriotism, alongside his first-hand experience of India's turbulent journey to independence and his leading role in the crisis-ridden region of Jammu and Kashmir, fuelled his unwavering commitment to promoting peaceful coexistence. Aligned with Aurobindo's religious (inter)nationalism, Singh likewise emphasised India's singular role in fostering the

[495] Refer to Chapter 5.3.2. for a discussion of Aurobindo's religious views on nationalism.

well-being of humanity and global peace. His pursuit of peace, therefore, stemmed partly from his experiences of conflict and war and partly from his religious, nationalistic sentiments.

Regardless of his motivations, the topic of peaceful coexistence gained international prominence during the 1970s amid the threat of nuclear war. Aligning with Weizsäcker's efforts in Germany, Singh publicly expressed his interest in resolving armed conflicts and easing global tensions. His increasing involvement in global politics and interest in religious nationalism eventually led him to encounter Gopi Krishna. Claiming to have rediscovered, in kundalini, a religious mechanism that could potentially bring about world peace, and attaching it to the heritage of "India's wisdom", Krishna was to become a key figure in Singh's life during the 1970s–and vice versa.

17.2. The Relationship Between Singh and Krishna

Karan Singh and Gopi Krishna were both raised in the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir – one as its future ruler, the other as his potential subject. Despite their different social backgrounds, they were united in their devotion to Kashmir and to the Indian nation. As will be argued throughout this chapter, both emphasised the Hindu nature of India and glorified its inherent wisdom as carried forward by Hindu religions. This chapter will portray Singh and Krishna as two men sharing patriotic sentiments and leanings towards Hindu nationalism.

Singh and Krishna commenced their partnership in July 1973 when Singh extended an invitation to Krishna for a meeting.[496] The purpose and specific content of their encounter remain uncertain. While there is no doubt that Krishna shared his experience and theories of kundalini with Singh, any additional topics discussed, such as religious nationalism or the superiority of Hindu religions, are speculative.[497] However, whatever conversation took place, it evidently sparked Singh's interest, resulting in several years of close collaboration

[496] Although Krishna mentioned his correspondence with Singh in several letters to his supporters, the archival material did not include any correspondence between them, regardless of its potential extent. Only a few letters exchanged between Singh and Kieffer are available. Therefore, the information presented in this chapter is derived from Degler (2023), Singh's writings, and additional material collected in the archives.

[497] Information on their second meeting in June 1974 is equally scarce. A letter from S. K. Manchanda to Krishna indicates, however, that Krishna and Singh were discussing the proposed research project at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). Degler mentions that they shared a dinner during their meeting and inspected the KRF headquarters in Nishat, which seemingly met Singh's expectations (Degler 2023, 201–202; Manchanda to Krishna, July 1, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.).

and support. This is further evidenced by a letter sent by Margaret Kobelt to Singh on July 24, 1973, in which Kobelt met Krishna's request to send Singh various documents associated with Krishna's work (Degler 2023, 191, 201; Kobelt to Singh, July 24, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5.).[498]

During their first official meeting in 1973, Singh held the position of Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation, a role he had assumed in 1967. Only a few months after their meeting, the Gandhi administration promoted Singh to the position of Minister of Health and Family Planning. Another drastic change occurring in 1967 was Singh's conclusion of his position as Governor of Jammu and Kashmir. After eighteen years of service in Jammu and Kashmir, Singh had "moved from the crown to the heart of India" (Singh 1985, 2:162), relinquishing the responsibility to Ghulam Mohammed Sadiq, who had served as Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir since 1965, and Janki Nath Wazir, the long-time Chief Justice of Jammu and Kashmir, who temporarily assumed the role of Governor (*ibid*., 2:147, 162). Krishna thus met Singh during a transitory phase of the latter's professional life.

Degler mentions a brief meeting between Singh and Krishna many years previously, though details such as when and under what circumstances are unspecified (Degler 2023, 191). The most plausible scenario suggests that Singh encountered Krishna in his capacity as a prominent member of the Kashmiri Pandit community. As previously outlined, Krishna established the reform movement Samaj Sudhar Samiti, which advocated for women's rights. Moreover, Krishna supported the struggle of Kashmiri Pandits to strengthen their position as a religious minority. Notably, one of Krishna's significant involvements in a political organisation occurred during a religiously motivated conflict between the Hindu minority and the Muslim majority. This deserves a brief digression to explore the matter further.

In the summer of 1967, Kashmir experienced severe turmoil following the abduction of Parmeshwari Handoo, a Hindu minor, by Ghulam Rasool Kanth, her Muslim co-worker.[499] Parmeshwari's abduction happened amidst heightened frustration among the local Hindu minority over what they considered Muslim dominance and discrimination against Hindus. Several Pandits united forces and established the "Kashmir Hindu Action Committee"

[498] The list of documents included Krishna's article "The True Aim of Yoga" (1973), review articles by Haridas Chaudhuri and John White, and a statement that White distributed at the Council Grove Conference (Kobelt to Singh, July 24, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5.).

[499] Refer to Rai (2021) for a discussion on the "Parmeshwari affair". Rai convincingly argues that displaced Kashmiri Pandits have inscribed such interreligious conflicts in their collective memory to "bolster their superior entitlement to Kashmir at a time when their grasp over it seems to be slipping" (Rai 2021, 92).

(KHAC), which became the movement's main organisational body. One of its active members was Gopi Krishna.[500] In a letter to Hridya Nath Kunzru (1887–1978), a former member of the federal Parliament (until 1964) and son of a Kashmiri Pandit himself, Krishna condemned what he perceived as the mistreatment of Kashmiri Hindus. Furthermore, he confirmed his own participation and emphasised his commitment to the cause: "It is essential [that] the Kashmiri Pandits should unite to stand against this and other similar affront[s] to their honour and injustice. […] I am also participating in this movement" (Krishna to Kunzru, in Degler 2023, 128). To Krishna's disappointment, Kunzru decided against supporting the cause of the Pandits (Bhatnagar 2023, 568; Degler 2023, 125–127; Rai 2021, 106–107).[501]

It is crucial to note that what initially began as a local Hindu agitation aimed at securing Parmeshwari's release escalated into a major upheaval with the participation of non-Kashmiri Hindus. These included members of the Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), who exacerbated the conflict with anti-Muslim sentiments and Hindu supremacist rhetoric.[502] For the Hindu minority, the transfer of power from Singh, a Hindu, to Sadiq, a Muslim, may have intensified their narrative of suffering due to anti-Hindu discrimination for decades. In essence, the Hindu right capitalised on the frustration of the Kashmiri Pandits to advance their own agenda of Hindu nationalism. Therefore, despite KHAC's peaceful methods, which included processions, sit-ins, and speeches, it is evident that Hindu nationalistic elements permeated these actions (Rai 2021, 106–107; Degler 2023, 128).

Ultimately, Krishna's involvement in KHAC led to his imprisonment and the loss of his official documents on August 14, 1967 – only seven days after the official campaign of KHAC had begun. In response, his loyal supporter Sinai, who has been introduced in Chapter 15, reached out to several politicians, including Sadiq, and other official parties to secure

[500] While Degler claimed Krishna's central role in establishing KHAC and his position as its chairman, no other reference underpins this assessment (Degler 2023, 128; Bhatnagar 2023, 568; Rai 2021, 106–108; Koul 2002).

[501] He and Krishna became friends despite Kunzru's refusal to support KHAC. Besides sharing their Kashmiri descent, they were involved in welfare and several reform movements. In 1973, Kunzru, a prominent public figure by then, visited Krishna in Kashmir (Degler 2023, 182, 192).

[502] In 1980, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) underwent a transformation by merging with other parties to form the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In recent years, the BJP has emerged as a significant political force alongside the Indian National Congress. It has been represented by Narendra Modi, who has served as India's Prime Minister since 2014. Following increasing violence throughout the 1990s, Kashmir experienced a large-scale displacement of its Pandit population. Ever since this displacement, the BJP has advocated for the rehabilitation of the Pandit community in the Kashmir Valley. Refer to Rai (2021) and Bhatnagar (2023) for further discussion of the ties between Hindu nationalism and the struggle for dominance among Kashmiri Pandits (Rai 2021; Bhatnagar 2023).

Krishna's immediate release from prison (Degler 2023, 128–129; Rai 2021, 107; Sinai to Sadiq, August 22, 1967, LGK, box 6.1.6.). According to Degler, Sinai even managed to contact Indira Gandhi, "who was said to know of Gopi Krishna as a great yogi" (Degler 2023, 130). While Degler does not specify how Gandhi became aware of Krishna as early as 1967, the archival material suggests that it was Singh who initially introduced Gandhi to Krishna's work. This implies that not only Gandhi but also Singh was aware of Krishna's work as early as 1967, and possibly even earlier, considering Singh's move to Delhi in March 1967 (Krishna to Kieffer, June 2, 1975, LGK, box 6.5.2.; Singh 1985, 2:162).

On whatever occasion Singh might have encountered Krishna in the first place, it was presumably in a political context. Singh must have been informed about Krishna's imprisonment resulting from his involvement with KHAC, indicating Singh's awareness of Krishna's Hindu nationalist tendencies. However, Singh's invitation to meet with Krishna in 1973 was explicitly unrelated to Krishna's political campaigning, but rather related to his growing fame as a religious teacher. Therefore, while Singh and Krishna's collaboration aligned with a shared political agenda, they focused on religious rather than political matters.

By 1973, Singh's interest in Krishna had significantly increased upon becoming aware of Krishna's considerable prominence in Europe through his books. During that time, Krishna's collaboration with Weizsäcker was at its peak (see Chapter 15.3.). Despite Weizsäcker's limited recognition beyond German-speaking contexts, Singh had heard of their collaboration while dwelling in Europe for a business trip. Potential informants during his trips to Europe include Werner Heisenberg and Karlfried Graf von Dürckheim – both of whom enjoyed a high profile and had spent time with Krishna during his European visits (Krishna to Kieffer, February 24, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.7.; box 1.1.).[503]

In addition to Singh's unidentified European informants, another encounter might have solidified his interest in Krishna. In December 1972, Singh invited the Aurobindonian philosopher Haridas Chaudhuri, who had served as examiner of Singh's dissertation, to a commemorative event for Aurobindo's hundredth birth anniversary in New Delhi.[504] During the event, the two men exchanged their thoughts on Krishna, who then resided in Europe. Considering that both Chaudhuri and Singh eventually collaborated with Krishna, there is a

[503] While Krishna mentioned that Singh had heard about his work while staying in Europe, he omitted to mention from whom Singh had received this information. Similarly, Degler remains vague when noting that during one of Singh's business trips to Europe in his capacity as the Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation, he "had learned of the widespread impression Gopi Krishna had been making there" (Degler 2023, 191; Krishna to Kieffer, July 24, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5.).

[504] Chapter 24 introduces Haridas Chaudhuri and discusses his interest in Krishna's kundalini research.

good reason to assume their mutual agreement on the value of Krishna's work (Chaudhuri to Kieffer, July 2, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.1.).[505]

Singh's interest in Krishna might partly also derive from his personal fascination with kundalini. In his autobiography, he recounts an episode from the 1950s when he immersed himself in religious practices, primarily centred on chanting the mantra "Aum". He recalls how these practices induced a distinct bodily sensation at the base of his spine, which he interpreted as the manifestation of kundalini.

> Occasionally I had a curious sensation as if a fluid substance was moving at the base of my spine, and on one occasion it jumped half way up my spinal column. This was evidently a manifestation of the *Kundalini* or serpent-power believed by yogis to reside coiled at the base of the spine. (Singh 1985, 2:39, original emphasis)

According to Singh, he began to conceive of the movement of kundalini as "a potent instrument of psychic development" (Singh 1985, 2:39), explicitly attributing this understanding to "Sir John Woodruffe [*sic*] (Arthur Avalon) several decades earlier, Pandit Gopi Krishna in more recent times and some others [who] have written at length about the *Kundalini*, its arousal and the powers it brings in its wake" (*ibid*., original emphasis). Singh underscored his high opinion of Krishna's writings several times, as the following chapters will demonstrate.

After their first official meeting in 1973, Singh initiated a research project at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) under Krishna's guidance, leading to additional projects and events (see below). However, the meeting not only motivated Singh to advocate for Krishna's work but also spurred Krishna to lay greater emphasis on promoting his project in his native country. In a letter to Kieffer, Krishna stressed the need for an adapted strategy. Up to that point, their efforts had been focused on disseminating Krishna's ideas among European and US-American scholars and scientists, exclusively advancing the project outside of South Asia. Recognizing Singh's significant interest in promoting Krishna's cause within South Asia, they agreed to shift the focus of their promotional campaigns to South Asia. This is explicitly conveyed in a letter that Krishna wrote to Kieffer in 1974. Referring to the anticipated research projects in South Asia, Krishna underscored that "we too must modify our strategy to suit this new development […], the area of publicity must shift for

[505] As previously indicated, Margaret Kobelt sent Singh Chaudhuri's review article of Krishna's book *Kundalini: The Secret of Yoga* (1972) (Kobelt to Singh, July 24, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5.).

some time from New York to New Delhi" (Krishna to Kieffer, August 6, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.).

However, Krishna's reinforced focus on South Asia also derived from his Hindu nationalistic tendencies, triggered by his experiences of religiously motivated discrimination in Kashmir and perhaps influenced by Singh's concept of "enlightened patriotism" (Singh 1974, 99). Accordingly, he increasingly pled for India's lead in the global project of kundalini research:

> India ought to take the lead now. […] It has the dedicated scientific talent available […]. It has the erudite scholars thoroughly conversant with the ancient tradition and it has the self-sacrificing spiritual teachers and Yoga-adepts who can all combine to take up the colossal project of research on Kundalini. This would be the greatest project ever undertaken by any country in the world, greater than the famous Manhattan Project which resulted in the development of the dreaded atom bomb. The Kundalini Project will not only exceed it in magnitude, but also excel it by far in the harvest gained […]. The first golden harvest of this activity would be that the Indian masses would awaken to the glory of their land. (Krishna, in Karanjia 1977, 15)

The quote demonstrates how Krishna envisioned India's global lead. He insisted that if India immersed itself in this research field, the outcomes would extend beyond scientific recognition to encompass mass awakenings to the nationalistic cause among its inhabitants. Comparing the last two quotes by Krishna, it becomes evident that his change of strategy was equally driven by his uncompromising determination to promote his own cause and his nationalistic sentiments.

Considering the importance that Krishna and his supporters attributed to this subject, the "Manhattan Project" warrants a brief comment. From 1974 onwards, Krishna and Kieffer employed the term "New Manhattan Project" in reference to their research endeavours. The original Manhattan Project was a US-American research programme aimed at developing the world's first nuclear weapons. This collaborative effort involving the United States, Great Britain, and Canada proved successful, resulting in the dropping of two nuclear bombs on Japanese territory in August 1945. The Manhattan Project serves as a poignant historical reminder of the devastating consequences of nuclear power. However, it also represents a programme of dedicated research in which international collaborators achieved significant results within a relatively short period (Kelly 2020).

In reference to the latter, Kieffer increasingly used the designation "New Manhattan Project" as a label for Krishna's kundalini research. In his introduction to Krishna's *The Awakening of Kundalini* (1975), Kieffer explained this metaphor with the following words: "[Gopi

Krishna] urges scientists the world over to investigate the physiological bridge to higher consciousness with the same dedication and urgency that characterized the Manhattan Project of the 1940s and resulted in the invention of the atom bomb" (Kieffer, in Krishna 1975b, xi–xii). Kieffer thus compared KRF's efforts to expand knowledge about kundalini with a global scientific programme motivated by the urgency of the Second World War. In fact, in a letter to the editor of *The New York Times*, Kieffer underscored that research in kundalini would even surpass the Manhattan Project in urgency: "Today there is no such spirit [as during the 1940s], despite the fact that the threat to the safety of the race is infinitely greater now. […] A New Manhattan Project, therefore, is no longer an option left open to us but a mandate" (Kieffer to Seigel, June 18, 1975, LGK, box 6.5.2.). In the same letter, Kieffer underscored that research in South Asia at AIIMS leads in the right direction. Following Kieffer's argument, it was imperative to follow the South Asian example.

Krishna and Kieffer increasingly used the "New Manhattan Project" as a promotional phrase, indicating what they perceived as the urgency of their work. However, it seems they primarily used the phrase in a US-American setting, where it had become ingrained in the collective memory. The above-quoted paragraph, along with Kieffer's letter to *The New York Times*, represents a notable exception, linking the idea of a New Manhattan Project with the prospective glory of the Indian nation (LGK, box 6.4.5.).

As Krishna's most active supporter, Krishna also relied on Kieffer's support in South Asia, stressing that Kieffer's "presence at Delhi will be of the highest advantage" (Krishna to Kieffer, August 6, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.). Despite Kieffer's unwavering loyalty, which demanded him to follow Krishna's desires, Kieffer's stance on South Asia's role appears somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, he agreed with Krishna's reasoning and underscored South Asia's singular importance in this endeavour. On the other hand, he suggested detaching kundalini from its South Asian origin, instead presenting it in a "Western context" (Kieffer to Krishna, September 22, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.). The reasons for Kieffer's ambiguity are best attributed to his business-oriented, conformist attitude. Accordingly, in public South Asian forums, Kieffer praised South Asian efforts to the project while diminishing non- South Asian contributions: "My dream is to see India undertake scientific investigation of Kundalini. The West cannot make even a small beginning. It is bogged down by materialism" (Kieffer 1976, 9). The quote was featured in Kieffer's column in a South

Asian newspaper, which essentially portrayed and extolled Krishna's work.[506] Aligning with their adapted strategy, Kieffer publicly argued for South Asia's indispensable role in kundalini research. Additionally, in private correspondence, he further emphasised South Asia as the centre of the international "Kundalini Research movement", with Singh assuming leadership (Kieffer to Krishna, February 25, 1977, LGK, box 6.8.8).[507]

However, in a non- South Asian context, he repeatedly suggested omitting direct references to kundalini or attempting to contextualise it as an element embedded in ancient Egypt – which Kieffer apparently considered as aligning with his understanding of a "Western" context. He thereby aimed to counteract what he perceived as hostile sentiment among US-Americans towards kundalini and other South Asian teachings. These antagonisms would arise from South Asian teachers disseminating flawed theories about kundalini, including those of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Yogi Bhajan – both of whom Kieffer considered adversaries, as discussed in the previous chapter (Kieffer to Krishna, September 22, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.). However, while Kieffer reiterated these claims, he prioritised his loyalty to Krishna and trusted his opinion. Kieffer thus joined Krishna in re-evaluating the exclusivity of non- South Asian scientists and scholars in disseminating insights about kundalini.

While Krishna and Singh only began collaborating in 1973, the roots of their shared narrative lie in the ongoing Hindu-Muslim conflicts in Kashmir after India gained its independence. As this chapter demonstrated, Krishna's experiences of discrimination against his Kashmiri Pandit community cast a seed of Hindu nationalism that was revived upon his collaboration with Singh. Accordingly, his strong sense of community was largely limited to Kashmiri Pandits. While neither Singh nor Krishna seemed to be inclined to engage in Hindu right-wing groups, Krishna shared at least one "battlefield" with them. However, what Krishna and Singh unequivocally shared was their commitment to religious nationalism. Singh not only discussed Aurobindo's political thought in his doctoral thesis, but he further reframed Aurobindo's religious nationalism as enlightened patriotism, and dedicated his book *Towards a New India* (1974) to this topic. Krishna's religious nationalism was partly due to

[506] Kieffer's column was titled "Kundalini Goes to USA". The "Kundalini Yoga" series, printed in the newspaper *Blitz* will be detailed below in Chapter 18.2.

[507] Kieffer and Singh's relationship was troubled from the start, as evidenced by their correspondence during the summer of 1974. The exchange reveals competing claims regarding kundalini's status as a national or universal asset and differences in their views on the significance of scientific research. Singh vehemently disagrees with Kieffer's assertion that meditation methods are mere placebos and rejects Kieffer's praise of the "scientific establishment" – with Singh doubting the existence of such a monolithic establishment (Singh to Kieffer, August 30 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.).

the experience of violence and partly a pragmatic move to promote his own project. The next chapter will explore in more detail how Krishna's collaboration with Singh bolstered the view of kundalini as an element of Indian nationalism. Furthermore, it will demonstrate how Krishna's project reinforced the perception of kundalini's revitalisation in modern times.

17.3. Krishna's Role in Kundalini's Popularisation and Nationalisation in India

On several occasions, Krishna underlined how, by "the grace of God" and mere chance, he had discovered one of the greatest secrets of human history, which he now intended to place "in the hands of science" (Krishna to Weizsäcker, December 29, 1967, LGK, box 6.1.7.). This "great discovery", of course, was the movement of kundalini, which Krishna believed he had experienced in his body. However, contrary to Krishna's claim, kundalini was certainly no secret in South Asia despite not occupying a central position in religious or scientific discourse.

As Strube convincingly argued, already in the nineteenth century, a discourse on shakti had been gaining currency among Bengali intellectuals. Propelled by figures such as the Bengali writer Shashadhar Tarkachuramani (1850–1928) and the nationalist educator Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay, the notion of kundalini shakti increasingly came to the forefront. South Asian and non-South Asian representatives of the Theosophical Society picked up on this development, playing a vital part in "reviving" and popularising kundalini from the 1880s onwards.[508] With the publication of the book *The Serpent Power* (1918), Arthur Avalon solidified kundalini's "revival", shaping and monopolising the associated discourse for decades (Strube 2022; 2023).[509] Moreover, efforts to address kundalini through a scientific lens similarly trace back to nineteenth-century Bengali discourses revolving around "Hindu revivalism", along with theosophical interpretations of yogic texts. During the 1880s and

[508] The notion of "revival" has a problematic leaning, as it implies a certain disruption of tradition. Moreover, it assumes a continuation of the original tradition or object. At the same time, however, a "revival" implies a different historical context involving new protagonists. Strube and others pointed out that the notion of "revival" perfectly reflects the imagined dichotomy of tradition and modernity (A. P. Sen 1993; Strube 2022). Refer to Chapter 5.1.4. for a discussion of kundalini's revitalisation on the part of the Theosophical Society and Hindu reformers.

[509] As discussed in Chapter 5.3.3., Arthur Avalon is a pseudonym for a collaborative effort between South Asian intellectuals (many of whom were from Bengal) and the British judge Sir John Woodroffe (Strube 2022; Taylor 2001). Between 1890 and 1922, the team behind Arthur Avalon presented tantra in a new light and has shaped its perception until today. Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay counts among Woodroffe's most important partners, underpinning the Bengali influence on modern perceptions of kundalini (Strube 2023, 90, 105).

1890s, *The Theosophist*, the key vehicle for sharing opinions among South Asian and non-South Asian theosophists, published several articles addressing the subtle body and its components along medical lines. This "scientific imperative" (Singleton 2010, 53), as promulgated by theosophical writers, laid the foundation for a scientistic reading of kundalini.[510] In the wake of Avalon's *The Serpent Power*, the increased interest in kundalini further motivated educated South Asians to provide scientific analyses of kundalini. While Chapter 5 already detailed *kuṇḍalinī*'s early scientification against the backdrop of "Hindu revivalism", its reiteration was vital for analysing Krishna and Singh's project of kundalini's nationalisation (Singleton 2010, 50–52; Strube 2022).

Considering kundalini's earlier appropriation by theosophical scientism and Hindu nationalism, Krishna's interpretation of kundalini is not the great pioneering achievement it claims to be. Therefore, it is imperative to underscore that Krishna, while assuming a central role in kundalini research, built on a discourse carried forward by South Asian theosophists and Hindu nationalists since the nineteenth century (Strube 2022).[511] Moreover, when Karan Singh decided to launch major research endeavours and media outreach revolving around Krishna's "sensational findings", he was well aware of the recent history of kundalini's appropriations and scientific explorations targeted at its explanation (Singh 1983, 64–65). He nonetheless framed the planned kundalini research endeavours under the guidance of Gopi Krishna as a "development of truly historic proportions" (Singh, in Karanjia 1976h, front page) and "of truly global significance" (Singh to Kieffer, July 25, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.). He thereby situated South Asia and Krishna at the centre of a global change.

The peak of Krishna's involvement in the nationalisation of kundalini occurred between 1973 and 1978. During these years, Krishna's travel activities were mostly limited, and his focus was largely targeted on his reputation in South Asia. The subsequent chapters will investigate what Singh referred to as "historic development" and illustrate Krishna's role in three distinct nationalistic endeavours revolving around kundalini: The anticipated research at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (Delhi), the international and interdisciplinary

[510] As outlined in Chapter 5.2., central contributors to the early attempt to interpret kundalini along scientific and medical lines include the South Asian Sanskrit scholar Srishchandra Basu, his brother Bamandas Basu, the Tamil theosophist and translator Narayanaswami Aiyer, and N. C. Paul.

[511] As argued previously, educated South Asians initiated the early scientistic discourse revolving around kundalini in South Asia. However, despite South Asia's central role, it is imperative to underscore the global dynamics enabling the discourse in the first place. Refer to Strube (2022) and Bergunder (2016) for a comprehensive analysis of the global historical developments that have driven discourses such as this forward.

conference “Seminar on Yoga, Science, and Man” (Delhi), and another research project at the “Central Council for Research in Indian Medicine and Homoeopathy” (Bangalore).

17.3.1. The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (1974–1977)

Between 1974 and 1977, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) was a key collaboration partner for Krishna and bolstered his recognition among South Asian scientists. AIIMS was established in 1956 during the Nehru administration. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur (1889–1964), India’s first Health Minister, was the driving force behind its creation. Following India’s independence and her appointment as Minister, Amrit Kaur immersed herself in establishing a Medical College and Hospital of excellence. Working alongside a team of leading scientists, she realised her vision for postgraduate medical education and research for South Asian physicists. Additionally, the Institute ensured high-quality medical treatment. Although Amrit Kaur had announced this vision upon her appointment as Health Minister in 1946, it would take another decade until AIIMS’s realisation. The first AIIMS began operating in 1956 in New Delhi. Today, branches of AIIMS are operational throughout South Asia, maintaining their status of excellence. A key function of the Institute, as declared in its Establishment Act, was to provide facilities for research and experimentation. It was this statute that ultimately led to Krishna’s collaboration with AIIMS (Government of India, Ministry of Health 1956; Roychowdhury 2020).

As explored in the following chapters, AIIMS showed interest in collaborating with Krishna and prepared the ground for a government-funded kundalini research project. Karan Singh, then Minister for Health and Family Planning under Gandhi’s administration, was the catalyst behind this. He expected Krishna to guide the research, thus positioning him at the centre of the research team. Moreover, several of Krishna’s published works were referenced in the proposal for the research project. One can therefore argue that Krishna assumed a central role in AIIMS’s planned project, hence significantly contributing to India’s nationalistic appropriation of kundalini.

17.3.1.1. AIIMS’s Kundalini Research Plans

On January 30, 1974, Krishna received a letter from B. K. Anand that marked the beginning of his growing fame in South Asia and his collaboration with the Indian government. Bal

Krishan Anand (1917–2007), a Professor of Physiology specialising in Neurophysiology, played a central role at AIIMS. Prior to its inception, Amrit Kaur sought Anand's expertise for the planning of AIIMS, and he became a member of the Team of Experts shaping AIIMS's foundation. After the Institute's official inauguration, Amrit Kaur nominated Anand as its first professor in the Department of Physiology. Moreover, he served as the Dean of the institute from 1969 until 1974 (Degler 2023, 197; Sengupta 2007, 103–104).

In his letter to Krishna, Anand expressed his wish to discuss potential research collaborations focusing on the neurophysiological effects of yoga and meditation. Anand, along with his colleagues G. S. Chhina (n.d.a.) and Baldev Singh (n.d.a.), had already initiated research into yoga at AIIMS as early as 1961. Their clinical studies primarily concentrated on investigating the physiological effects of yogic practices. Using EEG, they gained insights into yogis' brain-wave frequencies while performing "meditative yogic practices" (IJPP 1991, 79).[512] In their paper "Some Aspects of Electroencephalographic Studies in Yogis" (1961), they write: "Four Yogis who practised *samadhi* were investigated electroencephalographically. It was observed that their resting records showed persistent alpha activity with increased amplitude modulation during *samadhi*. The alpha activity could not be blocked by various sensory stimuli during meditation" (Anand et al., 1961, 452, original emphasis). Other experiments targeted the oxygen utilisation of a yogi while being situated in an airtight box, and investigated yogis' claims regarding voluntary control of heartbeats (IJPP 1991, 81–83). They published extensively on the subject and continued their research over the years.

In 1974, when Anand approached Krishna, Anand likely envisioned a research project revolving around the neurophysiological effects of presumed kundalini awakenings. Krishna enthusiastically embraced Anand's invitation and met with representatives of AIIMS at Savodarya Enclave only two days after receiving Anand's letter.[513] Unfortunately, no records are available regarding the content of the meeting, aside from Degler's vague statement that the attendees "discuss[ed] research" (Degler 2023, 197; IJPP 1991, 79).

An interesting parallel emerges between Anand's initiatives in 1961 and 1974 to study the effects of yogic practices: On both occasions, political intervention instigated the research.

[512] EEG is a technique used to measure brain-wave activities, often utilising biofeedback instruments. For more context, refer to Chapter 21.1.

[513] It is uncertain whether Anand attended the meeting with Krishna on February 1, 1974. Degler only mentions the attendance of "representatives of AIIMS" without specifying who exactly was present at that meeting. Following Anand's initial letter to Krishna, his involvement remained peripheral at best. Therefore, it is likely that he did not attend the February meeting (Degler 2023, 197).

In 1961, members of the Indian Parliament raised pertinent questions regarding the possibility of researching yoga, leading to AIIMS's initial yoga research project under Anand, Chhina, and B. Singh's direction. Many years later, in 1974, Anand presumably contacted Krishna at the recommendation of Karan Singh, who had assumed the position of Health Minister the previous November – once again, a political intervention fostered research into yogic phenomena (IJPP 1991, 79).[514] This demonstrates that yoga and yoga research have been matters of national and political significance, tied to national identity – a connection that continues to endure.

The team did not make any further headway in preparing the research project until June 1974. The progress was significantly hindered by the preparations for the twenty-sixth "Congress of the International Union of Physiological Sciences", scheduled for October 1974. Anand's Department of Physiology at AIIMS hosted the Congress, keeping them fully occupied throughout 1974. In addition to the preparation of the Congress, Anand voluntarily retired from his position at AIIMS in February 1974 to accept an assignment at the World Health Organisation in New Delhi. Following Anand's retirement, S. K. Manchanda, another member of the Department of Physiology, assumed Anand's position as the Head of the Department and became Krishna's primary contact at AIIMS (Degler 2023, 207; IJPP 1998, 575; Sengupta 2007, 104).

Surender Kumar Manchanda (1931–1998) joined the Department of Physiology at AIIMS in 1957 and received both of his doctorates in physiology and medicine from there. Aside from his lifelong commitment to AIIMS and his interest in the "physiology of consciousness" (IJPP 1998, 575), not much is known about Manchanda. For Krishna, Manchanda developed into his closest collaborator at AIIMS. In his letter of June 1974, Manchanda introduced himself as the new head of the project and informed Krishna that the first draft of the research proposal was about to be concluded (Degler 2023, 202).

The proposal in question finally reached Krishna on July 1, 1974. Titled "Yogic Techniques in the Development of Higher Nervous Functions", the proposal comprised eighteen pages

[514] There is no definitive evidence that Anand contacted Krishna at Singh's request, but given the circumstances, he probably did. By January 1974, when Anand contacted Krishna, Singh had already assumed the role of Indian Health Minister, while Anand remained AIIMS's Dean. Therefore, there is little doubt that Singh and Ananda were in regular contact. In addition, according to Degler, Singh resumed his contact with Krishna during the summer of 1973. Finally, Singh told Krishna in a letter that he wished for Krishna to meet with Anand and other scientists. This study therefore suggests that Singh, in his new position as Health Minister, requested Anand to contact Krishna. Anand appeared to be the best candidate to contact Krishna, given his role as Dean of AIIMS and his background in yoga research (Degler 2023, 191; Krishna to Kieffer, December 21, 1972, LGK, box 6.10.3.).

and underscored the scientific and nationalistic interests associated with research into kundalini. In his letter, Manchanda informed Krishna that he had already submitted the proposal to Vulimiri Ramalingaswami, the current Director of AIIMS. Manchanda also referred to a meeting between Singh and Krishna, during which they discussed the research proposal. The specific content of Krishna and Singh's conversation remains unknown, and it is also unclear whether Manchanda modified the proposal following their meeting. However, it indicates that while Manchanda was in charge of the proposal, Krishna and Singh had been involved in its preparation (Manchanda to Krishna, July 1, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.).

The first part of the proposal, simply titled "Introduction", offers a general introduction to yoga, kundalini, and distinct topics associated with Krishna's interpretations. In fact, it reads much like a summary of some of Krishna's central tenets. The chapter "Kundalini and Evolution" unsurprisingly suggests that activating kundalini involves attaining uncommon skills, with Krishna cited as a distinct example of someone who had acquired hitherto unknown languages. The proposal then remarks that "it is tempting to think in line with Gopi Krishna that the concept of Kundalini may be the real biological mechanism underlying the further evolution of human mind" (Manchanda 1974, 6). In "Kundalini Shakti and Freud", the proposal correlates Freud's theories of sexual repression with kundalini's presumed capability of regulating the reproductive organs. The brief chapter continues somewhat incoherently by associating Freud's psychoanalysis with kundalini's potential to trigger mental disorders.

The first part concludes in the same way as the second part commences: By maintaining that "Yoga is an inalienable ethos of the Indian people" (*ibid*., 8). Accordingly, the second part, titled "Yoga Research in the Neurosciences Frame", advocates for South Asia's leadership in yoga research. Referring to Anand and other's contributions in the early 1960s, the proposal emphasises South Asia's initial lead in yoga research. However, over the past decade, this leading role has been surpassed by scientists from other countries. Addressing the potential loss of Indian national pride, the proposal then assesses that "it will be a sad reflection on the Indian scientists and on the management of National Science Policy if India is not able to make a breakthrough in this area of research, and if all such research efforts are left to be pursued by other countries" (*ibid*., 9).

Following this overview of the current state of research in South Asia, along with its nationalistic urge to resume research into yogic phenomena, the final part of the proposal considers the "human element" of such research. It suggests that yogis and scientists have

approached each other, showing more willingness to comprehend the other side. Anticipating modern discourses on scholar-practitioners and practitioner-scholars, the proposal envisions the research project operating on the threshold of a mutual understanding: "It seems that while men of religion, saints and yogis have started shedding the shackles of empiricism, the thinkers of science too have started to open the windows of their mind[s]" (*ibid*., 13). Gopi Krishna, while prominently presented as a yogi-scientist par excellence, was not expected to serve as the project's primary research subject – a role he never aspired to assume. Instead, the proposal suggests Krishna as the "mastermind" behind a somewhat innovative approach, transcending the roles of research subjects and researchers:

> If, as Gopi Krishna interprets the Kundalini Yoga, it is possible to achieve these results [of higher mental functions] by the practice of Yoga, perhaps the best course would be that some researchers should themselves […] take to the practice of Yoga, and motivate some students of science to do the likewise. The subjects thus initiated into the practice of Yoga would form an excellent core-material for research. Since these subjects will be entering the field only out of love for science, and the country, they will not mind subjecting themselves to research. (*ibid*., 14)

This quote comprehensively demonstrates how Manchanda envisioned the project's methodology following an ethnographic framework. He hoped that such a stance would resolve two prevailing issues in yoga research: The lack of yogis willing to contribute and the division between research subjects and scientists. Despite its innovative and progressive spirit, it is unlikely that this methodological approach was used.

A final remark is due to the proposal's bibliography. Most of the thirty-six cited works belong to the body of scientific and scientistic research into yogic phenomena, including articles by Anand, Robert K. Wallace, and Herbert Benson.[515] Moreover, the proposal referenced Arthur Avalon's *The Serpent Power* and seven works by Krishna.[516] Degler reasoned this relatively large number of works by Krishna to the fact that "Manchanda recognized the importance of Gopi Krishna's input on yoga research" (Degler 2023, 202). Manchanda indeed seemed

[515] Intriguingly, the proposal's reference section only included Benson and Wallace's articles discussing drug abuse during meditation. The proposal referred neither to Wallace's seminal article "Physiological Effects of Transcendental Meditation" (1970) nor to Wallace and Benson's "The Physiology of Meditation" (1972) (Manchanda 1974, 16).

[516] Some references to Krishna's work are articles from his book *Kundalini: The Secret of Yoga* (1972). Other cited works include *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1971), *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* (1972), and *Understanding Transformation of Consciousness in Higher States of Consciousness* (1973) (Manchanda 1974, 16–17).

to hold a high opinion of Krishna and his work, evident from his affirmative references to Krishna throughout the proposal. Nonetheless, it is more probable that the large number of Krishna's works were inserted at the urging of Singh to run the project under Krishna's guidance – hence orienting the proposal around his works (Manchanda 1974, 16–18).

Overall, the proposal appears rather tentative, supporting the assumption that the version of July 1, 1974, was only a preliminary draft. Little information is available on any revised proposals. Despite having already submitted it to Ramalingaswami, the then Director of AIIMS, Manchanda requested Krishna's comments on the original proposal. It is, therefore, likely that Manchanda intended to revise the proposal upon its return from Ramalingaswami. His reference to the proposal as a "report" supports this assumption (Manchanda to Krishna, July 1, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.). Moreover, Degler briefly mentions that Manchanda informed Krishna during the summer of 1975 that he "had done a rewrite and update on the original proposal" (Degler 2023, 217). While this indicates that Manchanda continued working on the proposal, no further information is available on the nature of the changes, whether Krishna commented on it, and whether he ultimately resubmitted the revised proposal.

Despite its shortcomings, the AIIMS's anticipated research project began to be promoted. Two notable occasions were a newspaper article from April 1976, printed in *Blitz*, and Singh's advocation of the project at an international event in New Delhi in October 1974. The examination of these sources in the next chapter aims to offer further information on kundalini research at AIIMS and determine the proposal's weight for Krishna and the project of kundalini's nationalisation. Despite being published after Singh's event, the significance of the *Blitz*'s article prevails, warranting discussion first.

17.3.1.2. Promoting AIIMS's Kundalini Research

An article from April 1976, printed in the South Asian weekly tabloid *Blitz*, provides vital information on AIIMS's project.[517] Aligning with the proposal's nationalistic ethos, the article emphasised how AIIMS's project "puts India with its medical and scientific researchers upon the threshold of the world's greatest discovery" (Karanjia 1976c, 6). In

[517] *Blitz* featured the "Kundalini Yoga" series between April and May 1975. A central platform to promote Krishna's cause, this series will be discussed in detail in Chapter 18.2.

addition to promoting AIIMS's research plans, it extensively quotes Manchanda and details the project's objectives.[518]

According to the article, Manchanda identified two central issues for investigation. They summarise the project's main research objectives and merit quotation. The first issue addresses kundalini's supposed nature as energy:

> The current concepts of energy that is usable for biological activities are based on the metabolic processes of the living tissues […]. This energy is nutrition-dependent. Kundalini energy, on the other hand, is considered to be ethereal Prana. If there is such a type of energy that is in continuum with the one that pervades the atmosphere, CAN WE IDENTIFY IT AND DESCRIBE ITS PARAMETERS? (Manchanda, in Karanjia 1976c, 6, original emphasis)

Assuming kundalini to be an "ethereal" type of energy distinct from metabolic energy, Manchanda established AIIMS's first research focus as the scientific identification and description of the energy's parameters. In other words, the research team was not concerned with proving the existence of kundalini, which was accepted as a matter of fact. Instead, their objective was to investigate the characteristics of this "ethereal" energy.

The second issue for investigation concerned the psycho-physiological changes attending kundalini's movement:

> If the higher nervous skills, or changes in the perceptive faculties as are considered to become manifest, consequent to the mobilisation of the energy released by the activation of Kundalini are true biological phenomenon [*sic*], then WHAT ARE THEIR PHYSIOLOGICAL CORRELATES AT THE LEVEL OF NEUTRAL, HARMONAL [*sic*] AND OTHER METABOLIC PARAMETERS? (Manchanda, in Karanjia 1976c, 6, original emphasis)

The second research focused on identifying the physiological changes of the expected improvements in nervous skills and perceptive faculties resulting from kundalini's activation. These changes, according to Manchanda, resulting from kundalini's conversion into "kinetic form": "The energy can be converted into kinetic form, either spontaneously or

[518] Karanjia, the author of the article in *Blitz*, quotes from what he called the "Introduction to the AIMS's [*sic*] Kundalini Research Project" (Karanjia 1976c, 6). It is unclear whether he referred to Manchanda's initial proposal of July 1974 or if he had received an updated version. Considering that Manchanda requested comments from Krishna in July 1974, it is likely that by April 1975, the proposal had been revised (Manchanda to Krishna, July 1, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.).

by meditational practices. The phenomenon of conversion has been termed as '*the awakening of the Kundalini*'" (*ibid*., original emphasis).

Potential changes included physical symptoms such as involuntary body movements or changes in temperature and vision. Additionally, Manchanda's reference to "true biological phenomen[a]" further encompassed alterations in consciousness. Manchanda maintained that kundalini, in its kinetic form, may result in

> the acquirement of extraordinary control on the autonomic activities, […] leading to the cultivaion [*sic*] of a genius mind, psychic powers like telepathy, clairvoyance, and various psychokinetic feats, and to changed sense of perception relating to the experience of higher consciousness, called the Mystical Experience. (*ibid*.)

Considering these research objectives, it is safe to assume that Manchanda and the team at AIIMS did not only hope to discover explanations not only for psycho-physiological changes related to kundalini's kinetic form. Additionally, they aimed to unravel the physiological parameters of alterations of consciousness, paranormal powers and mystical experiences.

The efforts to promote AIIMS's planned research project by *Blitz*'s editor, R. K. Karanjia, remained unparalleled. Aside from introducing the project's main objectives, the emphasis on its seminal value for India's international recognition is remarkable. As outlined below, Karanjia closely collaborated with the Hindu nationalist government of Indira Gandhi and was well acquainted with Karan Singh.

Several months before Karanjia's "Kundalini Yoga" article, Karan Singh also undertook the task of public advertising for the planned research. This opportunity arose from Singh's participation at the Congress of the International Union of Physiological Sciences, held in Delhi in October 1974. It was an obvious choice, considering that the Department of Physiology at AIIMS simultaneously organised the Congress and created the research proposal. As Health Minister, Karan Singh delivered the opening address at the Congress. Having been devoted to the AIIMS research endeavour from its inception, Singh used his lecture as a platform to introduce the project and perhaps some of its central tenets. Unfortunately, little information about Singh's lecture is available, leaving room only for speculations as to its specific content. One potential source of insight into Singh's opening address is Karanjia's April 10, 1975, newspaper article in *Blitz* addressing kundalini research at AIIM. There, Karanjia writes:

> Dr. Karan Singh […] thrilled the 2,300 world scientists assembled at the International Congress of Physiological Science […] with the announcement of an ambitious

> Kundalini Research Project to be sponsored by the All-India Institute of Medical Science, to research the "Kundalini concept and its relevance to the development of higher nervous functions". (Karanjia 1976c, 6)

In addition to the project's official announcement, Singh asserted that humanity was currently undergoing a transmutation of consciousness: "Is man, in fact, evolving towards a transmutation of consciousness […]? Is it possible that man is on the threshold of a new evolution? If so, what will be the concommitant [*sic*] changes required in the human body, particularly the brain?" (Singh, in Karanjia 1976c, 6). The questions raised by Singh evidently aligned with Krishna's interpretation of kundalini, suggesting a potential correlation with the evolution of the brain (see Chapter 10.2.2).

However, available sources do not indicate whether Singh implicitly mentioned kundalini as a component of AIIMS's project during his lecture.[519] Therefore, it remains uncertain whether Singh introduced the project solely as neurophysiological research on yogic practices or if he was explicitly promoting Krishna's cause to over two thousand international physiologists.[520]

According to Degler, the Congress and particularly Singh's lecture unequivocally served as promising catalysts for Krishna's research. Despite not attending the Congress, Krishna himself was equally confident in its significance for his own cause, as expressed in a letter to his supporter Evelyn Ferrantani (Degler 2023, 198, 207; Krishna to Ferrantani, November 16, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.4.). Nonetheless, considering the lack of additional references, it is somewhat challenging to determine the Congress's definitive impact on subsequent developments regarding Krishna's kundalini research.

17.3.1.3. Further Developments at AIIMS

Despite Singh's official announcement of the research project and its subsequent promotion in *Blitz*, no information is available regarding when, or if, the research project at AIIMS

[519] John White mentions that R. Keith Wallace attended the conference and was particularly disappointed by its outcome. His paper, titled "The Neurophysiology of Enlightenment", reviewed the ongoing scientific research on TM conducted by members of TM. Wallace perhaps felt left out when Singh announced the large-scale research project anticipated by the Indian government (J. W. White 1976a, 92).

[520] The fact that Karanjia referred to Singh's lecture in an article that revolved around the presumed "re-discovery of kundalini" (Karanjia 1976c, 1) pleads for Singh's direct reference to kundalini. At the same time, as will be argued below, Karanjia followed a political agenda, therefore his articles need to be considered with a certain critical distance (*ibid*., 6).

officially started. In July 1974, Singh assured Krishna that the research at AIIMS would commence within the next two or three months. Seeking funds at the Indian Council for Medical Research, Singh was convinced that the research would begin in a timely manner. Owing to Singh's firm conviction, Krishna already envisioned the research's impact on his own cause:

> When the research is started in India it is possible that the German Organization [FWW] may also follow suit and there might be responsive gestures from other Organizations also. Within a year or so of the establishment of the Indian Research Centre we would be far ahead in our status among academicians than we are now. (Krishna to Kieffer, July 30, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.1.)

Krishna's hopes for the prompt start of the research in South Asia further motivated him to plan a formal inaugural event. At the inauguration, as he envisioned, scientists, scholars, members of the Parliament, and the Press would be present. He assured his supporter Kieffer "of wide publicity because of the scientific interest aroused at the initiation of scientific research on the phenomenon. That is the time when your presence at Delhi will be of the highest advantage" (Krishna to Kieffer, August 6, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.). However, such a gathering never happened. Furthermore, despite Krishna residing in Delhi for several months from 1974 onwards, not a single meeting with the members of the project team is recorded.[521] Details are also scarce regarding information on the team members or distinct tasks and responsibilities. Aside from Manchanda and Krishna's involvement, the source material does not refer to any other involved parties. Krishna merely communicated in a letter to Kieffer that Manchanda hoped to provide two scientists and a Sanskrit scholar "to help in the translation of ancient esoteric texts". Additionally, an investigative officer would be hired to "visit the various Ashrams in India to locate cases of awakening of the Serpent Power" (Krishna to Kieffer, July 30, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.1.). Since Manchanda did not include any of these tasks or responsibilities in the research proposal, such a division of assignments was perhaps never intended to be a part of AIIMS's research. Instead, it might have simply reflected Krishna's vision of how kundalini research in South Asia could be best implemented.

[521] A notable exception is a meeting with Manchanda after Krishna's lecture at the "Seminar on Yoga, Science, and Man". This meeting took place sometime in late spring 1975. No further information is recorded (Degler 2023, 211).

However, an undated document may provide some additional information on the anticipated execution of the research.[522] The document refers to Anand and Manchanda, who stated that the project aimed to investigate the physiological and psychological symptoms accompanying a kundalini awakening with the help of tantra yoga manuals. While the document omits references to specific manuals, it indicates that these manuals would guide the scientists in their research. One research goal of the project was examining the physiological explanation of genius – a goal that appears to be influenced by Krishna's interpretative model of kundalini (Unknown, n.d., 3–4). Moreover, the brief overview provides information on a centre where volunteers would be observed and subjected to training intended to potentially induce a kundalini awakening:

> Dr. Manchnada […] said that tentative plans for the research call for a special center in the Himalayas, north and slightly east of New Delhi, where the climate is moderate all year round. Too wide a variation in temperatures does not make for an ideal environment for this kind of research, because trainees will be subjected to very strenuous mental disciplines that are designed to accelerate the evolutionary processes at work in the nervous system and brain. (*ibid*., 2–3)

The description of a centre exclusively dedicated to the project of kundalini research strongly resembles Krishna's anticipated Yoga Experimental Project. It is probable that Krishna's frustration over the unsatisfying progress at AIIMS (and other instances) ultimately motivated him to launch his Experimental Centre.[523]

No further information is available on AIIMS's centre, including the nature of its "very strenuous mental disciplines", which the research team considered beneficial for the rise of kundalini. Were there any machines involved, like at the Menninger Foundation or the Kundalini Clinic? Were these "mental disciplines" limited to silent meditation, or did they integrate postural yoga? Was there perhaps any influence from Maharishi's TM or Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga? This would significantly weaken Krishna's position as the central expert on kundalini among the research team members. In the lack of further source material,

[522] The document lacks information on the date and author. This notwithstanding, two reasons indicate its authenticity: First, its inclusion in the archival material indicates that Krishna's supporters found it valuable, and second, the historical information is accurate, e.g., relating to the Congress of Physiologists in New Delhi and Anand's yoga research. Therefore, my assessment is that the document is a trustworthy and valuable source (Unknown, n.d.).

[523] As outlined in Chapter 13.2., Krishna's Yoga Experimental Project aimed to continue what was planned as AIIMS's empirical research.

these questions must remain unanswered. However, they point to the necessity for additional research.

In hindsight, it appears as if the initial motivation for the project constantly waned to the point where it stagnated. The most likely scenario was the lack of governmental support, funding, and staff.[524] Despite his high rank, Singh might have faced difficulties securing funding, and *Blitz*'s reference to the project could, therefore, be interpreted as a final attempt to revive the initial endeavour. AIIMS's stagnation notwithstanding, Singh did not cease his support of Krishna. This is particularly evident from another notable event scheduled for March 1975. Unlike the Congress of the International Union of Physiological Sciences, the "Seminar on Yoga, Science, and Man" was truly impactful for Krishna's project – both on a national and international scale. Moreover, on an institutional level, Singh planned to launch a novel scientific research project. With a focus on consciousness research, Singh envisioned "Project Consciousness" as complementary to AIIM's physiological approach (Degler 2023, 227). The next two chapters will discuss the event and project and their immediate effects on Krishna's case.

17.3.2. The Seminar on Yoga, Science, and Man (1975)

One of Krishna's most notable performances as the orchestrated guide of India's nationalistic endeavour of kundalini research took place in March 1975 in New Delhi. The occasion was a public conference titled "Seminar on Yoga, Science, and Man", mainly instigated by Karan Singh.[525] The conference was sponsored by AIIMS, Karan Singh's Ministry of Health and Family Planning, and the Central Council for Research in Indian Medicine and Homoeopathy (CCRIMH), making it a prestigious undertaking. According to Degler, the event was divided into a "scientific" and a "yogic" portion, with the sessions revolving around yoga featuring Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Dhirendra Brahmachari, and Gopi Krishna

[524] The assumption of the insufficient funds for AIIMS's research project is supported by a note from Kieffer, stating that he had received a grant proposal from Manchanda in April 1975. Kieffer sent the proposal to several contacts, seeking funds in the United States instead of South Asia (Kieffer to Krishna, April 22, 1975, LGK, box 6.5.2.).

[525] Unfortunately, additional literature on the event is scarce. Daulat Singh Kothari published the conference proceedings for CCRIMH, which included several conference presentations, information on the speakers, and exhibited books. Aside from Kothari's edited volume (1975), from which I could only access its table of contents, Degler's event narration provides the most useful insights. However, given Degler's loyalty to Krishna and his cause, one must acknowledge her description as biased (Degler 2023, 210–212).

(Degler 2023, 210).[526] The particular significance of the conference for the present study is threefold: First, it was a promotional event for Krishna's position as the leading figure of kundalini research; second, it consolidated India's self-ascribed role in kundalini research; and third, it served as a venue for an international demonstration of power between the three South Asian teachers.

Karan Singh opened the event on March 14, 1975, with an inaugural address. Fragments of this lecture are available, which underscore Singh's stance regarding Krishna.[527] Quoting a passage from his inaugural address elucidates his attitude:

> I would particularly like to draw the attention of this distinguished gathering to the central significance of the phenomenon of "Kundalini". […] The All-India Institute of Medical Sciences is undertaking a special project for the study of the Kundalini, in which we want the cooperation and collaboration of all yogis and scientists. The project revolves particularly around the books on Kundalini by Pandit Gopi Krishna, who is happily present amongst us today. These books are arousing keen interest, not only in India but throughout the world. […] Here is a truly exciting challenge to scientists the world over. (Singh, March 14, 1975, LGK, box 5)

In essence, Singh advertised South Asia's kundalini research efforts under Krishna's guidance. It is likely that his affirmative reference to Krishna's work significantly contributed to the growing interest in Krishna among South Asian scientists and journalists. By simultaneously emphasising Krishna's global recognition and his central contribution to South Asian research, Singh also aimed to attach increased prominence to the AIIMS research project. After all, strengthening India's international standing remained Singh's highest priority.

Krishna spoke on the conference's last day, March 16, 1975. According to his own assessment, "many of the scientists and Yogis, who attended the Seminar, had come from different places and represented several universities and Yoga Ashrams. The ideas I expressed had therefore a wide circulation" (Krishna to Iengar, March 18, 1975, LGK, box

[526] Due to the lack of an exhaustive list of the conference's speakers, only Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Dhirendra Brahmachari, whom Degler mentioned in her book, can be evaluated (Degler 2023, 210).

[527] Kieffer secured central passages of Singh's inaugural address and integrated them into an advertising folder, which he circulated among US-American publishers, bookstores, and newspaper editors. The folder comprised three sections, all of which portray Krishna as a leading figure in global endeavours to unravel kundalini's nature: Singh's address, which is titled "An Appeal", a newspaper clipping from *The Hindustan Times*, titled "Awaken Kundalini, become a Genius", and a short review of Krishna's most recent book, *The Awakening of Kundalini* (1975) (LGK, box 5; Kieffer to Krishna, June 3, 1975, box 6.5.2.).

6.10.1.). In lack of title and the specific content of his lecture, one can only speculate about the ideas Krishna referred to in the above quote. However, the broad topics can be discerned by examining his book *The Awakening of Kundalini* (1975), AIIMS's project proposal, and several newspaper articles published following his contribution to the conference. Accordingly, Krishna probably addressed a range of his favourite (and recurring) topics, including the biological basis of kundalini, its link to the evolution of the mind and humanity, the notion of genius, and higher consciousness. Moreover, as discussed earlier, from at least 1974, Krishna pursued an adapted strategy, emphasising South Asia's pivotal role with regard to kundalini research. Against the backdrop of his shifted focus, Krishna likely also highlighted South Asia's role in his lecture, including potential links between kundalini and South Asian's ancient literature and the allegedly unique knowledge about yoga in South Asia (Krishna 1975b; Krishna to Kieffer, August 6, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.5.; box 5).

Degler unsurprisingly praised Krishna's contribution at the conference as a "great success" (Degler 2023, 211). Additionally, she claimed that Krishna enjoyed certain privileges compared to his fellow speakers:

> The seminar was a great success for Gopi Krishna. Even the organizers seemed to be aware that this might be the case. After cautioning all the speakers on the topic of kundalini in advance that they might have only a very short time to speak, they told Krishna to take as much as he wanted. In the end he spoke for an hour and a quarter to what was later described as a rapt audience. (Degler 2023, 211)

This study agrees with Degler that the event bolstered Krishna's standing and that its organisers sympathised with him. However, caution must be exercised when considering Degler's claims due to the lack of additional sources and her biased description. At an international conference featuring lectures from a host of speakers, it seems unlikely that Krishna was granted an unlimited time frame for his talk. If it was indeed unconstrained, it could be another indicator of Singh's efforts to create a stage for Krishna. This, however, is restricted to speculation.

Another possible motivation for Degler's statement could be to portray Krishna in a superior light compared to the other "yogic" speakers at the conference: Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Dhirendra Brahmachari. The former had an international standing, a global fellowship, and the technique of Transcendental Meditation as a trademark. The latter was well established

in South Asia.[528] Essentially, both had a much better international and national standing and a larger fellowship than Krishna. While Maharishi's success constantly grew in Europe and the United States, Brahmachari assumed a privileged role in South Asia, resulting from his close relationship with the Indian Prime Minister (Deslippe 2012, 373–375; Williamson 2010, 80–81). Due to these facts, Krishna's supporters did not miss an opportunity to diminish his successful competitors. As already outlined, Maharishi had developed into Krishna's foremost foe.[529] Therefore, when Brahmachari challenged Maharishi's theories at the conference, Degler may have also regarded this as a success for Krishna (Degler 2023, 211).

Krishna's contribution to the conference led to several meetings with interested parties, including Manchanda, Paneenazhikath N. V. Kurup (the current director of CCRIMH), and D. S. Kothari. Especially the physicist and educator Daulat Singh Kothari (1906–1993) proved a valuable contact. As former president of the Indian National Science Academy and a respected scientist who also shared an interest in yoga research, Kothari invited Krishna to speak at the National Science Academy and the University of Delhi. According to Krishna, the informal talk at the Academy was a successful undertaking that ended in "mutual understanding" (Krishna to Iengar, March 28, 1975, LGK, box 6.10.1.). After speaking at Delhi University, which was presided over by Kothari, Krishna was further invited to a meeting at the Institute of Yoga and Psychic Research in Delhi. Moreover, during the conference, several attendees formed a standing committee for research on yoga under the chair of Kothari, which Krishna was invited to join. These meetings and invitations, along with several South Asian newspapers that picked up on the topic, underpin Krishna's growing recognition in South Asia (Degler 2023, 211; Krishna to Iengar, March 28, 1975, LGK, box 6.10.1.).

Singh, Krishna, and others' efforts to enhance interest in kundalini and yoga research yielded notable results in South Asia. Singh and Krishna's framing of kundalini research as being tied to nationalistic sentiments increasingly motivated scientists from different disciplines to join their cause. This was also the case with "Project Consciousness", yet another South

[528] Brahmachari was not only Gandhi's yoga mentor but also Yogi Bhajan's yoga teacher. As Deslippe convincingly argued, Yogi Bhajan drew from elements of Brahmachari's practices and implemented them into his Kundalini Yoga teachings (Deslippe 2012, 373–375). See Chapter 8.1. for an examination of Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga.

[529] Refer to Chapter 16.3.2. for a discussion of the challenging relationship between Krishna and the Maharishi.

Asian research project featuring Krishna, which some described as Karan Singh's "pet project" (Prasad and Patel 2015).

17.3.3. Project Consciousness (1977)

In early January 1977, the first meeting of a newly formed advisory committee took place in New Delhi. The initiator of the committee was Karan Singh, one of its members was Gopi Krishna, and a central objective was to determine kundalini's link to consciousness. This chapter will detail the project and its committee, its link to the initial proposal of AIIMS, and its significance for Krishna.

Considering the slow progress of AIIMS's research project, Singh contemplated initiating another "carefully structured research project [revolving] around Kundalini and the works of Pt. Gopi Krishna" (Singh, in Karanjia 1976h, 1). Singh's idea emerged in March 1976, with the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) in Bangalore (Karnataka, India) serving as the project's institutional home. In contrast to AIIMS's research, the new project would focus less on kundalini's physiological aspects and more on its expected links to consciousness.[530] The project's anticipated designation reflected its emphasis: "Project Consciousness" (Degler 2023, 227; Karanjia 1976h, 1).

Prior to its inception in January 1977, Singh made several efforts to secure funding for the project. In a letter to Karanjia, dated March 14, 1976, and printed on May 1, 1976, as part of *Blitz*'s "Kundalini Yoga" series, Singh underscored its prospect. The letter somewhat resembles a public campaign, with Singh stressing the necessity of further research in "this neglected and fascinating field" (Singh, in Karanjia 1976h, 1) while expressing regret that funding had not yet been secured. In an attempt to emphasise the significance and scale of the project, Singh mentioned that he had been in contact with the Director General of the World Health Organisation, who might be willing to provide financial support. Singh's commitment to the anticipated project was further demonstrated by including the topic on the agenda of an official meeting of ministers at the Indian Parliament. *Blitz* reported on this happening in its issue of May 8, 1976 (Karanjia 1976h, 1; 1976g, 8).

[530] It is likely that the designated scope of kundalini was eventually broadened and included several yogic phenomena and their links to consciousness. This becomes evident, e.g., from a research paper attributed to "Project Consciousness", titled "Autonomic Changes During 'Om' Meditation", published in 1995 (Telles, Nagarathna, and Nagendra 1995, 420).

While there is no evidence that Singh successfully secured monetary support, he continued his efforts to implement the project.[531] As an initial step, he formed the project's advisory committee. In a telegram dated January 9, 1977, Krishna received his official invitation to be part of the committee:

> Doctor Karan Singh Union Health Minister is pleased to nominate you as a member on Advisory Committee on Project Consciousness of National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences stop Minister desires a meeting of Members of Advisory Committee on Friday 14th January at 10.30 hours in His Chambers at Nirman Bhawan New Delhi stop Request your presence stop. (Telegram to Krishna, January 9, 1977, LGK, box 6.6.2.)

Aside from Krishna, other committee members included some "top rank scientists in India" (Krishna to Kobelt, January 14, 1977, LGK, box 6.6.2.). Unfortunately, only a few scientific members can be identified: The neurosurgeon R. Marthanda Varma (d. 2015), who, as the founder and director of NIMHANS, officially led the project; the neurophysiologist Turaga Desiraju (1935–1992), founder of the Department of Neurophysiology at NIMHANS, where "Project Consciousness" was based; and the physicist D. S. Kothari, whom Krishna had met at the preceding "Seminar on Yoga, Science, and Man" (1975) (Karanjia 1976h, 1; Telles, Nagarathna, and Nagendra 1995; Krishna to Kobelt, January 14, 1977, LGK, box 6.6.2.).
Despite Bangalore being the primary location for implementing "Project Consciousness", the inaugural meeting of the advisory committee took place in New Delhi at the governmental Chamber that Singh used in his position as Minister. According to Krishna, he arrived at the Chamber in the company of Singh, with whom he had met at the latter's private residence before the inaugural meeting. While there is no information regarding the meeting's agenda, Krishna indicated that several additional meetings might be necessary before the group could establish guidelines and a specific framework for the project. There was a good chance that the following meeting would take place in Srinagar, aiming to reduce Krishna's need to travel, demonstrating his key position in Singh's endeavours (Krishna to Kobelt, January 14, 1977, LGK, box 6.6.2.).

[531] One sponsor of "Project Consciousness" was Maharishi's TM. Kieffer condemned this as a strategic move, enabling TM to receive the research results from the project. As outlined earlier, Kieffer held a negative opinion of TM, which is reconfirmed from the following quote: "It is, for their part, a very cheap way to assure access to all of the findings. […] After all, TM is a business and nothing more. Any good businessman would do as much to keep informed of what the competition is up to" (Kieffer to Krishna, December 28, 1976, LGK, box 6.6.2.).

From the little material that is available, "Project Consciousness" was set to become a prestigious and promising undertaking. Due to Singh's commitment and direct involvement in the project, its chances of implementation were significantly higher than AIIMS's. Having said that, and despite its promising prerequisites, it did not meet Krishna's high expectations. In 1977, several months after the committee's inaugural meeting, Indira Gandhi's government fell. With her defeat at the elections, Singh lost his position as Minister and the accompanying sphere of power and influence. While this was not the conclusion of "Project Consciousness", it marked the end of Krishna and Singh's collaboration (Degler 2023, 230; Prasad and Patel 2015).[532]

In 2004, during his inaugural address at the conference "Science and Beyond: Cosmology, Consciousness and Technology in the Indic Traditions", Singh reflected on "Project Consciousness" and the potential it held:

> Years ago, when I was minister for health and family planning, I had started […] a programme entitled "Project Consciousness" in which I had assembled some of the most creative scientific minds in India as well as involving Pandit Gopi Krishna whose books on Kundalini awakening are known throughout the world. Unfortunately, […] the project was wound up almost immediately after I left the ministry, evidently considered a mild eccentricity not worth pursuing. […] Had the project continued over the last quarter of a century, we could well have produced the first Nobel laureates in the field of consciousness research. (Singh 2003, 6)

Contrary to Singh's statements, under the leadership of Desiraju, "Project Consciousness" continued to operate. At the Department of Neurophysiology at NIMHANS, the project team pursued the vision that the advisory committee may have conceived for "Project Consciousness", investigating the correlation between yogic techniques and mental conditions. A 2015 South Asian newspaper article described "Project Consciousness" with the following words:

> The project aims at the study of the states of consciousness induced by Yogis through meditation, *pranayama, kundalini*, and the application of these methods for achieving greater integration of personality and behaviour. Effective application of "yogic"

[532] Singh and Krishna nonetheless maintained a relationship characterised by mutual respect and affinity. At least one further meeting was recorded at the ITA conference in Davos in 1983, where both Krishna and Singh presented a paper. Moreover, Singh attended Krishna's funeral ceremony in his native Kashmir (Degler 2023, 281, 297).

> techniques could save patients from the dangerous side-effects of modern drugs. (Prasad and Patel 2015, original emphasis)

However, despite the continuation of "Project Consciousness", it ceased to play any further role in Krishna's endeavours after Singh's withdrawal. While Desiraju and Krishna maintained contact until the latter's passing, Krishna did not reengage with a South Asian research project thereafter.

The next chapter shifts focus from scientific research projects and international events to a promotional campaign in South Asia's public media. The "Kundalini Yoga" series situated Krishna and the research into kundalini at the centre of national interest. As the next chapter will demonstrate, the series represented South Asia's greatest promotional effort with regard to Krishna and followed a designated political strategy.

18. R. K. Karanjia and the "Kundalini Yoga" Series

Under the heading "KUNDALINI YOGA: India's Ancient 'Serpent Power' Re-discovered", R.K. Karanjia published an article series in the South Asian tabloid *Blitz*. The aim of this series was twofold: To promote Krishna's project and emphasise South Asia's leading role in kundalini research.[533] When Karanjia published his "Kundalini Yoga" series in 1976, *Blitz* was at the zenith of its success and enjoyed Prime Minister Gandhi's full support. At the same time, the Gandhi administration could rely on Karanjia's loyalty. *Blitz* served as the government's flagship and contributed to its agenda to promote kundalini as a symbol of Hindu nationalism. The choice of *Blitz* as the national platform to announce the launch of South Asia's large-scale project of kundalini research was therefore by no means arbitrary. As the following two chapters will demonstrate, Karanjia's cover stories significantly enhanced Krishna's nationwide reputation and became one of the most notable episodes of Krishna's project of kundalini research.

18.1. The Relationship Between Karanjia and Krishna

Rustom K. Karanjia (1912–1998) was born into a wealthy Parsi family and became a journalist for the *Times of India*. In 1941, he founded *Blitz*, a weekly tabloid based in Bombay. Initially advocating a pro-war stance, *Blitz* soon identified with the Independence Movement and developed into a popular and internationally renowned newspaper committed to investigative journalism and politics (Sanghvi 2008).[534]

Despite political differences and Karanjia's provoking, iconoclastic articles, Karanjia maintained a strong and friendly relationship with Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi.[535] During the 1970s, with the support of Gandhi, *Blitz* developed into the best-selling weekly

[533] While other South Asian newspapers had already published articles on Krishna, none were willing to dedicate an entire series spanning several issues to him. The most notable articles preceding *Blitz*'s "Kundalini Yoga" series include "Instant Genius Through Yoga" (*The Indian Express*, March 3, 1975), "Awaken Kundalini, Become a Genius" (*The Hindustan Times*, March 29, 1975), "Kundalini Concept Explained" (*The Indian Express*, April 4, 1975), and "Genius Can Be Cultivated Says Scholar" (*The Statesman*, April 4, 1975, translated from Hindi) (Degler 2023, 210; LGK, box 5).

[534] For *Blitz*, Karanjia interviewed several world leaders, including Fidel Castro, Josip Broz Tito, and Gamal Abdel Nasser (Sanghvi 2008).

[535] Vir Sanghvi described Karanjia as "anti-Congress [the Indian National Congress party to which Jawaharlal Nehru belonged] and pro-Nehru – as bizarre as it may sound" (Sanghvi 2008).

newspaper in South Asia.[536] According to Karanjia's friend Vir Sanghvi (b. 1956), Karanjia not only became "Mrs Gandhi's favourite journalist" (*ibid*.), but also under her government *Blitz* "was pretty much the voice of the establishment" (*ibid*.). *Blitz* was particularly known for its irreverence and iconoclasm. These two attributes made it very popular among its readership while not affecting its stable relationship with the government. After almost four decades, in the mid-1990s, Karanjia stepped down from his position, and *Blitz* ceased publication (Sanghvi 2008; Kulkarni 2008).

Karanjia's first personal encounter with Krishna occurred in Srinagar in the summer of 1975. From Karanjia's description of their meeting location, it seems as if they met at the local KRF branch in Nishat: "I encountered Pandit Gopi Krishna in his Srinagar home, which has been transformed into a laboratory of research in Kundalini-Yoga" (Karanjia 1977, 1). Before their initial meeting, Karanjia had already come across Krishna's books. In particular, *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* (1972) caught his attention and encouraged him to recommend it to Gandhi (Gandhi to Karanjia, May 30, 1975, LGK, box 6.5.2.).

There are no indications that Krishna and Karanjia had any follow-up meetings after their initial encounter in the summer of 1975. The most obvious reason is Krishna's journey to Europe in November 1975, where he remained for an entire year (see Chapter 12.5.). As mentioned earlier, Krishna's fifth journey was his longest trip and the least-documented period of his international career. Therefore, why he chose to stay in Germany and Switzerland instead of South Asia – at the peak of his national success – remains unclear. Moreover, no correspondence between Krishna and Karanjia is available, which could otherwise provide information on Karanjia's preparation for the "Kundalini Yoga" series, his literary research, updates on the articles, or additional interviews with Krishna. This lack of information notwithstanding, it is likely that after their meeting in 1975, Karanjia started preparing what was to become the "Kundalini Yoga" series. For the same reasons, Krishna's relationship with Karanjia can only be recapitulated by statements in published material. Karanjia's *Kundalini Yoga* (1977) is most helpful in this regard and suggests that a shared fascination with kundalini and mutual respect characterised the relationship between Krishna and Karanjia.[537]

[536] Since Karanjia was only proficient in English, *Blitz* was initially limited to that language. However, a Hindi version was later introduced, which proved even more successful and outsold the English edition (Sanghvi 2008).

[537] Karanjia's book *Kundalini Yoga* (1977) is based on the "Kundalini Yoga" series (1976), with only minor adaptions. All chapter titles correspond to the headlines of the series articles in *Blitz*, and the content remained

In the book's preface, Karanjia describes his initial meeting with Krishna in Srinagar, crediting him with "initiating me to this fascinating and rewarding enquiry" (Karanjia 1977, 1). Of course, Karanjia referred to the enquiry into kundalini and presented Krishna as an illuminated guide who "holds the secret of the cosmic life force that can telescope a whole millenia [*sic*] of development within this century and resurrect the indwelling God in Man" (*ibid*.). Against the backdrop of Krishna's teachings, Karanjia reflected on a traumatic experience of an accident where he almost died, reconsidering that experience as "spiritual rebirth" (*ibid*., 2). Karanjia additionally mentioned Satya Sai Baba, of whom he was a devoted follower, and compared the two.[538]

> Sai Baba and Gopi Krishna present, to my thinking, two different aspects of man's evolution from the material to the transcendental plane of consciousness. Baba was born to command the cosmic forces, while Gopi Krishna's was an accidental evolution. That is why the latter had to undergo all the pangs and torments of rebirth. (*ibid*., 3)

Despite labelling Krishna's experience as an "accidental evolution" – which aligns with Krishna's own narrative – Karanjia acknowledged his current condition as a "transcendental plane of consciousness" in the wake of a rebirth. Moreover, considering the widespread support (also among South Asia's leading politicians) for Sai Baba, Karanjia's association between Krishna and Sai Baba likely strengthened Krishna's standing (S. Srinivas 2014).

Aside from portraying Krishna as an enlightened "twice-born" (Karanjia 1977, 1), Karanjia further introduced Krishna as a research subject: "The most attractive feature about him [Krishna] from my viewpoint is that he is willing to offer his highly evolved person with an awakened Kundalini to proper scientific research. […] Here a liberated mind and body is made available, for the first time, to science for clinical examination" (*ibid*.). This statement echoes William I. Thompson's statement about Krishna's role in FWW (W. I. Thompson 1974, 84–85). However, as outlined above, Krishna was never intended as a research subject of the South Asian kundalini research projects (Manchanda 1974).

In his foreword, Krishna praised Karanjia's qualities as an outstanding journalist who disseminated knowledge about kundalini. As the main beneficiary of the article series, Krishna expressed his ardent support of Karanjia's features in *Blitz*:

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unchanged. The book's final chapter, "Kundalini Project to Save the World", poses a notable exception (Karanjia 1977).

[538] Satya Sai Baba (1926–2011) claimed religious mastery from a young age. He was mainly active in South Asia, establishing several institutions and Trusts. Srinivas (2010) critically examines the Satya Sai Movement.

> You are the first among journalists of standing who, with such zeal and singleness of purpose has come forward to help me in the execution of this task. You have done this in a manner as if you are upholding a cause entirely your own. […] It was my ardent wish that this mighty discovery of the sages of India should be initially broadcast to the world by the Indian Press in such an effective way that its echoes continue to reverberate for centuries to come. Like a pioneer you have shown the way. I am sure others will follow it. (Krishna, in Karanjia 1977, 16–17)

This quote is significant for two reasons. First, it shows Krishna's respect for Karanjia's work as a journalist, which he considered a pioneering achievement. Krishna attributed the journalist's diligence, courage, and pioneering spirit "to a divine impulse urging you [Karanjia]" (*ibid*., 7) to campaign for the greater cause of kundalini research. In other words, Krishna suggested that kundalini was active in Karanjia (*ibid*., 3). Second, Krishna writes as a fervent nationalist, stressing India's singular role in the project of kundalini research. In particular, by highlighting that kundalini's origin traces back to the "sages of India", he adheres to the nationalist agenda.

Krishna drafted his foreword for *Kundalini Yoga* in April 1976 while staying in Zurich (*ibid*., 21). During this month, *Blitz* featured its first series on "Kundalini Yoga". Considering that the last feature was not released until May 1976, Karanjia likely intended the *Blitz* article series on kundalini yoga as a book project from an early stage, but no later than April 1976. Despite asserting that he was not "eager for publicity for myself" (*ibid*., 7), Krishna certainly saw the benefit of Karanjia's intention to publish a book on kundalini yoga for his project. This observation is supported by the fact that the New York branch of Krishna's KRF published *Kundalini Yoga* (Karanjia 1977). Karanjia's book lacks an innovative spirit but represents one of the foremost testimonials of South Asia's short-lived hype around Krishna's project. This will become more evident when exploring the "Kundalini Yoga" series more deeply.

18.2. The "Kundalini Yoga" Series (1976–1977)

Between April 10 and May 3, 1976, the South Asian tabloid *Blitz* featured a series of six cover stories revolving around kundalini.[539] The initial three articles, released in April,

[539] Three additional *Blitz* features addressed kundalini: One in February 1976, associating kundalini with current Indian politics, and two in May 1976, opening guest editorials for readers' views (Karanjia 1976b; 1976e, 15; Karanjia et al. 1976, 8–9).

focused on Krishna's life, experience, and interpretation of kundalini and offered an overview of current and past kundalini research projects and concepts.[540] In May, *Blitz* addressed the topic of kundalini even more prominently. In addition to three follow-up articles of the "Kundalini Yoga" series, two issues also published guest contributions and readers' views.[541] The series painted a clear picture of what was believed to be the global prominence of Krishna's project while emphasising its South Asian origin.

Before its official launch, *Blitz* featured a preceding article in February 1976, perhaps aiming to arouse curiosity. The headline on page one of the February 28, 1976, issue of *Blitz* read, "Indira Gandhi and Kundalini: 'Durga Armed with Shakti'" (Karanjia 1976b). The main objective of the article pertained to promoting Gandhi's politics and analysing how her presumably activated kundalini accounted for her political achievements. Karanjia, who wrote the article, mused that Gandhi's political success rested on her "evolved consciousness […] a manifestation of 'Kundalini-Shakti'" (*ibid*.).

Following Karanjia's argument, the accomplishments of India's Prime Minister and perhaps her entire administration derived from the activation of kundalini. India's glory and her global hegemony would, therefore, first and foremost depend on this mysterious force. This resonates with Aurobindo's religious nationalism (see Chapter 5.3.2.), which Karan Singh later construed as "enlightened patriotism" (Singh 1974, 99). Against the backdrop of Karanjia providing religious underpinnings for Gandhi's leadership, Aurobindo's understanding of the Indian nation as shakti is particularly telling. As argued earlier, during Aurobindo's engagement in radical nationalist discourses, he underscored that the awakening of India's shakti would lead to the liberation of the nation and its citizens (Strube 2023, 196).

Translating Aurobindo's religious nationalism to Karanjia's adulation of Gandhi sheds further light on the political motivations behind the "Kundalini Yoga" series. Karanjia emphasised Gandhi's role in "India's divine mission" (Karanjia 1976b) to disseminate knowledge about kundalini. He aimed to elevate Gandhi's (already privileged) status from a member of India's most powerful elite to a leader driven by her activated kundalini energy, effectively placing her in the "'twice-born' minority" (*ibid*.). Karanjia's notion of an elevated

[540] The April articles of the "Kundalini Yoga" series were titled "Kundalini Yoga" (April 10, 1976), "Paradise Lost Can Be Regained" (April 17, 1976), and "Gopi Krishna's Re-Birth" (April 24, 1976).

[541] The May articles of the "Kundalini Yoga" series were titled "The Technology of Kundalini Arousal" (May 1, 1976), "Scientific Basis of the 'Serpent-Power'" (May 8, 1976), and "Sunburst of a Thousand Suns" (May 22, 1976).

group of "twice-borns" – to which he also included Krishna (Karanjia 1977, 1) – echoes Krishna's elitist views (see Chapter 15.3.1.). According to Krishna, a religious elite with activated kundalini would rule over future generations (Krishna 1979a, 135). In this context, Karanjia suggested that Gandhi's administration must be associated with kundalini to enhance its supremacy. The "re-discovery" of kundalini, as promoted in *Blitz* and attributed to Krishna, provided the religious underpinnings for Gandhi's government and thus carried significant political weight. Consequently, the February 1976 *Blitz* article marked a key event in the nationalistic politicisation of kundalini (Karanjia 1976b).

Unlike the February coverage, the April and May "Kundalini Yoga" articles predominantly featured Krishna and international kundalini projects. The initial article (April 10, 1976) demonstrates Krishna's central role in the series: A picture of Krishna and a letter addressed from him to Karanjia cover over a third of the front page (Figure 16). In the letter, Krishna reiterated his opinion on the magnitude of kundalini, praised Karanjia's exceptional qualities as a journalist, and acknowledged his own "modest" role in this "mighty endeavour". Above Krishna's letter, one reads, in bold letters, "From the Master…" (Karanjia 1976c, 1).

Karanjia's subsequent introduction to the topic followed the pattern of mutual flattery, praising the other's singular qualities. Accordingly, he portrayed Krishna as an enlightened sage whose work would contribute to South Asia's international recognition: "Gopi Krishna, the sage of Srinagar, is blessed with the grace of a fully awakened *Kundalini* which transformed a former lower grade civil servant into a yogi, philosopher, scientist, litterateur, poet – in brief, a genius of the highest consciousness" (Karanjia 1976c, 1, original emphasis). While praising Krishna's "enlightened" nature, Karanjia simultaneously highlighted Krishna's background as a "simple, untutored civil servant in the lower grade of the Kashmir Government service" (Karanjia 1976a, 11). Karanjia thus juxtaposed Krishna's simplicity with his presumed genius. This endeavour aligns with Krishna's approach: He depicted his experience as authentic, unspoiled, and genuine, free from external inspiration (Krishna 1967). Karanjia dedicated an entire series article to the "drama of [Gopi Krishna's] simple life" (Karanjia 1976a, 11). In a hagiographical manner, Karanjia narrated how Krishna's "simple" life drastically altered in the wake of what he framed as Krishna's "re-birth".[542] Employing much of Krishna's *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967), Karanjia promoted Krishna's work (Karanjia 1976a, 11).

[542] Karanjia refers to Sannella's concept of the physio-kundalini process when labelling Krishna's kundalini experience as a re-birth (Karanjia 1976g, 10).

APRIL 10, 1976 REGD. NO. MH-By/SOUTH-61 Licence No. I

BLITZ
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From the Master...

My dear Karanjia,

I am very happy to know that you intend to start a series of articles on Kundalini-Yoga. There is no single topic so important for the peace and happiness of mankind as investigation of the phenomenon of the Serpent Power. There is nothing of greater importance in the present critical situation of the world than knowledge of the subliminal depths of man. It is proof of your highly developed intuition that you have been able to grasp so quickly the colossal implications of this discovery of the ancient sages. I have faith in your ability to do full justice to the theme. I am myself but a puny instrument of a great purpose. The destined hour for this mighty change in the thinking of mankind has come; and God will choose his own intruments for disseminating this vital knowledge for the first time. It is not great scientists or scholars who will come forward to pioneer this movement, but those ordained by Heaven to contribute their mite to the cause, who have the right judgement to grasp the importance of this discovery of the ancient sages and its relevance to the burning problem of the day. There are few people so well equipped as you are to draw the world's attention to this momentous secret, which has been known for thousands of years, but which still awaits recognition by science. Success is sure to attend your efforts for it is a service both to mankind and God.

With all good wishes,

Yours sincerely,

GOPI KRISHNA
Research Institute for Kundalini Srinagar.

KUNDALINI YOGA

India's Ancient "Serpent Power" Re-discovered

By R. K. KARANJIA

MAN is a gorilla standing up on his hind legs to reach God. This is both the history and the mystery of evolution, so decreed by God and Nature, who have built into the human body an evolutionary mechanism as well as an energy matrix known to ancient Indian science-philosophy as the **Kundalini** and **Prana**, respectively. These perform the function of the forward-stoking engines of evolution in mankind.

Kundalini-Yoga, which aims at the self-directed arousal of the latent **"Serpent Power"** or **"Life Force"** — that is, **"Prana Shakti"** — provides the missing link, as also the master key, to human evolution to a higher level of consciousness.

Thus man, who evolved into human consciousness from the anthropoid ape, can now elevate his consciousness to a super-intelligent condition which would enable him to become one with the Cosmic Consciousness—that is, the God of his mystical yearnings.

Next stage of evolution

In other words, humanity is on the threshold of a psycho-biological breakthrough of stupendous consequence whereby, with the arousal of **Kundalini Shakti**, the embodied spirit, **Jivatma**, can become one with the **Paramatma**, the Universal Spirit.

This is probably the next stage of human evolution, maybe by a new race of supermen blessed with a higher consciousness and consequent biological changes, brought about by a mutation of the same type that transformed the ancestral ape into the contemporary man.

Kundalini, the instrument of this evolutionary advance, is a Sanskrit word which means "coiled up", like a snake or a spring, charged with latent energy or power. **It is not a supernatural, abnormal or occult phenomenon as the ancients claimed, but a biological mechanism, the engine of evolution, built into the cerebro-spinal system and the genital region of the body.**

It is, therefore, possible for any individual or collective group to achieve **Kundalini-Shakti** with Yogic exercises and, particularly, **Pranayama** — that is, controlled rhythmic breathing.

Re-discovery of Vedic secret

This is the divine mission and holy purpose of **Yoga**, a Sanskrit derivation from the word **Yuj**—that is, **to join or weld together.** In the present context, it signifies the union of man with God, the merger of human consciousness with Supreme Intelligence, resulting in the emergence of a new super-intelligent race.

This discovery or, more correctly, re-discovery of a hoary Indian secret responsible for the greatness and glory of our Vedic civilisation holds revolutionary implications of a staggering nature for mankind. It could make India's finest contribution to human evolution if scientifically investigated and formulated into a predictable methodology of **Kundalini** arousal.

This stupendous task is about to be undertaken in India, thanks to the pioneering genius of, and positive response from, two deeply committed men, Pandit Gopi Krishna and Dr. Karan Singh, respectively.

Gopi Krishna's mission

Gopi Krishna, the sage of Srinagar, is blessed with the grace of a fully awakened **Kundalini** which transformed a former lower grade civil servant into a yogi, philosopher, scientist, litterateur, poet — in brief, a genius of the highest consciousness. He has devoted his life and work to the re-discovery of what he calls **"the Divine Law of Evolution"**, with the result that today a number of competent and dedicated **Kundalini** research institutions are functioning all over the world with Srinagar as their centre of inspiration.

The United States has a very active and resurgent **Kundalini** Research Foundation under the guidance of a devoted **yogi**, Gene Kelfer, as its President. Case histories of **Kundalini** awakenings recorded by this Institute have enabled Dr. Lee Sannella, MD, of Berkeley, CA, who is leading a research group, to investigate several cases and reach the conclusion that **"the idea of spiritual rebirth or enlightenment can no longer be considered a confusing jungle of superstitions, religious dogmas, wild rumours and outright lies. IT HAS BECOME, INSTEAD, A DEFINITE, WELL-DEFINED CLINICAL ENTITY."**

One of Dr. Sannella's colleagues, Dr. Itzhak Bentov, has, in fact, set up what is called the "Bentov Model" to study **Kundalini** effects which can be monitored by the application of a modified ballistograph for the measurement of magnetic fields surrounding the brain to a seated upright subject.

The Max Planck Institute for Life Sciences in Stanberg, Germany, under C. F. Weizsäcker a renowned physicist, is equally interested in **Kundalini** research. Dr. Weizsäcker has, in fact, contributed a long, scientific foreword to one of Gopi Krishna's books.

A similar foundation is functioning in London also, under the able guidance of Messrs.

PAGE 6

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Figure 16: Front page "Kundalini Yoga" series, *Blitz*, April 10, 1976 (LGK, box 5., photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich).

Part of the inaugural article was also an overview of current kundalini research endeavours, both on a global and local scale. Karanjia particularly underscored Krishna's international network of Kundalini Research Foundations (KRF) under his auspices, "with Srinagar as their centre of inspiration" (Karanjia 1976c, 1). European and US-American individuals, including Weizsäcker, Lee Sannella, and Itzhak Bentov, carried associated research endeavours forward – all of them, according to Karanjia, inspired by Krishna (*ibid*.).

The significance of these international projects notwithstanding, Karanjia emphasised how the South Asian research projects outshone them all. At the forefront, as Karanjia maintained,

was Krishna's collaboration with Karan Singh and their ongoing research at the AIIMS (see Chapter 17.3.1.). Aligning with Karanjia's exaltation of Krishna as a "master", he portrayed Karan Singh as Krishna's disciple: "Fortunately for India and the world, Gopi Krishna has found an almost *karmic* disciple in Dr. Karan Singh" (*ibid*., 6, original emphasis).[543] Karanjia celebrated AIIMS's planned research as South Asia's groundbreaking contribution to global efforts to unravel brain activities, define new dimensions of the energy spectrum, and decode the most profound secrets of evolution (*ibid*.).

Following the precedent set by the first issue, a letter from Karan Singh was prominently featured in the May 1, 1976, issue (Figure 17). Addressed to Karanjia, the letter appears as personal correspondence in which Singh expresses his keen interest in the "Kundalini Yoga" series. While the letter implies that Singh may have initially been uninvolved in or unaware of the series, several indications suggest otherwise.

MAY 1, 1976

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BLITZ

INDIA'S GREATEST WEEKLY

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Development of truly historic proportions...

—KARAN SINGH

BLITZ's new feature on KUNDALINI-YOGA has evoked enormous interest both in India and abroad in the form of a huge mail which includes contributions from leading Yoga masters, medical and scientific authorities, theosophists, scholars and the general public. The contributions will be featured after the present series is completed (PAGES 10, 11 & 12).

No. 183 ME(I)/76

MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING INDIA New Delhi-110011

14.3.1976

My dear Russi,

I have read with considerable interest your first article on Kundalini Yoga in the 10th April issue of Blitz. I am happy that you have given prominence to what may well be a development of truly historic proportions. Research into Kundalini could perhaps provide the vital link between physics and metaphysics, science and religion, matter and energy.

It is my hope that we will be able to launch a carefully structured research project revolving around Kundalini and the works of Pt. Gopi Krishna before very long. My thinking at present is that this research project should be based at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences in Bangalore which has got a good deal of the required infrastructure and also has a dynamic and deeply committed Director, Dr. R.M. Verma. I have still not been able to arrange the financing of the project, which is expected to cross about 25 lakhs, but I am in touch among others with the Director General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Mahler, and am hopeful that we will be able to start work before the end of the year. Meanwhile, I send you my good wishes for the success in your efforts to focus widespread public attention upon this neglected and fascinating field of study.

With good wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Karan Singh

Shri R.K. Karanjia,
Blitz Publications Pvt. Ltd.,
17/17-H Cowasji Patel Street,
Bombay-400001.

Figure 17: Front page "Kundalini Yoga" series, *Blitz*, May 1, 1976 (LGK, box 5., photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich).

[543] Despite Krishna's persistent emphasis that he was not a guru and would not accept disciples, in this particular context of the "Kundalini Yoga" series, Krishna nevertheless assumed the role of a master for scientists, politicians, and his supporters at the KRFs (Krishna 1976a, 29; Karanjia 1976f, 10).

At that time, Singh was the foremost figure in navigating the national endeavours of kundalini research. It is therefore highly improbable that he would not have been informed about a major article series on kundalini in the country's leading newspaper. Furthermore, both Singh and Karanjia regularly contacted Prime Minister Gandhi. Another clue to Singh's involvement is the letterhead of his published letter. Although dated March 14, 1976, Singh references having "read with considerable interest your [Karanjia's] first article on Kundalini Yoga in the 10th April issue of Blitz" (Singh, in Karanjia 1976h, 1). This suggests either a deliberate coordination or an earlier involvement on his part.

Singh's letter further mentioned the prospect of another promising kundalini research project, which he hoped to initiate in the near future with Krishna's involvement. Despite Singh not specifying the project's name, he evidently referred to what was to become "Project Consciousness".[544]

Singh's emphasis on kundalini research aligned with the overall topic of the May 1 issue. Titled "The Technology of Kundalini Arousal", the feature questioned whether the experience of kundalini could be understood as a biological phenomenon and, if so, how it could be demonstrated by scientific means – in essence, the outline of Krishna's kundalini project.

Karanjia recognised that kundalini's association with the physical body was a contentious issue, particularly given that science had not yet established such a link. To address this dispute, Karanjia invited guest contributions and included various opposing viewpoints in his articles. A notable example was P. K. Mishra, a retired Director of Health Services in Delhi. In his guest column, "Science Cannot Interpret Kundalini Yoga", Mishra strongly challenged Krishna's theories and rejected Kranjia's claim of kundalini's "re-discovery" (Mishra 1976, 8). Although Karanjia published Mishra's critical piece, he did not shy away from expressing his own perspective: "Dr. Mishra, for instance, interprets it [kundalini] as divine grace impossible for science to apprehend or engineer. With all respect due to this view, we hold to Pandit Gopi Krishna's more rational and scientific biological-evolutionary thesis since it was the latter that inspired these articles" (Karanjia 1976h, 11). This example highlights how Karanjia presented a façade of critical examination while persistently endorsing and promoting Krishna's viewpoint.

[544] Perhaps by May 1976, the designation "Project Consciousness" (see Chapter 17.3.3.) had not been decided yet. Singh officially introduced the project in January 1977.

Intriguingly, Karanjia used Vasant Rele's *The Mysterious Kundalini* (1927) as an empirical underpinning for Krishna's theory.[545] Introducing Rele as an "authority on the various manuals of *Kundalini-Yoga*" (Karanjia 1976d, 11, original emphasis), Karanjia accepted Rele's equation of the right vagus nerve with kundalini (Rele 1931, 38).[546] Although he admitted that Woodroffe, the "great Western authority on the Tantras" (Karanjia 1976d, 11), was critical of Rele's theory (Woodroffe, in Rele 1931, x), Karanjia nonetheless praised Rele's account as a scientific achievement.[547] In addition, Karanjia contemplates the potential benefits of merging Krishna's with Rele's theory:

> If the theory that […] [the arousal of kundalini] can be used for purposes of evolution to a higher consciousness, and the parallel thesis of the Vagus nerve being made the channel for the upward passage of *Kundalini-Shakti* […] can be combined for purposes of scientific investigation, the result might well be the biggest break-through, an epochal biological leap forward, in the history of modern science. We shall then know and command the technology of evolution itself. (Karanjia 1976d, 12, original emphasis)

In essence, Karanjia proposed initiating a research project that compares and analyses the theories of Krishna and Rele. Given that both authors were South Asian, any anticipated scientific "breakthrough" would be attributed to South Asia.[548] As mentioned earlier, Karanjia, along with Singh and Krishna, was convinced of South Asia's imperative role in leading the research on kundalini.

The May 8 issue of the "Kundalini Yoga" series extended the scope of kundalini research beyond South Asia. On its front page, Karanjia featured a picture of Krishna with Weizsäcker, emphasising Krishna's international collaborations (Figure 18). However, the greater part of the May 8 article focused on Lee Sannella and the San Francisco-based Kundalini Clinic (see Chapter 22).

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[545] Chapter 5.3.4. introduces Vasant Rele's influential book and his theory about the vagus nerve. According to Rele, the vagus nerve was the physiological equivalent of kundalini.

[546] Karanjia refers to Rele in "Paradise Lost Can Be Regained" (April 17, 1976) and in "The Technology of Kundalini Arousal" (May 1, 1976). While Rele equates the vagus nerve solely with kundalini, Karanjia suggests that it could additionally be regarded as sushumna, the central channel of the yogic subtle body (Karanjia 1976h, 10; Rele 1931, 38). Mishra categorically denied both options as "totally incorrect" (Mishra 1976, 8).

[547] Throughout the "Kundalini Yoga" series, Karanjia used the expression "Serpent-Power" (Karanjia 1976d, 11), when referring to kundalini. However, Woodroffe, who popularised this term, receives scant mention.

[548] Karanjia did not mention with a single word that Rele's theory traces back to the late 1920s but instead portrayed the South Asian physicist as a contemporary of Krishna. Perhaps, by omitting the publication date of Rele's book, Karanjia intended to place Rele among the ranks of current ongoing researchers alongside South Asian intellectuals.

MAY 8, 1976

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BLITZ

INDIA'S GREATEST WEEKLY

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INDIAN metaphysics fuse with Western physics in the working partnership of Pandit GOPI KRISHNA, the Yoga sage of Srinagar, and Professor CARL FRIEDRICH FREIHERR VON WEIZSACKER, Director of the Max-Planck Institute for the Life Sciences in Munich, Germany.

Fusion of Mind, Body & Cosmos

By R. K. Karanjia

ANDIT GOPI KRISHNA has issued Zurich, where he in- trated another Kun- i Research Centre, a ing appeal to nations e world to pool their rces for the giant rtaking of a **Kunda- Project** to outmatch notorious **Manhatten** ct which resulted in development of the

"The Kundalini Project will not only exceed it in magnitude, but also excel it by far in the harvest gained and will undo the evil which the Manhatten Project has done," he declares, in a long statement which sounds the trumpet of a prophecy.

The Sage of Srinagar has done us the honour of entrusting this timely SOS to your paper. The gift of clairvoyance enables him to see the holocaust overcoming humanity in the last quarter of the century. This fatal quarter is already

bells for the final great war of nuclear annihilation.

Like the hero of the Russian novel, "the man of intellect, who in the face of the striped panther of death that had already lain down beside him in the same bed, had to find a formula for life," Gopi Krishna has re-discovered the ancient Indian formula of Kundalini-Shakti probably just in time to save mankind.

A formula for Life

The modest Kundalini Project which India is presently sponsoring at a governmental level

of Medical Science can still provide a life-giving alternative to the Manhatten formula for nuclear death. That is why this paramount issue came up for a debate in the Indian Parliament last week. Dr. Karan Singh, Union Minister of Health, assured the House that he is in contact with the Director-General of the World Health Organisation, Dr. Mahler, to help India set up the Project. If Dr. Mahler can persuade member nations of the WHO to join his enterprise it could provide a base for the giant undertaking of Gopi Krishna's vision.

The only roadblock in the way of the project is Science's stubborn refusal to accept any phenomena which go beyond

To enable scientists to see the light, Gopi Krishna has projected **Kundalini-Yoga** as a biological, evolutionary process in the form of a workable field theory covering psychic phenomena for scientific investigation.

Berkeley group's breakthrough

In fact, he seeks to heal the split between science and religion by offering the first testable field theory of psycho-physiological relationship between mind, body and cosmos, which opens up possibilities for the investigation of consciousness and the cosmological forces of life.

Figure 18: Front page "Kundalini Yoga" series, *Blitz*, May 8, 1976 (LGK, box 5., photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich).

As argued below, Sannella barely mentioned Krishna in his book *Kundalini. Psychosis or Transcendence?* (1978) and certainly did not collaborate with him. Nonetheless, Karanjia presented Sannella's experiments at the Kundalini Clinic as a direct result of Krishna's urging for research. The information provided by Krishna's KRF, as Karanjia claimed, had enabled research at the Clinic in the first place. Furthermore, Karanjia not only wrongly associated Sannella's research with Krishna but also downplayed the weight of Sannella's research compared to ongoing research in South Asia: "The Sannella programme provides a pilot for the larger enterprise undertaken by the All-India Institute of Medical Science" (Karanjia 1976g, 10; 1976c, 1). The reference to the Kundalini Clinic, therefore, only served as an underpinning for Karanjia's argument regarding the growing international interest in kundalini, while emphasising South Asia's lead.

The Kundalini Clinic's research capacity was indeed limited. However, by the time Karanjia published his article, AIIMS's research had also somewhat stagnated. Consequently, while Karanjia's assertion that AIIMS surpassed the Kundalini Clinic lacks substantial evidence, it aligns with the objectives of his article series and the Indian government's stance. Karanjia thus used the Clinic as an example to emphasise that only South Asia had the authority and expertise to address the international interest in kundalini research.

In the final feature of the "Kundalini Yoga" series, May 22, 1976, Karanjia suggested yet another reason for South Asia's alleged supremacy in this endeavour: The influx of Europeans and North Americans travelling to South Asia in quest for a religious teacher, practice, or meaning. Aligning with Singh's concept of "enlightened patriotism", Karanjia extols South Asia as the ultimate holy land, holding the potential for religious liberation: "The vast hordes of hippies today wandering India in search of spiritual salvation […] may be likened to the Three Wise Men who saw the Star over Bethlehem and journeyed to Jerusalem to witness the birth of the Saviour" (Karanjia 1976f, 10). Karanjia, who spared no effort in exalting Krishna, underscored Krishna's supremacy among all the South Asian teachers and doctrines. He considered Krishna's project of kundalini research humanity's only escape from its path of destruction. Consequently, the "hordes of hippies" in search of salvation must conclude their pilgrimage at Krishna's "laboratory of kundalini research" in Kashmir. Karanjia concluded the "Kundalini Yoga" series with a millenarian perspective, influenced by Krishna's sense of urgency: "The Kundalini project we have been advancing through this series can alone provide the New Light in '*the sunburst of a thousand suns*' experienced by the elect who have experienced Cosmic Consciousness" (*ibid*., 12, original emphasis).

Spanning two months and six issues, the "Kundalini Yoga" series stands as one of the most crucial promotional campaigns for Krishna's project. This is best exemplified by a report by Mr. Kaul, Krishna's son-in-law:

> Blitz's articles have made a lot of awareness of Kundalini in the people. Many persons have come to me and talked to me. Shri Jatty, Vice President of India, was in Calcutta and he told in an address to the Members of Arbindo [*sic*] Ashram that each of them should read the books of Panditji. A fortnight back about 5 cars came to Sarvodya Enclave to see Panditji. […] It seems that they had gone to see the vice President and he directed them to see Panditji. (Kaul to Kobelt, May 31, 1976, LGK, box 6)

This quote once again shows the political dimensions of Krishna's kundalini research in South Asia. Politicians such as Indira Gandhi, B. D. Jatti, India's Vice President from 1974 to 1977, and Singh utilised concepts of kundalini to further their political agendas. Krishna, in turn, recognised the alignment of this political agenda with his own objectives. Karanjia's role in this arena was to translate and disseminate these agendas among the South Asian people. The "Kundalini Yoga" series was thus instrumental in shaping public discourses, reflecting Krishna's interpretations and furthering the political agendas Karanjia promoted.

19. Summary: Kundalini's Nationalisation

During the 1970s, when international research into kundalini peaked, Hindu nationalists reclaimed kundalini as India's national emblem. The collaboration between Gopi Krishna, Karan Singh, and R. K. Karanjia exemplified such endeavours, reflecting the nationalisation and political use of kundalini.

Karan Singh launched two government-funded research projects revolving around Krishna's theories. Unlike the challenges faced in Europe and the United States, these South Asian initiatives celebrated Krishna as a national hero. His international prominence and sympathies with Hindu nationalist ideologies made him the ideal figurehead for state-supported efforts to integrate kundalini into the broader narrative of Hindu nationalism. However, Krishna was not a passive participant in a political strategy. Instead, he actively contributed to kundalini's nationalisation.

The Gandhi administration proclaimed the rediscovery of kundalini, celebrating it as an ancient Hindu principle. However, as detailed in this and preceding chapters, kundalini was not newly unearthed in the twentieth century. Educated Bengalis and theosophists had engaged with kundalini in the nineteenth century, reaching similar conclusions. Karan Singh, well versed in Aurobindo's religious and political ideas, was undoubtedly aware of these earlier discourses addressing kundalini. Nonetheless, he contributed to framing the "rediscovery" of kundalini to emphasise South Asia's religious superiority. This aspiration for a national project on kundalini research was driven by geopolitical considerations and was embedded within a Hindu nationalist vision.

The nationalist appropriation of kundalini was further exemplified by the "Kundalini Yoga" series, launched by R. K. Karanjia, a government-affiliated journalist. Karanjia portrayed Krishna as the foremost authority on kundalini and advocated for South Asia's leadership in kundalini research. As a confidant of Indira Gandhi, Karanjia attributed the Prime Minister and her administration's success to the effect of kundalini, reinforcing arguments for her political and South Asia's religious supremacy.

For a short period, Krishna and his project of kundalini research garnered significant attention from South Asian scientists, politicians, and journalists. This enhanced his national reputation and led to the establishment of additional South Asian branches of KRF. Moreover, invitations to prestigious national events increased, including the "World Conference on the Future of Mankind", held in New Delhi in February 1978. As a "chief guest", Krishna lectured at the "Raj-Yoga and Karma Yoga" session. Intriguingly, the panel

also featured G. S. Chhina, who, along with B. K. Anand and B. Singh, had initiated yogic research at AIIMS in the early 1960s. Thus, the panel comprised both first and second-generation yoga researchers, bridging the scientific establishment and scientism.[549]

Despite these short-lived achievements, the South Asian research projects, including the planned research at AIIMS and "Project Consciousness" at NIMHANS, failed to gain momentum. This failure echoed a recurring pattern in Krishna's research endeavour and represents another episode in the history of its failure.

Part V will explore other, more successful international kundalini research projects beyond Krishna's influence. It will trace its institutionalisation, elaborate on figures mentioned in earlier chapters, including Lee Sannella, Itzhak Bentov, Haridas Chaudhuri, and Hiroshi Motoyama, and demonstrate how a shared fascination with kundalini unified diverse fields of alternative religion and culture.

[549] Krishna made the acquaintance of Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan during the conference. As discussed in Chapter 12.6., Inayat Khan invited Krishna to speak at the New York conference "New Dimensions of Consciousness. Symposium on the Coevolution of Science and Spirit", organised by the Sufi Order of the West, scheduled for November 1978 (Asha to Krishna, January 26, 1978, LGK, box 6.8.3; Degler 2023, 241–242).

PART V

Pivotal US-American Kundalini Research and Teaching Institutes and their Relationship with Gopi Krishna

This study has so far highlighted the contributions of Gopi Krishna and his collaborators to modern kundalini research. However, it is essential to acknowledge that their efforts in this vein were not the only ones. Part V of this study examines various US-American institutes and individuals who also played significant roles in the burgeoning field of kundalini research. Due to the distinct experimental and theoretical approaches within this field, Part V is organised into two main sections: "Kundalini in the Laboratory", which includes the Menninger Foundation (Topeka, Kansas) and the Kundalini Clinic (San Francisco, California); and "Kundalini in Seminar", which features the Esalen Institute (Big Sur, California), and the Californian integral institutes (San Francisco). Additionally, as an excursus, the study explores Motoyama's Institute for Religious Psychology (Tokyo, Japan). Although Motoyama was based in Japan, he sought connections with US-American institutes, eventually establishing his own institute in California, thereby contributing to US-American kundalini research endeavours.

These examples are selected for their emphasis on cultural exchange between "East" and "West", their innovative contributions to kundalini's transformation, and their connections to Gopi Krishna – each chapter will specifically highlight these relationships to demonstrate the international and collaborative nature of Krishna's research endeavours.

California – the location of most institutes discussed in Part V – was pivotal in advancing the modern understanding of kundalini. During the latter half of the twentieth century, particularly the San Francisco Bay Area became a focal point for the cultural exchange between the United States and Asia. With nearly two centuries of Asian influence, beginning with early Chinese, Russian, and Japanese immigrants, California earned the designation "America's gateway to the East" (Haddick 1983, 126). The 1960s marked a notable increase in fascination with Asian thought (*ibid*., 126–128). Given California's central role in this burgeoning interest, the Californian institutes discussed in Part V are crucial for analysing US-American contributions to the modern project of kundalini research.

Each institute uniquely contributed to disseminating interpretations of kundalini through a "scientific" lens. Common interpretative frameworks across these institutes include kundalini as a psycho-physiological entity, linking it to consciousness research and somatics.

This perspective is exemplified by Itzhak Bentov's "physio-kundalini syndrome" and Lee Sannella's "physio-kundalini process" (Chapter 22.1.4.), Haridas Chaudhuri's "psychonuclear energy" (Chapter 24.2.), and the view of kundalini as a catalyst for altered states of consciousness, notably pronounced at Esalen and the Californian integral institutes. The belief in kundalini's therapeutic capacities, prominently advocated at the Kundalini Clinic and as part of Christina Grof's definition of spiritual emergencies (Chapter 23.3.2.), underscores kundalini's integration with the body and mind. Additionally, the practical implications of these interpretative frameworks reflect the intersection of technology and religion, as evidenced by the work of Elmer and Alyce Green, Motoyama, and Bentov.

The discussion of the institutes is preceded by a historical and theoretical introduction to the US-American context, exploring key themes in US-American kundalini research (Chapter 20). Chapter 21 examines the Menninger Foundation and the biofeedback research conducted by Elmer and Alyce Green. This chapter discusses the rise of electrophysiological research from the late 1950s to the 1970s, introducing the technological basics of electroencephalography and biofeedback, and explores key figures and their perspectives on kundalini. Chapter 22 focuses on the San Francisco-based Kundalini Clinic, founded by three psychiatrists to assist individuals experiencing kundalini or similar psycho-physiological processes. A central theme in this chapter is the concept of physio-kundalini, as outlined by Itzhak Bentov and Lee Sannella. The excursus in "Kundalini in the Laboratory" explores the work of the Japanese parapsychologist Hiroshi Motoyama. This section highlights his empirical investigations into kundalini, examines his Institute of Religious Psychology and his technological innovations, and will further demonstrate Motoyama's impact on the Kundalini Clinic. Chapter 23 centres on the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, which, since its establishment in the early 1960s, has been a central playground for scientistic hypotheses, experiments, and practices, with consciousness research and somatics representing two of its pivotal pillars. Esalen's seminars and workshops, addressing kundalini since 1965, and the formation of the Spiritual Emergency Network (SEN) have solidified kundalini's association with both crisis and growth. Chapter 24 investigates four San Franscico-based institutes, which I collectively refer to as the Californian integral institutes: the American Academy of Asian Studies (AAAS), the Cultural Integration Fellowship (CIF), the California Institute of Asian Studies (CIAS), and the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS). The history of these institutes illustrates the significance of what one could call Californian integral thought of US-American interest in kundalini.

20. The US-American Background

Kundalini's modern history has been inextricably linked with the United States. In particular, developments during the second half of the twentieth century contributed to kundalini's modern interpretations and increasing transformation. This includes the emergence of several counter- and subcultural currents, protest movements, and new research emphases, such as "altered states of consciousness". Especially California became a hub for alternative views on society, religion, the body, and the mind. Thus, when referring to the United States, this does not include the whole country but is mainly limited to the West Coast.

As this chapter will demonstrate, the peak of interest in and research on kundalini coincided with the emergence of US-American counterculture and a growing fascination with Asian religions and consciousness. Moreover, the role of the body was increasingly emphasised in association with "religious experience" and psychotherapy (Hero 2016). Kundalini's oscillation between a physical mechanism and its assumed potential to induce altered (or higher) states of consciousness (Krishna 1972c) turned kundalini into a key symbol of US-American alternative culture and religion.

20.1. Subcultures and Countercultures

In the late twentieth century, the United States saw the emergence of "subcultures" and "countercultures" that resonated profoundly within the mass media and subsequently became influential models for youth movements beyond North America. Subcultures and countercultures oppose dominant cultural institutions regarding ideologies, values, norms of behaviour, and social structure.[550] While subcultures question the dominant culture, countercultures aim to instigate cultural changes and subvert the dominant society. A brief introduction to both categories will help clarify their distinct meanings.

Scholars from the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, today known as the "Chicago School", pioneered subcultural studies.[551] A crucial insight from the Chicago

[550] Dominant or mainstream culture is not a consistent homogeneous entity. It designates groups, beliefs, ideas, and behaviours that a majority accepts. This collectively perceived cultural hegemony may refer to the ethics and norms advocated by a specific group or to a national or international consensus. Hence, the concept of dominant culture implicates the notion of power and the claim to it (Hebdige 1979; Stout 2012, 250).

[551] Key contributions to subcultural studies by members of the "Chicago School" include Frederic M. Thrasher's *The Gang* (1927), Edward F. Frazier's *The Negro Family in Chicago* (1932), and Edwin Sutherland's *Principles of Criminology* (1924).

School concerns social deviance. They argued that subcultural deviant behaviour does not primarily stem from a refusal to comply with social norms and values. Instead, subcultural differentiation signifies social affiliation, not with dominant forms of organisation, but with subcultural social forms, often labelled as communities, networks, tribes, etc. (Gelder 2007, 4).

Ken Gelder distinguished subculture from popular culture by outlining six distinct "prevailing cultural logics" (*ibid*., 3) associated with subcultures. First, subcultures embrace a hedonistic lifestyle, often coupled with a negative attitude towards conventional work and, at times, an acceptance or even appreciation of criminal activities. Second, subcultures reject class divisions, harking back to the nineteenth-century notion of subcultures as groups without a class identity, often labelled as (be)low class. Third, subcultures are linked to specific territories, such as neighbourhoods, streets, or clubs, rather than owning places of identity. Fourth, they favour non-domestic modes of living, often abandoning traditional identity markers like family and home. Fifth, subcultures display excessive and exaggerated lifestyles, marked by deviant dress codes, music, and substance use, which are their most visible features. Finally, they maintain a generally dismissive attitude towards conformism, opposing the dominant culture within which they exist (*ibid*., 3–4).

The category of counterculture is most associated with the US-American sociologist John Milton Yinger and the US-American scholar Theodore Roszak. Yinger's article "Contraculture and Subculture" (1960) was a pioneering attempt to distinguish counterculture from subculture. However, Roszak's influential book *The Making of a Counter Culture. Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (1969) surpassed Yinger's contribution in impact and is credited with coining the term "counterculture".

According to Yinger, there are key differences between counterculture (which he called "contraculture") and subculture. Countercultures interact with the dominant culture, establishing their values and norms in opposition. In contrast, subcultures may interact with the dominant culture but do not necessarily derive their identity from opposing it. Yinger also emphasises conflict as a defining feature of countercultures, citing frustration and delinquency arising from disillusionment with societal norms and values. While subcultures may or may not experience conflicts with the dominant culture, such conflict is central to countercultures (Yinger 1960, 628–629).

The term "counterculture" encompasses diverse expressions of youth culture characterised by a vibrant and subversive momentum. While prominent in collective memory, it is

important to note that only a marginal group of predominantly young individuals actively engaged in countercultural activities. This group, comprising people from various social and cultural backgrounds, found a common voice for a brief period at the end of the 1960s through "an amorphous range of [countercultural] activities and ideologies" (Bennett 2012, 6). Accordingly, "counterculture" typically refers to a distinct historical phenomenon. Emerging from the United States, the counterculture became an international phenomenon from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, exerting influence across Western and Eastern Europe, as well as Japan – additionally, the travel movements of the hippies extended to countries such as Afghanistan and India. It encompassed various youth movements, including the hippie, environmental, peace, civil rights, and psychedelic movements. These movements were interconnected and significantly influenced subsequent developments, underscoring the lasting impact and relevance of the counterculture era. Several scholars contend that the 1960s counterculture peaked during the late 1960s and concluded with the end of the Vietnam War in April 1975 (Oliver 2014, 6–7). The next session explores the 1960s counterculture's intellectual roots and key social and political movements, underscoring its temporary nature and elucidating its historical context.

20.2. The Long Sixties

The 1960s are frequently considered an "exceptional" decade, marked by significant political, social, and cultural developments and increasing challenges to cultural norms and conventions. However, the logic of the 1960s extends to both the preceding and following decades. Consequently, Oppenheimer suggested that the concept of "the Sixties" should be extended to a time range from 1955 to 1975, which Strain later called "the long Sixties" (Strain 2017; Oppenheimer 2003, 2–3).[552]

The 1950s were characterised by an economic boom and widespread prosperity. For the first time in many generations, the white middle class enjoyed a high standard of living, accompanied by social conformity and conservative politics (Spates and Levin 1972, 329). The so-called "baby-boomer" generation, born during the 1950s and early 1960s, grew up in relatively stable conditions, with various lifestyles and educational opportunities at their disposal (Oliver 2014, 7–8). Despite this stability, subcultural opposition gained momentum.

[552] Andrea Rota's edited volume *Religion and Academia Reframed* (2023) addresses religion, science, and society during the long Sixties.

The "Beat Generation", a loose group comprising artists, poets, writers, travellers, and hedonists, significantly shaped certain segments of US-American society in the 1950s.[553] Notable members include William S. Burroughs (1914–1997), Jack Kerouac (b. Jean-Louis Lebris de Kérouac, 1922–1969), Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997), Gary Snyder (b. 1930) and Neal Cassady (1926–1968). The Beat subculture oscillated between exploring oppositional expressions of culture dissociated from the dominant culture, such as jazz music, and pursuing avant-garde endeavours. In his book on subcultural styles, Dick Hebdige describes the Beat style: "The Beat, studiously ragged in jeans and sandals, expressed a magical relation to a poverty which constituted in his imagination a divine essence, a state of grace, a sanctuary" (Hebdige 1979, 49). With their nonconformist (life)style the Beats contributed to the emergence of a "coffeehouse culture". This cultural expression of defiance combined a mélange of jazz and folk music, poetry, drugs, sexual orientation, criminal activities, and visionary philosophy (Gelder 2007, 77).

The Beats, among other the US-American youth subcultures, significantly influenced the 1960s counterculture (Campbell 2016).[554] Roszak even considers Allen Ginsberg's poem *Howl* as the counterculture's founding document (Roszak 1969, 67).[555] A major inspiration for Ginsberg and other Beats was the visionary poet William Blake (1757–1827) and his "ecstatic radicalism" (*ibid*., 126). Blake and his utopian texts inspired the Beats in their dissenting poetry and visions of an alternative society. Although the Beats' writings were antithetical to the perceived depravity of contemporary society, they did not embrace political or social activism. Nevertheless, they significantly paved the way for their successors in the following decades (Gelder 2007, 76–77).

[553] Jack Kerouac coined the term "Beat Generation", using it as a self-designation, and John C. Holmes popularised it in a 1952 *New York Times* article (Gelder 2007, 77).

[554] Colin Campbell suggests that the US-American counterculture was the product of three youth subcultures of the 1950s, which shared "a postwar crisis of meaning" (C. Campbell 2016, 189): the Beats, the "moral protesters", and the juvenile delinquents". Campbell expounds on this genealogy in his 2007 book *Easternization of the West: A Thematic Account of Cultural Change in the Modern Era* (*ibid*., 184–212).

[555] The publication of Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956) represented a major scandal in US-American society, leading to the arrest and trial of Lawrence Ferlinghetti (1919–2021), who initially published the poem. Gelder describes the scandalous publication with the following words: "*Howl* is […] a devastating assault on American society, a delirious, hallucinatory and hyperbolic stream of complaint and invective that absolutely distinguishes it from the otherwise polite and restrained realm of American letters" (Gelder 2007, 75, original emphasis). Other notable pieces of Beat literature include Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959), and Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957).

During the mid-1960s, the Beat Generation metamorphosed into the hippie movement.[556] While the Beats criticised society and highlighted its flaws through philosophy and literature, the hippies preferred to manifest their disapproval through a distinct style, such as colourful and flamboyant clothes (and the famous flowers in the hair), paired with a unique mode of living characterised by an alternative and oppositional lifestyle outside of established institutions. This lifestyle was often accompanied by the use of psychedelic substances and the embrace of love. The notion of "dropping out" encapsulated much of the hippies' attitude, evolving into a countercultural maxim that involved dropping out from school, society, establishments, conventional habits, and dominant culture (Spates and Levin 1972, 326).[557] Spates and Levin argue that the distinctive hippie movement was ephemeral, narrowing its heyday to the period from 1966, when the "World's First Psychedelic Shop" opened its doors in the legendary Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco, until mid-1968 (Oliver 2014, 17–18; Spates and Levin 1972, 326–327).[558]

Self-expression and activism were characteristic of the youth movements of the long Sixties, becoming flagships of countercultural behaviour.

The notion of self-expression has been prevalent among alternative groups in US-American society since the early 1800s with the emergence of bohemianism. Early bohemian groups valued self-expression and individual autonomy as a reaction against industrial society. They advocated for living according to one's vision, irrespective of social norms and conventions. In their self-conception, the Beats, the hippies, and other youth movements during the long Sixties expanded upon this concept (Spates and Levin 1972, 330–331). In reality, however, they propagated a remarkably uniform youth culture, characterised by a highly standardised aesthetic and similar lifestyle.

Political, environmental, and social engagement constituted another central pillar of the counter- and subcultural movements of the long Sixties. In accordance with Alan Ginsberg's poem *How to Make a March/Spectacle* (1965), countercultural demonstrations and events were conducted in a cheerful, peaceful, and thoughtful manner (Ginsberg 2002). Thus, any demonstrations aimed to merge political engagement with a peaceful and festive celebration

[556] Waren J. Hinckle III first discussed the category "hippies" in his article "The Social History of the Hippies" (1967). It was published in *Ramparts*, a radical political and literary magazine associated with the New Left movement (Spates and Levin 1972, 326).

[557] The psychiatrist and author Timothy Leary publicly recited the phrase "turn on, tune in, drop out" and thus popularised the notion of "dropping out" (Leary 1983, 253).

[558] As the hippie movement began to decline, various sub-groups emerged, such as the "drug freaks" or the "weekend hip people", contributing to a more diverse movement. This trend ultimately led to the gradual transformation of the hippies into what became known as the "hip-generation" (Spates and Levin 1972, 327).

(Roszak 1969, 150). While examining the full range of the 1960s movements would by far exceed the scope of this chapter, it is essential to illustrate the countercultural ethos of the long Sixties through at least one prominent movement, which further aligns with the objectives of several protagonists of modern kundalini research: the peace movement.

The peace movement significantly shaped the public image of the 1960s counterculture and profoundly influenced US-American society. The catalyst for this movement was the Vietnam War, which began in 1955 and continued until 1975.[559] Between 1965 and 1975, the peace movement reached its zenith, with its peak occurring in 1969 when students and young people increasingly took leadership roles in demonstrations, attracting a growing number of participants. The movement quickly attracted diverse groups, including Old Left pacifists, Democratic politicians, civil rights activists, Protestant clergymen, leading intellectuals, and hippies, all united in their support for peace (Olson 1999, 26–28).

The peace movement articulated ethical concerns regarding military strategies and advocated withdrawal as the sole morally defensible option. Furthermore, the political rationale behind the conflict remained obscure to many. Despite prevailing anti-Communist sentiments, unlike in the Cold War era, numerous US-Americans did not perceive the Vietnam War as directly aligned with national interests. This sceptical stance, paired with pivotal events such as the My Lai Massacre (1968) and the increasing number of conscripted soldiers, further fuelled dissent. Particularly from October 1969 onward, millions participated in the nationwide demonstrations expressing discontent. Beyond the streets, the movement found its centres within university campuses across the United States.[560] Young students' opposition to the war stemmed from moral, political, and deeply personal considerations; they viewed conscription as a direct threat to their personal liberties (*ibid*., 26).

The 1960s counterculture was marked by its distinct oppositional character. The pursuit of social change and alternative lifestyles served as the driving and unifying force for countercultural movements. This also pertained to their forms of religion.

[559] The designation Vietnam War is slightly misleading, as the territories of Cambodia and Laos were also exposed to war, hence it is also known as the Second Indochina War (Olson 1999, 463).

[560] Parallel to the "sit-ins" emblematic of the civil rights movement, a similar form of protest known as "teach-ins" emerged within university settings. These events attracted both students and faculty members, with professors delivering lectures on topics pertinent to the Vietnam War (Oliver 2014, 24).

20.3. US-American Alternative Religion and Their Metaphysical Roots

Since the Age of Enlightenment, radical thought has frequently been associated with anti-religious notions.[561] Consequently, for twentieth-century US-American (political) revolutionaries, it was common to embrace sceptical, secular traditions while rejecting religion as corrupt and tied to the establishment. Similarly, the dissenting counterculture saw established institutions, including organised forms of religion, as corrupted and outdated wastelands (T. Miller 1995b, 1–7; Roszak 1969, 138–139). Nevertheless, religion remained a major pillar of the counterculture, with its members experiencing what Roszak called a "new, eclectic religious revival" (Roszak 1969, 138).

Several scholars have attempted to define the forms of religion and modes of religiosity of counter- and subcultural currents by using terms and concepts such as "spirituality" (as opposed to religion, e.g., Heelas and Woodhead 2005), "alternative spiritualities" (e.g., Possamaï 2003), "alternative religion" (e.g., T. Miller 1995a), "new religious movements" (e.g., Melton 2004), "cultic milieu" (C. Campbell 1972), "New Age religion" (Hanegraaff 1996), and "occulture" (Partridge 2005), to name but a few. This list already demonstrates that there exists no academic consent on countercultural religiosity. However, certain aspects prevail: the notion of "alternative" as opposed to traditional forms of belief, a distinct eclecticism, an emphasis on the self, the personal, sensual, and direct experience of the divine, and the inclusion of elements from Asian religions (T. Miller 1995b, 1–4).

Much of what happened in the latter half of the twentieth century originated in nineteenth-century religious innovations and diversifications (Melton 2004, 187–188). These were particularly shaped by evangelicalism,[562] "harmonial religion" (also "harmonialism") (Ahlstrom 2004),[563] and "metaphysical religions" (Albanese 2007).

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[561] The French philosopher Denis Diderot (1713–1784), a prominent figure during the Age of Enlightenment, strongly detested religion and is a paramount example of Europe's sceptical and secular intellectuality during that period. However, this does not indicate a general disenchantment during the Age of Enlightenment. Notably, Romanticism strongly tended toward mysticism and occultism, the latter of which underwent a vivid revival in the nineteenth century (Asprem 2014; Baier 2009a; Roszak 1969, 139).

[562] Evangelicalism represents a key pillar of the development of US-American religion and continues to play a critical role in the contemporary US-American religious landscape. See McLoughlin (1978) for a thorough introduction to evangelicalism. I am indebted to my colleague Fredrik Gregorius for his opinion on this matter.

[563] The US-American historian Sydney E. Ahlstrom coined the term "harmonial religion" in his book *A Religious History of the American People* (1972). He argues that "harmonial religion encompasses those forms of piety and belief in which spiritual composure, physical health, and even economic well-being are understood to flow from a person's rapport with the cosmos" (Ahlstrom 2004, 1019). See Foxen (2020) for an introduction to the links between US-American religion, modern yoga, and harmonialism.

Catherine Albanese's concept of "metaphysical religion" warrants closer examination. It refers to a strand of US-American "religious mentality […] organized in terms of an identifiable set of themes" (*ibid*., 13). Metaphysical forms of religion emphasise personal spiritual experience, the belief in a cosmic order interconnected with human consciousness, and the transformative potential of individual spiritual insight and healing (*ibid*., 1–18). A significant achievement of metaphysical religions was the interpretation of South and East Asian religions and their subsequent dissemination within the US-American spiritual landscape (Williamson 2010, 28). Apart from the Theosophical Society (see Chapter 5.1.3.), two forms of metaphysical religion particularly implemented Hindu philosophy into US-American awareness: Transcendentalism and New Thought.

The philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) counted among the most influential figures in metaphysical religion and was a pioneer in grounding his religious beliefs in Hindu ideas. As a minister of the Unitarian Church, Emerson challenged Christianity's hegemonic position. In addition, he held Asian religions in high regard. Thus, when he established the Transcendentalist Society in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1836, some of his key philosophical ideas were influenced by Asian thought. Through his engagement with Asian religious texts, he came to believe in the unity of the self with the divine and the importance of inner spiritual experience. While knowledgeable about Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, and Zoroastrian traditions, Emerson considered Hindu texts to epitomise the essence of Asian thought. His writings reflect his vision of a universal spirituality transcending traditional "Western" religious boundaries. Emerson's efforts to synthesise Hindu religion and US-American worldviews were landmarks in the development of US-American perspectives on Hindu religions. The Christian-dominated United States of the mid-nineteenth century considered Emerson's theories a potential threat to the status quo. Therefore, while he attracted "alternative" audiences, most Christians dismissed his innovative ideas (Albanese 2007, 347–348; Williamson 2010, 26–29).

Another key influence in preparing the US-American stage for South Asian ideas emerged from the metaphysical-healing corner. Phineas Parkhurst Quimby (1802–1866), a clockmaker and mesmerist, initiated the mind-cure movement, eventually evolving into New Thought.[564] He believed that all disease originated in the mind and emphasised the dominance of ideas over matter, faith in metaphysical healing, and the power of positive

[564] In the 1890s there was a need for an umbrella term unifying various designations of metaphysical healing, such as mind cure, divine healing, or mental science. This naming process finally led to the designation of New Thought (Harley 1995, 327).

affirmation. According to Quimby, comprehension of the spiritual world requires recognition of the unity of everything and concentrating on the present moment. While Quimby and his movement had strong Christian leanings, their emphasis on personal experience and the inherent divinity of human beings set the stage for later South Asian influences on US-American religiosity.[565] Thus, groups associated with metaphysical healing played a significant role in the "synthesizing process" (Williamson 2010, 26) of Hindu and US-American religions, which had been triggered earlier by the Transcendentalist Society (Harley 1995, 325; Holmes 1944, 379; Williamson 2010, 32–33).

During the nineteenth century, images of South Asia and its religious traditions were widespread among religious and intellectual circles in the United States. Metaphysical religious worldviews blended with a fascination with the Orient fuelled the process of disseminating South Asian ideas in later countercultural settings. Transcendentalism and New Thought, while representing only glimpses of a broader picture, evidently prepared certain segments of US-American society for Asian religions and their religious teachers.

The underground press, a major means of communication, documented the era's dissent and eclectic religiosity. Browsing through major underground periodicals of that time, such as the *San Francisco Oracle* or the *International Times*, one could find information on Zen, shamanism, Left-Hand Tantra, and Jesus Christ. This "anything-goes" attitude was characteristic of the counterculture's religious eclecticism (Roszak 1969, 140). Aligning with Campbell's observations about the Cultic Milieu, the US-American cultural underground was particularly vibrant during the counterculture when its young members sought "alternative" forms of religion.[566] Several religious teachers then launched religious groups, drawing from the rich religious soil of this cultural underground and the supply of "newly discovered" Asian religions (Melton 2004, 187–188; Oppenheimer 2003, 2, 7).[567]

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[565] After Quimby's death, some of his most loyal clients carried on with his healing techniques and his associated spiritual principles. Thanks to them, Quimby's approach has remained influential until the present day and has diffused in various circles of US-American society. Of particular interest are Warren Felt Evans (1817–1889), who extensively wrote about New Thought; Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910), who founded the Christian Science Church, which endured through the Christian Science movement; and Emma Curtis Hopkins (1849–1925), who initiated the New Thought movement (as it is known today), which stemmed from the advancement of Quimby's original theory and healing practices (Baier 2009b, 2:437; Harley 1995, 326–327).

[566] See Asprem and Dyrendal (2015) and Kaplan and Lööw (2002) for critical readings of Campbell's concept of the Cultic Milieu.

[567] Many innovative (and frequently short-lived) religious groups garnered a bad reputation and were labelled as "cults". This derogatory sentiment often stemmed from assumptions about exploitative behaviour by the "cult leaders". As a result, an anti-cult movement emerged, aiming to disseminate damaging and adverse information about these groups. Organisations such as the Cult Awareness Network propagated the view that

US-American new religious movements increasingly drew from Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions.[568] The popularity of these Asian religions among members of the counterculture has several reasons but is mainly grounded in late nineteenth-century interpretations of these religions and associated oriental stereotypes. Moreover, South Asian swamis and European and US-American scholars popularised translations of Asian religious texts as "authentic" testimonies of religious experiences. English writer and speaker Alan W. Watts (1915–1973) is a notable example of a populariser of Asian religion.

Growing up in England, Watts moved to New York in 1938, where he pursued studies in both Zen and Christianity, obtaining a master's degree in theology and a doctorate in Divinity. Throughout his life, he assumed various roles: Zen monk, Christian priest, academic scholar, writer, TV and radio broadcaster, and countercultural populariser of Zen. From the 1950s, Watts became well known in the countercultural scene for his non-traditionalist approach to religious teachings, where he was frequently celebrated as the foremost authority on Asian religious thought. His reading of Zen and the interpretation of Asian religion through a Jungian lens significantly contributed to the popularisation of Asian religions and the dissemination of widespread views of Asian religions as enabling direct religious experiences and offering means of reaching liberation in this life.[569] Thereby, he fostered the countercultural view of alternative religion as a means of dissent from conventional norms (Oliver 2014, 32, 131; Partridge 2018, 275–280; Watts 1961; 1972). Metaphysical and countercultural developments also influenced the intellectual sphere. A notable example was the academic study of the mind and human behaviour.

"cults" were hazardous and campaigned for them to be banned (S. J. Stein 2003, 140–141). See Miller (1995b) for a critical introduction to the notion of "cults" in the US-American context.

[568] The term "new religious movements" (often abbreviated as NRM) originated in the descriptive accounts of the new religious environment in Japan after 1945. During the US-American occupation of Japan, a period of religious freedom commenced, mirroring the US-American legal tradition. Over the next twenty years, many new religious movements emerged as formerly oppressed groups claimed their right to practise their respective religions. The term "new religious movements" was subsequently imported to the United States to describe its evolving religious landscape during the second half of the twentieth century. However, as Oppenheimer demonstrated, only a small minority of US-Americans actively participated in new religious movements. Most remained within the boundaries of traditional religions, such as Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism (Melton 2004, 188–189; Oppenheimer 2003, 2).

[569] The Japanese Daisetsu T. Suzuki (1870–1966) particularly influenced Watts' reading of Zen (Roszak 1969, 131–133).

20.4. US-American Investigations into the Mind and Consciousness

Much of the material in the following chapters concerns kundalini's link to "religious experience" and "altered states of consciousness". Aligning with the profound emphasis on the self in twentieth-century alternative religion, studying human consciousness and its alterations in the wake of "religious experience" or "experience deemed religious" (Taves 2009, 17) became a pivotal current in psychology. This development, of course, had already started much earlier, when theologians, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), and psychologists, such as William James (1842–1910) and James H. Leuba (1868–1946), assessed "religious experience" as the essence of religion. The core interest pertained to the change of consciousness induced by religious experience (Hammer 2004, 71). Humanistic and transpersonal psychology served as the primary intellectual arenas for participants of what Davis calls "consciousness culture" (Davis 2021, 72). Against the backdrop of "consciousness culture", several protagonists reassessed physical and mental crises as potential for transformation. This led to the reappraisal of psychiatry and the rejection of hospitalisation. It is crucial to situate these developments within the context of US-American history and culture, with California playing a central role as the main venue.

20.4.1. The Interest in Consciousness and the Emergence of a "Consciousness Culture"

The notion of consciousness permeated popular, scientific, and religious discourses during the second half of the twentieth century. In this chapter, I am interested in the concept of consciousness as elaborated during the long Sixties and used in the context of US-American kundalini research.

While research into consciousness has steadily increased, there is no decisive definition;[570] the widespread fascination with consciousness perhaps precisely stems from its mystery. The shared interest in consciousness during that period created what sometimes is considered a broad cultural field: Timothy Leary called it a "consciousness movement" (Leary, in Davis 2021, 75), John White spoke of a "consciousness revolution" (J. W. White 1975b, 15), and Erik Davis labelled it a "consciousness culture" (Davis 2021, 39).

[570] Schneider and Velmans' edited volume *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness* (2017) thoroughly discusses the nature(s) of consciousness, its interpretations, and shades.

Davis's concept is particularly relevant to the topic of the present study. He defines "consciousness culture" as "a largely psychological current of empirical mysticism and proto-New Age self-care" (*ibid*.), connecting it to countercultural subjectivity, religious experience, and the psychedelic movement. This perspective aligns with Roszak's observation about the primacy of consciousness and personal experience among countercultural actors (Roszak 1969, 64). The countercultural ethos of consciousness culture was evident in unique clothing styles, art, and literature. Moreover, Davis highlights the entanglements between transpersonal psychology and "consciousness culture", which has fuelled intellectual discourse through specialised publications and events like conferences and seminars (Davis 2021, 72–75).

This study divides intellectual investigations into consciousness into "consciousness studies" and "consciousness research". On the one hand, "consciousness studies" pertains to an academic field that investigates consciousness and the mind from a multidisciplinary perspective, drawing from philosophy, (clinical) psychology, and neuroscience, among others (Schneider and Velmans 2017, xix). On the other hand, based on self-designations in primary sources, "consciousness research" describes a fringe discipline whose proponents hope to disclose the nature of consciousness through self-experimentation and New Age science (J. W. White 1975b, 15).[571] Gopi Krishna, his collaborators, and other protagonists associated with kundalini research fall into this second category.

John White surveyed current expressions of consciousness research in his article "The Consciousness Revolution" (1975). In a broadly inclusive manner, he added a wide range of techniques, theories, and fields to his list, including altered states of consciousness, extrasensory perception (ESP), psychedelic research, organic gardening, biofeedback, thanatology, transpersonal psychology, yoga, and others (*ibid*., 15–19). This demonstrates the underlying logic of consciousness research: whatever was deemed as positively influencing individuals, enhancing their perception of the world, and potentially contributing to the evolution of a "new humanity" characterised by an expanded and heightened consciousness represented a potential topic or field associated with consciousness research. Accordingly, modern interpretations of kundalini that emphasise its potential to induce

[571] Most of my protagonists involved in the study of consciousness use the expression "consciousness research" to describe their research approach. Considering the influence of New Age science on this fringe discipline, it is apt to define it as "New Age consciousness research". Throughout this thesis, "consciousness research" will encompass the meaning of "New Age consciousness research".

altered, higher, or cosmic states of consciousness would easily fit into the scheme of consciousness research.

Some key concepts that defined the field of consciousness culture included Abraham Maslow's "peak experience" (1964), Charles Tart's "altered states of consciousness" (1969), Stan Grof's mapping of the "realms of the human unconscious" (1976), and Ken Wilber's "spectrum of consciousness" (1977). As discussed below, these protagonists were instrumental in developing humanistic and transpersonal psychology, underscoring the entanglement of consciousness culture with the "new" psychologies. In particular, the question of the potentiality of consciousness to alter has permeated popular discourses and investigations into the mind throughout the twentieth century and remains influential (Partridge 2018; Pollan 2018).

The concept of "altered states of consciousness" dates back to 1966 when psychiatrist Arnold M. Ludwig (n.d.a.) coined the expression (Ludwig 1966). However, Charles Tart's edited volume *Altered States of Consciousness: A Book of Readings* (1969) ultimately popularised altered states of consciousness.[572] The underlying premise of altered states of consciousness was the assumption that consciousness comprised different levels or types, ranging from lower to ordinary to higher states of consciousness. As a result, participants of "consciousness culture" attempted to categorise the varieties of consciousness and map, in Wilber's words, "this incredible spectrum we call consciousness" (Wilber 1982, 12). Richard M. Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (1901) and William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) represent two pioneering attempts at this type of classification (Davis 2021, 72; Tart 1972, 10).[573]

Bucke's book is a compilation of what he perceived as "instances of Cosmic Consciousness" (Bucke 1905, xvii) throughout history. His initial interest in investigating cosmic consciousness resulted from his experience of ecstatic bliss, which left the impression of a spiritual rebirth (see Chapter 10.2.3.). In the wake of his experience, Bucke defined cosmic consciousness in the following way: "Cosmic Consciousness, then, is a higher form of consciousness than that possessed by the ordinary man. […] The prime characteristic of

[572] Aside from Tart's *Altered States of Consciousness*, John White's edited volumes *The Highest State of Consciousness* (1972b) and *Frontiers of Consciousness: The Meeting Ground Between Inner and Outer Reality* (1974a) testify to people's fascination with altered states of consciousness during the long Sixties.

[573] Richard M. Bucke and William James were not the sole pioneers in shaping the twentieth-century understanding of consciousness within "consciousness culture". However, I focus on these two because consciousness researchers such as Charles Tart (1972), John White (1975), and Gopi Krishna (1974) frequently reference them when writing about consciousness.

cosmic consciousness [*sic*] is, as its name implies, a consciousness of the cosmos, that is, of the life and order of the universe" (*ibid*., 1–2). He differentiated the notion of cosmic consciousness from lower forms of consciousness, which he called "Simple Consciousness" (*ibid*., 1), signifying the awareness of the immediate environment and one's own body, and "Self Consciousness" (*ibid*.), meaning the realisation of oneself as distinct from the rest of the universe. This simple classification into three forms of consciousness represents one of the earliest systematic presentations of different strains of consciousness (*ibid*.). Many protagonists of the present study, including Gopi Krishna, Lee Sannella, and John White, grounded significant portions of their claims about kundalini on Bucke's concept of cosmic consciousness (Krishna to Basedow, April 25, 1971, LGK, n.d.; Sannella 1976, 24; J. W. White 1972b, vii).[574]

William James, who equally referenced Bucke, was another pioneer in categorising various strands of consciousness.[575] Davis even suggests that "James was arguably the first thinker to start talking about 'consciousness' in our current sense of the term. Our intimate sense of what it feels like to 'experience' the world is still shaped by Jamesian notions like the 'stream of consciousness'" (Davis 2021, 416).[576] James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) sheds light on the vast and complex spectrum of religious experience and, crucially, religious consciousness. Looking through a psychological lens, James introduced the link between mystical experiences and altered states of consciousness. He underlined how "these exalted states of consciousness […] of 'union' form a perfectly definite class of experiences, of which the soul may occasionally partake, and which certain persons may live by in a deeper sense than they live by anything else with which they have acquaintance" (James 1985, 116). He constructed a spectrum of "exalted states of consciousness" (*ibid*.) that ranges

[574] Bucke's narration of his experience of cosmic consciousness resonates with Gopi Krishna's description of his initial kundalini experience (see Chapter 10.2.3.). Moreover, Lee Sannella referenced Bucke in examining kundalini as a rebirth (Chapter 22.1.4.).

[575] The British psychologist and psychic researcher Frederic Myers (1843–1901) also defined distinct states of consciousness and significantly influenced James' views on the variety of consciousness, e.g., Myers' concept of "subliminal consciousness", which attempts to grasp the mental condition while in a trance state (Davis 2021, 73).

[576] William James introduced the notions of "flow" and "stream", which developed into core tenets of consciousness research. In his book *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), James dedicates an entire chapter to the "stream of thought" (James 1890, 146–87) and elsewhere writes about the "continuous flow of the mental stream" (*ibid*., 128). In the 1985 edition of James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, the philosopher John E. Smith identified James' "stream of thought" as an "aspect of consciousness" (Smith, in James 1985, xiv). Unlike later understandings, e.g., maintained by Stanley Krippner, James' "stream of thought" was not a means to switch from one form of consciousness to the next but rather an intrinsic aspect of consciousness (Krippner 1972, 26).

from (mystical) experiences, engendered by substance-induced self-experimentations, to "the methodical cultivation of mystical consciousness as an element of religious life" (Baier 2021, 365). James prioritised genuine religious experiences over substance-induced conditions (Baier 2021, 365–366; James 1985, 301–339). In any case, James was convinced of the existence of distinct states of consciousness: "Even the least mystical of you must by this time be convinced of the existence of mystical moments as states of consciousness of an entirely specific quality, and of the deep impression which they make on those who have them" (James 1985, 316).

Bucke and James represent two important pioneers in popularising the varieties of consciousness, which propelled the prevalence of a consciousness culture in the United States in the latter half of the twentieth century. These developments significantly contributed to modern interpretations of kundalini against the backdrop of consciousness research. Moreover, the success of consciousness culture was carried forward by the "new" psychologies, i.e., humanistic and transpersonal psychology, which provided its psychological underpinnings.

20.4.2. The "New" Psychologies: Humanistic and Transpersonal Psychology

In her book *Theosophy and the New Psychology* (1904), the theosophist Annie Besant defined "new psychology" with the following words: "What I have called New Psychology is the psychology that holds its mind open to all new facts and truths; […] that is willing to consider facts the most abnormal" (Besant 1904, 9–10). While Besant was mainly concerned with defining a psychological orientation that resonated with theosophical doctrine, her "new psychology" anticipated developments in psychology during the latter half of the twentieth century. These developments led to the establishment of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, facilitating the Human Potential Movement.[577]

[577] Hammer pointed out that "humanistic psychology was not so much a radical innovation as a return to certain turn-of-the-century ideals" (2004, 70). He underscores the significance of psychologists of religion, such as James Leuba and William James, who had already highlighted religious needs and values for realising one's potential. This notion would be revived by humanistic and transpersonal psychologists (*ibid*., 70–71).

20.4.2.1. Humanistic Psychology

The US-American psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) is best known for his psychological concept, the "Hierarchy of Needs" (1943), and for stimulating perspectives of humanistic psychology. Developed as a response to the perceived shortcomings of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic approach – "first force" – and B. Frederic Skinner's behaviourism – "second force" – Maslow defined humanistic psychology as the "third force" in psychology. In *Toward a Psychology of Being* (1962), he elucidated his humanistic perspective on human nature:

> The two comprehensive theories of human nature most influencing psychology until recently have been the Freudian and the experimental-positivistic-behavioristic. All other theories were less comprehensive and their adherents formed many splinter groups. In the last few years, however, these various groups have rapidly been coalescing into a third, increasingly comprehensive theory of human nature, into what might be called a "Third Force". This group includes the Adlerians, Rankians, and Jungians, as well as all the neo-Freudians. (Maslow 1962, vi)

Maslow, Anthony J. Sutich (1907–1976), Carl R. Rogers (1902–1987), Rollo May (1909–1994), and other like-minded psychologists and psychotherapists started discussing humanistic psychology during the 1950s. However, it was not until 1961 that it officially took shape with the publication of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (edited by Maslow and Anthony Sutich) and the inauguration of the "American Association for Humanistic Psychology" the following year. Owing to these early measures of institutionalisation, humanistic psychology gained increasing momentum, leading to its heydays from the 1970s through the 1980s (Daniels 2013, 27; Heine 2005, 299).

Some of its key concepts inspired and ultimately prevailed over related currents, including the Human Potential Movement, transpersonal psychology, and integral theory. Of particular importance are the concepts of "self-actualisation" and "peak experience". For Maslow, they are deeply intertwined, defining a person undergoing peak experiences as a self-actualising individual (Maslow 1962, 91). Maslow assumed that beyond the fulfilment of basic needs, human nature has a general tendency to strive for growth and self-perfection, which he subsumed under the designation of self-actualisation (*ibid*., 21). He defined self-actualisation with the following words:

> We may define it as an episode, […] in which the powers of the person come together in a particularly efficient and intensely enjoyable way, and in which he is more

> integrated and less split, more open for experience, more idiosyncratic, more perfectly expressive or spontaneous, or fully functioning, more creative, more humorous, more ego-transcending, more independent of his lower needs, etc. He becomes in these episodes more truly himself, more perfectly actualizing his potentialities, closer to the core of his Being. (*ibid*., 91)

The process of self-actualisation is propelled by so-called "peak experiences". Defined as "moments of highest happiness and fulfillment" (*ibid*., 69), Maslow emphasised their positive and affirmative quality. Moreover, owing to the wide range of experiences he linked to this category, peak experiences are nothing rare or exceptional but rather a natural and widespread expression of human nature. Some examples of peak experiences include "the parental experience, the mystic, or oceanic, or nature experience, the aesthetic perception, the creative moment, the therapeutic or intellectual insight, the orgasmic experience, [and] certain forms of athletic fulfillment" (*ibid*.).

Humanistic and transpersonal circles mainly associated the concepts of "self-actualisation" and "peak experience" with Maslow (H. L. Friedman and Hartelius 2013). However, in fact, the German psychiatrist Kurt Goldstein (1878–1965) laid the foundation for Maslow's ideas. The concept of "self-actualisation", in particular, must be seen in the light of Goldstein's holistic approach and organismic psychology (Goldstein 1939; Heine 2005, 351–353; Maslow 1962, viii). Despite Goldstein's critical stance regarding humanistic psychology's naturalistic reasoning, he participated in humanistic debates and significantly influenced early humanistic circles (Heine 2005, 342).[578]

20.4.2.2. Transpersonal Psychology

Maslow and Sutich recognised religious experiences as an important expression of human nature while adopting a strictly humanistic stance, emphasising biological and psychological frameworks. This tension stirred increasing criticism. Ultimately, Maslow, Sutich, and the psychiatrist Stan Grof, among others, suggested a "fourth force", thus initiating transpersonal psychology. "Indeed", as transpersonal psychologist Michael Daniels argues,

[578] Kurt Goldstein also influenced Fritz Perls (1893–1970), who, with his wife Laura Perls (1905–1990), developed Gestalt Therapy (Heine 2005, 324). Despite Goldstein's seminal influence on Maslow and Perls, he plays a marginal role in the reception of the twentieth century's "new psychologies". For instance, Jeff Kripal's encyclopaedic book on the Human Potential Movement, predominantly influenced by Maslow and Perls, does not once mention Goldstein (Kripal 2007). See Heine (2005, 341–353) for a thorough discussion of Goldstein's organismic psychology and holism.

"it was the desire to focus more specifically on spiritual matters that led to the initial suggestion that a *Fourth Force* in psychology was needed […], perhaps with the intention of leaving the Third Force of humanistic psychology to cater for those pursuing strictly existential and psychotherapeutic concerns" (Daniels 2013, 27, original emphasis).[579]

Aligning with the early development of humanistic psychology, in 1969, Sutich launched the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, and in 1972, along with several transpersonal psychologists, the "Association for Transpersonal Psychology" (ATP).[580] In addition, in 1978, Stan Grof and the co-founders of the Esalen Institute, Michael Murphy and Dick Price, established the "International Transpersonal Association" (ITA).[581] Key pillars of ATP and ITA were promoting education and research in transpersonal topics and sponsoring international conferences – such as the 1983 conference in Davos, Switzerland, where Gopi Krishna spoke to an international audience.

Like its humanistic predecessor, transpersonal psychology is not a school of thought in the strict sense but rather a loose network (Heine 2005, 304). It lacks a universally accepted perspective and vaguely revolves around the emphasis on a higher spiritual essence in humans and their experience. This essence seems to be mostly associated with consciousness (S. Grof 1976, 155). Individuals may seek to realise this essence through designated techniques and tools, thereby enabling transformation and growth. Daniels describes "transpersonal" and "transpersonal psychology" with the following words:

> The word *transpersonal* (beyond or through the personal) refers to experiences, processes, and events in which the usual self-conscious awareness is transcended and in which there is a sense of connection to, or participation with, a larger, more meaningful reality […]. Central to the transpersonal perspective is the assumption that transpersonal phenomena involve a fundamental transformation of normal egoic existence to some ultimately more satisfying or valuable condition. In other words, […] transpersonal

[579] Despite the initial aim to distinguish humanistic and transpersonal topics and approaches, Daniels demonstrated that "such a clear separation has never happened" (Daniels 2013, 27).

[580] The "Association for Transpersonal Psychology" (ATP) has overseen the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* and has been involved with educational and research projects. Today, the ATP is primarily affiliated with the Californian Sofia University (formerly the Transpersonal Institute) (ATP, n.d.).

[581] The "International Transpersonal Association" (ITA) held conferences in Iceland, South Asia, Brazil, Switzerland, the United States, and Finland, among other countries. Since 1982, the ITA has published the biannual *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, edited by Glenn Hartelius. In 2004, the ITA was dissolved. However, owing to the efforts of David Lukoff, it was ultimately revived in 2008 and has continued to exist to this day, with the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) representing its key sponsor (ITP, n.d.).

> psychology directly and proactively addresses and promotes the need for human transformation. (Daniels 2013, 23, original emphasis)

"Spiritual" and religious experiences play a vital role in the transpersonal perspective and are frequently understood synonymously with "transpersonal" experiences. Thus, unlike humanistic psychology, transpersonal psychology seeks to expand traditional psychological frameworks by incorporating perspectives from "spirituality" (*ibid*.).[582] Accordingly, some transpersonal psychologists hold the view that the "broader *transpersonal movement*" includes "various nonscientific transpersonal psychologies […] such as Buddhist psychology, Kabbalistic psychology, and astrological psychology" (*ibid*., 24, original emphasis).

Transpersonal psychology also shares many ties with "consciousness culture", with some of its key representatives having participated in the psychedelic movement. Of foremost importance in this regard is Stan Grof, whose "psychedelic-holotropic approach" (*ibid*., 28) consolidated the experimental and therapeutic orientation of transpersonal psychology.

Another key representative in this regard is Ken Wilber (b. 1949), who helped establish transpersonal psychology and significantly contributed to integral theory. Wilber's thought has changed significantly throughout his life, but his personal (and professional) motto, "transcend and include" (Wilber 2000, 8), applies across its whole trajectory.[583] Wilber's concept of the "Spectrum of Consciousness" counts among his earliest ideas. In his eponymous book, he defines the spectrum of consciousness as "strictly metaphorical. Consciousness is not, properly speaking, a spectrum – but it is useful, for purposes of communication and investigation, to treat it as one. […] the spectrum of consciousness, [refers to] the basic levels of consciousness" (Wilber 1982, 18; Combs 2013, 166–169).[584] Grof, Wilber, and other transpersonal psychologists sought to induce and integrate altered states of consciousness, hoping to gain insights into the evolutionary potential of human nature.

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[582] While transpersonal psychologists did not fully dismiss religion as a restrictive and outdated concept, they preferred the notion of spirituality and used it in the sense of the counterculture (Daniels 2013). For further context, refer to Chapter 20.4.2.2.

[583] Owing to Wilber's frequent theoretical shifts, he even divides his own philosophy into Wilber-1, Wilber-2, etc., through Wilber-5 (Combs 2013, 167).

[584] According to Wilber, his concept of the spectrum of consciousness links him to his predecessors and contemporaries, including William James, Richard M. Bucke, Carl G. Jung, Stan Grof, and Roberto Assagioli (Wilber 1982, 19). Gene Kieffer, John White, and Gopi Krishna also frequently mentioned Wilber's understanding of consciousness in their correspondences (LGK, box 6).

The history of humanistic and transpersonal psychology is closely tied with the Esalen Institute in Big Sur and the Human Potential movement (see Chapter 23.1.). Not only were many of their instigators intellectually and spiritually nurtured at Esalen, but humanistic and transpersonal concepts were disseminated and popularised through its countless seminars and workshops. The structure of Esalen's seminars and workshops, then again, was evidently shaped and defined by the experimental approach of transpersonal psychologists, such as Grof (Esalen 1980, 37–38; Kripal 2007, 151). Moreover, the humanistic concepts of "self-actualisation" and "peak experience", along with transpersonal emphases on consciousness and religious experience, played a critical role in the theoretical underpinnings of the Human Potential Movement. Particularly Esalen's key maxim, "human potential", aligns with Maslow's "self-actualisation" and similar humanistic and transpersonal ideas (Anderson 1983, 65–67).[585]

Another unifying theme pertains to the criticism of conventional psychiatry and the perceived stigmatisation of mental illness, most prominently advocated by the anti-psychiatry movement.

20.4.3. The Anti-Psychiatry Movement

Throughout the 1960s and 70s, several European and US-American psychiatrists, including Ronald D. Laing (1927–1989), Thomas Szasz (1920–2012), David G. Cooper (1931–1986), and Franco Basaglia (1924–1980), challenged definitions of mental illness, the distinction between madness and sanity, the adequacy of psychiatric treatments such as medication and hospitalisation, and the overall purpose of psychiatry.[586] These figures' radical ideas and their networks formed the ideological core of what became known as the anti-psychiatry movement. However, anti-psychiatry was not a homogeneous movement with a single, unified perspective on psychiatry, society, and the dichotomy of madness versus sanity. On the contrary, its intellectuals held diverse and sometimes conflicting opinions. Nonetheless, as Kotowicz underscored, "one particular line of reasoning is attributable to all of them –

[585] Aldous Huxley initially introduced and popularised the concept of "human potentialities", which the Human Potential movement later adopted as "human potential" (Anderson 1983, 10). This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 23.1.

[586] Pioneering studies that presented a major critique of psychiatry and served as a significant catalyst for the anti-psychiatry movement include Ronald D. Laing's *The Divided Self* (1960), Michel Foucault's *Folie et Déraison* (1961, *Madness and Civilisation*), Erving Goffman's *Asylums* (1961), and Thomas Szasz's *The Myth of Mental Illness* (1961).

they all pitched their arguments against the power of the psychiatric establishment" (Kotowicz 2005, 4). Moreover, their external perception as belonging to a uniform movement with a shared agenda further united them (Crossley 1998, 878–879).

Although the beginnings of the anti-psychiatry movement are commonly associated with Laing, Szasz, and other influential 1960s figures, sentiments against psychiatry trace back to its development as a formal medical discipline in the early nineteenth century. The term "anti-psychiatry" itself surfaced around 1900 in the context of protest movements in German-speaking countries against abuses in psychiatric institutions (Schott and Tölle 2005, 206–207). However, the twentieth-century movement differs significantly from earlier approaches. A distinct element was the involvement of psychiatry's immediate representatives: "It is important to grasp […] that anti-psychiatry was an impetus which emerged from above, directed by psychiatrists and their views" (Crossley 1998, 879). This criticism "from above" also distinguishes the anti-psychiatry movement from similar currents of this period, including the attacks by the Church of Scientology between the 1950s and the 1980s and the criticism by the "Mental Patients Union", established in 1973 (*ibid*., 878–879).

Another typical element of the modern anti-psychiatry movement was its embedment in the 1960s protest movements. David Cooper, who coined the English phrase "anti-psychiatry" in 1967, strongly emphasised political and structural matters (Kotowicz 2005, 4). In his book *Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry* (1967), Cooper condemns the hierarchical structures and violence he associated with psychiatry while criticising society at large (D. G. Cooper 1967, ix–x). Cooper and other anti-psychiatrists frequently argued that society "is oppressive and requires the distortion and repression of human potentialities for its effective functioning" (Crossley 1998, 878). Accordingly, they dismissed psychiatry as "an institution of social control" (*ibid*., 884) within society.

Besides Cooper, Laing and Szasz most prominently advocated a structural critique. Both can be further credited with popularising anti-psychiatry in the Anglo-American world. Laing's *The Divided Self* (1960)[587] and *The Politics of Experience (1967)* and Szasz's *The Myth of Mental Illness* (1961) were particularly widely read and provided much of the framework for alternative perspectives on mental health and illness. Indeed, their popularity among circles associated with "consciousness culture" situated the anti-psychiatry movement at the

[587] The second edition of *The Divided Self* (1965) was much more influential, with Laing positioning himself more confidently as a representative of anti-psychiatry (Crossley 1998, 883).

core of the 1960s counterculture. Ironically, if figures such as Laing and Szasz had not been excluded from medical and psychiatric discourses in the first place, the anti-psychiatry movement might never have gained traction (Crossley 1998, 880; Kotowicz 2005, 56).

Counter- and subcultural movements, such as the psychedelic movement and the Human Potential Movement, shared several thematic ties with anti-psychiatry.[588] LSD serves as a key example, with psychiatrists and psychotherapists exploring its therapeutic potential. Moreover, LSD's potential resemblance to the symptoms of schizophrenia particularly fascinated leading representatives of both the psychedelic movement and anti-psychiatry.[589] Schizophrenia, as it must be underscored, was the mental illness most frequently addressed by anti-psychiatrists (D. G. Cooper 1967, x; Laing 1967, 57; Szasz 1957, 420). Another key overlap was community life, promoted by the counterculture and realised by the Human Potential movement at Esalen. In response to anti-psychiatrists' call to overcome the traditional roles of medical staff and patients, several "therapeutic communities" emerged. While Laing's "Kingsley Hall" and Cooper's "Villa 21" were the most notable examples in the United Kingdom (both located in London), in the United States, John W. Perry's "Diabasis House Program" is of foremost interest for the present study (Crossley 1998, 885; Kotowicz 2005, 76).[590]

John Weir Perry (1914–1998) was a Jungian psychologist. His most notable contributions to anti-psychiatry were his book *The Far Side of Madness* (1974) and the founding of Diabasis, an experimental residential facility in San Francisco.[591] Perry hoped to create a nurturing environment for young adults undergoing the early stages of their initial "acute schizophrenic break" (Perry 1974, 151). At Diabasis, individuals enduring psychotic episodes were not subjected to medications, insulin shock therapy, and hospitalisation. Instead, they lived in a community with therapists and patients and were encouraged to

[588] Representatives of the Human Potential movement, such as co-founder Dick Price and long-term affiliate George Leonard, valued Laing's and Szasz's alternative approaches and invited them to lead seminars and workshops. Especially Laing was considered an Esalen "hero" (Kripal 2007, 193; Esalen 1968, 8; 1973, 9).

[589] Among the anti-psychiatrists, particularly, Laing expressed interest in psychedelics and their potential to understand schizophrenia better – he also experimented with the use of LSD in psychotherapy. Accordingly, when Laing travelled to the United States in 1964, he was keen to make the acquaintance of Allen Ginsberg and Timothy Leary and maintained a friendship with both. Moreover, in the United Kingdom, Laing established himself as an expert on psychedelics and (somewhat unsurprisingly) on "bad trips" (Clay 1996, 114–115).

[590] Perry's Diabasis will be discussed further below in Chapter 23.3.3. in the context of the Spiritual Emergency Network (SEN).

[591] Perry was also involved at the "Soteria" residency facility in San José, California. In contrast to Diabasis, Soteria was modelled after Laing's "Kingsley Hall" and thus closely resembled British anti-psychiatry (Perry 1974, 152).

navigate what Perry termed the "far side of madness" (*ibid*.) without constraints. In his eponymous book, Perry challenged what he perceived as repressive treatments for mental illness, emphasising the importance of allowing psychotic individuals to use their inner turmoil to reach their full potential (*ibid*., 52, 152–157). While Perry's ideas evidently aligned with the anti-psychiatry movement, he mainly identified with Jungian and transpersonal psychology. He met Jung during his studies as a medical student at the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich, and the latter remained a central inspiration for Perry's work throughout his career.[592] Following Jung's perspective on schizophrenia as a potential catalyst for healing and transformation, Perry's fundamental premise embraced the belief in the "inner healer", viewing the mind and the body as allies in the healing process (Cornwall 2013; Esser 2023; Perry 1974, 1–4).

Perry's Diabasis and other therapeutic communities were an expression of protest against conventional views of madness and aligned the anti-psychiatry movement with countercultural ethos. Anti-psychiatry as a movement significantly influenced counter- and subcultural perspectives on schizophrenia and other mental illnesses. The Esalen Institute exemplified the incorporation of the belief in the "value of psychotic experience" (Esalen 1968, 8). As the following chapters will demonstrate, the radical redefinition of mental illness had a tremendous impact on the interpretation of unsettling "kundalini experiences". Thus, Gopi Krishna's pioneering role in reframing his disturbing experience as a transformational crisis must be considered against the backdrop of anti-psychiatry, which likely encouraged additional kundalini research by several US-American Institutes.

20.5. Summary

This chapter introduced the US-American background relevant to the reception of kundalini and kundalini research. Particularly during the formative years of the long Sixties, the United States established itself as the centre of a "consciousness culture". Thus, the view of kundalini's potential to induce higher or altered states of consciousness particularly resonated with US-American scholars and practitioners operating within this context.

[592] Perry told one of his former clients that he "wished Jung could have lived long enough to see how Diabasis really proved what Jung at times had stated about the potential for madness to bring about a necessary transformation of the psyche" (Cornwall 2022; Esser 2023; Perry 1974, 22). In addition to Perry's deep respect for Jung's views, it appears that Jung also valued Perry's efforts, as evidenced by Jung contributing a foreword to Perry's book *The Self in Psychotic Process: Its Symbolization in Schizophrenia* (1953).

Accordingly, kundalini's transformation during the twentieth century can only be fully understood when considering US-American counterculture, its religious eclecticism, the political and social developments during the long Sixties, and, crucially, perspectives on consciousness, human potential, and mental health. Although Gopi Krishna frequently emphasised his preference for Europe over the United States, he could not escape the US-American hegemony, with much of his research efforts linked to US-American Institutes and their research into kundalini. Against the backdrop of "consciousness culture", the following chapters will introduce these US-American research endeavours and consider their relationship with Krishna.

A Kundalini in the Laboratory

In the book *The Serpent Power* (1918), Arthur Avalon suggested a simple but, in their opinion, effective method to determine the activation of kundalini within the human body:

> There is one simple test whether the Shakti is actually aroused. When she is aroused intense heat is felt at that spot but when she leaves a particular centre the part so left becomes as cold and apparently lifeless as a corpse. The progress upwards may thus be externally verified by others. When the Shakti (Power) has reached the upper brain (Sahasrāra) the whole body is cold and corpse-like; except the top of the skull, where some warmth is felt, this being the place where the static and kinetic aspects of Consciousness unite. (Woodroffe 1950, 22)

Several decades later, researchers using electrophysiological instruments followed Avalon's lead and developed methods, means, and devices for empirically demonstrating the movement and existence of kundalini.[593] The following chapters will showcase several individuals, institutes and instruments that fall into the category of empirical kundalini research. The medical instruments used in conjunction with kundalini research either aimed to induce the energy, as with Bentov's ballistocardiograph, or diagnose kundalini-related activities, as in the case of Motoyama's Chakra Instrument (CI). Against the backdrop of empirical yoga and meditation research and New Age science, kundalini found its way to the laboratory.

These developments built on earlier accomplishments by South Asian theosophists and scientists. As already discussed in this study, the most vital examples of these preliminary studies include N. C. Paul's early translation of yogic concepts into medical terms, Vasant Rele's physiological description of kundalini, Swami Kuvalayananda's empirical yoga research, and its continuation at the AIIMS by B. K. Anand and his research team (see Chapter 5.3.). The following chapters unite around the experimental investigation of kundalini and the attempt to define its psycho-physiological concomitants.

[593] Cooper et al. (2021) discuss contemporary empirical studies, framing the activation of kundalini as an "energy-like somatic experience".

21. Biofeedback Experiments at the Menninger Foundation and Beyond

During the 1970s biofeedback surge, the Menninger Foundation, a leading mental health institution in Topeka, Kansas, was instrumental in advancing the field. Its influential research and clinical applications elevated the scientific understanding of biofeedback and facilitated its integration into mainstream psychological and physiological therapies. Two biofeedback pioneers that are particularly associated with the Menninger Foundation are Elmer Green (1917–2017) and Alyce Green (1907–1994) and their empirical yoga research.

As this chapter will show, Elmer and Alyce Green's contributions to biofeedback research led to the popular view that biofeedback and yoga are inextricably linked. Consequently, protagonists of kundalini research equally utilised biofeedback in their attempt to find evidence for kundalini. First and foremost, however, the basics of biofeedback and encephalography merit explanation.

21.1. The Invention of Biofeedback

In his 1968 article "Conscious Control of Brain Waves", the Japanese-American psychologist Joe Kamiya (1926–2021) presented his clinical findings about conscious recognition and alternation of alpha brain waves.[594] Kamiya suggested that individuals could be trained to alter their brain waves, and thus enter another frequency-related state at will (Kamiya 1968). These findings resulted in the emergence of neurofeedback, also termed EEG biofeedback.[595] Today, biofeedback is widely accepted as a scientific method and medical tool. During the 1960s and 70s, however, when countercultural hippies, alternative religious seekers, and bohemians celebrated biofeedback as an innovative, drug-free means to reach altered states of consciousness, medical professionals frequently dismissed biofeedback as a "countercultural fad" (Bennetts 1978, 32; Trotter 1971; J. W. White 1974b).

[594] Other early contributors to the field of biofeedback include psychologists M. Barry Sterman (d. 2024), Barbara B. Brown (1921–1999), and Elmer and Alyce Green. This brief overview cannot consider Sterman's pioneering electrophysiological research at UCLA or Brown's significant contribution, including her involvement in the institutionalisation of the field in 1969 as the "Biofeedback Research Society" and her EEG research at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Sepulveda, California. The Greens, in contrast, are particularly relevant to this study and will be explored in detail below (Peper and Shaffer 2010, 142).

[595] The designation "biofeedback" encompasses various techniques for monitoring and regulating physiological processes, including neurofeedback, which specifically focuses on monitoring and regulating brain wave activity. In this study, I employ biofeedback in the sense of neurofeedback (unless explicitly marked) and thus follow the convention of the individuals discussed in this chapter (E. Green and Green 1989; Peper and Shaffer 2010; J. W. White 1974b, 80–81).

For this study, biofeedback in the context of empirical yoga research is of central interest. While this research field is not restricted to neurofeedback, meaning the study of brain wave activities and associated states of consciousness, it nonetheless plays a pivotal role. For this reason, some basic concepts warrant clarification.

Brain waves are the rhythmic patterns of electrical activity in the brain, characterised by oscillating electrical voltages. Five brain-wave patterns have been identified and are widely recognised among clinical neurophysiologists (Figure 19). The most common way to record brain waves is electroencephalography (EEG), which is monitored using an electroencephalograph, a noninvasive medical instrument. By attaching metal electrodes to a subject's scalp, the EEG can detect electrical signals produced by neurons in the brain. These signals are amplified, filtered, and displayed as an electroencephalogram (also abbreviated as EEG), a visual representation of brain-wave patterns on a computer screen or paper printout. Considering that different brain regions emit a range of brain-wave frequencies, an EEG can only account for a particular situation and person. In other words, "the brain wave patterns are unique for every individual" (Abhang et al. 2016, 20).

Frequency band	Frequency	Brain states	Examples
Gamma	>35 Hz	concentration	learning, memory recall
Beta	12–35 Hz	active, external attention	wakefulness, periods of focused mental activity
Alpha	8–12 Hz	relaxed, serene, passive attention	daydreaming, meditation
Theta	4–8 Hz	inward focused, deep relaxation	light sleep, meditation
Delta	0.5–4 Hz	unconscious	sleep, dreaming

Figure 19: Characteristics of the five basic brain waves (Abhang et al. 2016, 21).

Two notable developments in the history of electrophysiology occurred in the first half of the twentieth century: In 1924, the German psychiatrist Hans Berger (1873–1941) first recorded brain waves using an EEG and reported oscillating signals at specific frequencies. This observation was confirmed and refined in 1934 by the English electrophysiologist Edgar D. Adrian (1889–1977) and his student Bryan H. C. Matthews (1906–1986). They were the first to identify alpha brain waves (*ibid*., 20–21).

Throughout the twentieth century, but particularly from the 1960s through the 80s, the fascination with brain waves in the alpha frequency band captured the imaginations of those working in several disciplines and fields, including biomedical engineering, neuroscience, cognitive science, and empirical yoga research (Trotter 1971, 314). Peper and Shaffer vividly conveyed that prevailing fascination with alpha brain waves, underscoring how

> alpha biofeedback fit an emerging zeitgeist of self-exploration. American culture in the 1960s and 1970s was shaped by a confluence of forces: exploration of consciousness through drugs such as LSD […] and Eastern meditative practices such as transcendental meditation (TM). […] Kamiya's work implied that a language of consciousness was possible. (Peper and Shaffer 2010, 143)

Thirty years after Adrian and Matthews identified alpha waves, Kamiya began regarding the EEG as a tool to explore what Peper and Shaffer called the "language of consciousness". Kamiya recalled how he "wondered if, through laboratory experiments with this easily traced [alpha] rhythm, a subject could be taught awareness of an internal state" (Kamiya, in Trotter 1971, 315).

Kamiya's clinical studies with alpha waves commenced at Langley Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute, San Francisco, California, in 1958. The guiding hypothesis during his experiments centred on the potential for his research subjects to learn self-regulation of their alpha brain-wave rhythms. Essentially, he aimed to determine whether the subjects, with the aid of technological feedback, could increase their sensitivity to their psycho-physiological processes and voluntarily transition between different brain rhythms. Kamiya thereby initiated what became known as Biofeedback Training (BFT). The basic hypothesis of BFT posits that individuals can learn to control their physiological processes consciously and voluntarily, assisted by real-time feedback through electronic technology: "With the aid of biofeedback training, consciousness and control can be extended over normally unconscious and involuntary body processes. Biofeedback training is a tool for learning psychosomatic self-regulation" (E. Green and Green 1989, 42; 118).

In a BFT setting, a research subject is connected to an EEG and instructed to calm the body, emotions, and mind.[596] During the session, the participant strives to induce a modifying brain wave frequency. Since the brain's electrical rhythms lack sensory representations perceptible

[596] Depending on the targeted information, a research subject in a BFT setting may be connected to another device to alter physiological parameters like temperature or heartbeat. For instance, an electrocardiograph (ECG) measures heart activity, an electromyograph (EMG) muscle activity, and an electrodermograph (EDG) skin electrical activity (J. W. White 1974b, 78–79).

by individuals, control over them is achieved through self-elicitation of the subjective states of consciousness, using visualisation or relaxation techniques. Once the desired state is attained, feedback is provided through visual or auditory cues, indicating the presence of the brain rhythm linked with the intended state. Aided by the signal, the participants learn to distinguish between brain-wave frequencies. This procedure is repeated a specific number of times (A. M. Green 1984, 223; J. W. White 1974b, 81). Unlike empirical studies employing EEGs to measure and examine brain-wave activity, the notion of training and active involvement of research subjects distinguishes biofeedback from EEG-assisted research settings.

Kamiya and several other BFT proponents believed this process could offer a shortcut to induce alpha brain-wave activity, thereby achieving contemplative states as experienced during meditation: a kind of "electronic yoga" (J. W. White 1974a, 75), as some suggested. The next chapter discusses biofeedback investigations into the nature of paranormal abilities associated with yogic mastery.

21.2. The Yogi in the Lab: Elmer and Alyce Green's Biofeedback Experiments

Elmer and Alyce Green count among the earliest and most active advocates of BFT. In 1964, they became members of the Research Department at the Menninger Foundation, where they launched the Voluntary Controls Program (1964) and later opened the Menninger Biofeedback and Psychophysiology Center (1975). A 1970 series of experiments series targeted the investigation of psycho-physiological self-regulation among yogis, with the South Asian yogi Swami Rama (1925–1996) representing one of their most notable research subjects (A. M. Green 1984, 227).

The Menninger Foundation was initiated in 1919 by the Menninger family, who "have sometimes been characterized as the Kennedys of psychiatry and regarded with faddish devotion" (L. J. Friedman 1991, xi). Launched in Topeka, Kansas, the Menninger Foundation comprised a clinic known for its psychiatric expertise, a research centre with leading scientists performing cutting-edge research, a sanatorium, and an educational institution training mental-health professionals. While the Menninger Foundation struggled with social and professional recognition during its first decades of existence, by 1951, it "was recognized as the major facility for mental health professional education in the nation" (*ibid*.) and enjoyed an excellent overall reputation. This was further bolstered by the

appointment of the renowned (para)psychologist Gardner Murphy (1895–1979) in 1952.[597] As the director of the Research Department, in 1964, Murphy offered a research position to Elmer Green, who had recently completed his PhD in biopsychology from the University of Chicago. The offer included the opportunity for Elmer and his wife Alyce to open a laboratory to pursue their research endeavours in psychophysiology with the help of BFT (L. J. Friedman 1991, xi, 284–289; E. Green and Green 1989, 19–20).

As part of their Voluntary Controls Program, Elmer and Alyce Green attempted to investigate subjects' ability to regulate psycho-physiological processes, with South Asian yogis representing their role models: "The earliest use of biofeedback training was probably made long ago by yogis learning to regulate the basal metabolism rate. This was accomplished by regulating breathing – for instance, learning to slow it to one breath per minute" (E. Green and Green 1989, 43). In addition to the significance they attached to yogis' presumed skills, the couple acknowledged preceding South Asian research as preparing the ground for their own investigations. In particular the research team revolving around B. K. Anand, G. S. Chhina, and B. Singh captured their interest (*ibid*., 123).

As noted earlier, Anand et al. investigated yogic phenomena at AIIMS using EEG (see Chapter 17.3.1.1.). However, the Greens were neither the first nor the only US-Americans to highlight the pioneering role of Anand et al. In his article "The Yogi in the Lab" (1974), White asserts that contemporary biofeedback research into paranormal abilities originated from their investigations:

> Now science is using biofeedback to investigate the nature of the psi ability associated with yogic training. In 1961, three South Asian researchers – Anand, Chhina and Singh – established the presence of alpha rhythms in yogis practicing meditation. Following their lead other researchers are assessing possible electroencephalograph correlates of ESP, especially alpha rhythms. (J. W. White 1974b, 87)

The German psychiatrist and psychotherapist Johannes H. Schultz (1884–1970) was another notable inspiration for the Greens' work in voluntary self-regulation. During the 1920s, Schultz developed his technique of "autogenic training", which he thoroughly outlined in his magnum opus *Das Autogene Training* (1932). While seated or lying on a bed, the research

[597] Murphy had assumed prestigious positions, including president of the "American Psychological Association". His research interests centred on experimental social psychology, psychoanalysis, and psychic research. He openly advocated for parapsychology, was an important pioneer of humanistic psychology, and significantly contributed to the development of the Human Potential movement through his work on human potentialities (L. J. Friedman 1991, 284–285).

subject repeats a set of training phrases, e.g., "the arm is heavy" or "the forehead is cool", aiming to attain a meditative or relaxed condition. As Baier demonstrated, Schultz's autogenic training was situated at the junction between experimental psychology, scientistic yoga, and body cultivation (Baier 2009b, 2:653–658). The Greens accurately pointed to Schultz's references to autohypnosis, as developed by the neurologist Oskar Vogt (1870–1959), and yoga. According to their reading of Schultz, his interest in self-regulation was triggered by reports about the abilities of South Asian yogis.[598] Although it remains contested whether yoga influenced the development of Schultz's technique, he unambiguously compared autogenic training with yoga (*ibid*., 654). In any case, the Greens considered autogenic training exercises "yogalike techniques" (E. Green and Green 1989, 22).

Their first experiments at the Menninger laboratory monitored autogenic training exercises, which they subsequently fused with biofeedback. The new variant of Schultz's technique comprised a fifteen-minute training session involving "self-regulating phrases" (*ibid*., 33) and medical instruments providing all sorts of biofeedback. They called this "Autogenic Feedback Training". Considering their understanding of autogenic training as "a system of 'Western yoga'" (*ibid*., 16), they subsequently framed their biofeedback experiments on self-regulation as a blend of autogenic training and yoga (E. Green and Green 1989, 26–34; E. Green 1984, 240).

These developments made the Greens particularly receptive to studying South Asian yogis, who claimed mastery of methods for self-regulation. Elmer and Alyce Green made the acquaintance of Swami Rama, a Rishikesh-based yoga teacher, in 1970.[599] While the Greens were eager to investigate Rama's presumed skills in self-regulation, the yogi was equally enthusiastic about being tested.[600] They recalled how he underscored, "I have never been wired up like this before, and I would like to find out what I can do" (Rama, in E. Green and Green 1989, 200). Over a three-day research stay at Menninger, the Greens conducted a few preliminary experiments with him. He demonstrated voluntary control of blood flow,

[598] Schultz frequently (and during that period in Europe also quite exclusively) referred to Kuvalayananda's empirical yoga research at Kaivalyadhama during the 1920s and 1930s (Baier 2009b, 2:654). Considering that the Greens emphasised the research by Anand et al., it is surprising that they omitted mention of Kuvalayananda. Refer to Chapter 13.2.1.2. for a discussion on Kuvalayananda's impact on kundalini research.

[599] Different sources report varying dates for the Menninger experiments with Rama, with his biographer, Rajmani Tigunait, stating 1969 and Elmer Green mentioning 1971 (Tigunait 2001, 245; E. Green 1984, 249).

[600] In addition to the Greens' account, other notable sources discussing the Menninger experiments with Rama include Doug Boyd, the son of Elmer and Alyce Green, whose book *Swami* (1995) recounts his close encounter with Rama, and Rajmani Tigunait's biography of Rama (2001).

temperature, and heartbeat. The experiment receiving the most attention was Rama's attempt to stop his heartbeat. Unlike previous experiments conducted by the Greens, Rama's demonstration was not a biofeedback session in a strict sense. He was seated in an armchair in a meditation pose without receiving any feedback on his heartbeat during the testing. To the surprise of all participants, Rama did not pause his heartbeat, but instead, the ECG recorded an atrial flutter, i.e., an abnormally rapid heart rhythm. As previously arranged, Alyce Green gave Rama a signal ("That's all") after monitoring his abnormal heart rhythm for approximately fifteen seconds. The participants considered Rama's demonstration a success – even if, in fact, he did not stop his heartbeat as anticipated (E. Green and Green 1989, 197–204; Rama et al. 1976, 25–26).

After Rama's departure, he sent Elmer Green a letter with "a few suggestions for future tests" (Rama, in E. Green and Green 1989, 205), and later that year (1970), Rama returned to the Menninger Foundation. While it is not essential to describe the exact procedure of the follow-up experiments, it is notable that his suggestions informed the research setting of his second stay (E. Green and Green 1989, 209). This indicates that Rama was not content with merely being a subject of the experiments; instead, he sought involvement in their design. A statement by his biographer, who was Rama's student, underscores that Rama followed his own trajectory: "Swamiji subjected himself to these scientific experiments [at the Menninger Foundation], but he was not a guinea pig; he was a teacher. He had come with a mission to teach, train, transform, and introduce the reality that transcends our known territories" (Tigunait 2001, 255). This accurately describes the frequent conflicts of interest between scientists and yogis throughout the field of empirical yoga research.[601] Due to divergent expectations, Rama terminated their collaboration ahead of schedule (E. Green 1984, 208–218).[602]

Despite its premature termination, the "Swami Rama Project" (D. Boyd 1995, vi) proved favourable for both sides. Rama's demonstration of stopping his heart from pumping blood

[601] Gopi Krishna also emphasised that his roles in various research foundations extended beyond that of a mere research subject, viewing himself as an active and integral member of these organisations. See, for instance, Chapter 15.3.1.

[602] Expectations increasingly diverged, with Rama being on lecture tours disseminating his teachings and the Greens wanting to keep a rigorous laboratory schedule. When Rama attended Christopher Hills' "World Conference on Scientific Yoga", which took place in New Delhi in December 1970, he did not return to the Menninger Foundation. Elmer Green, who was invited to the Conference, remained in Topeka. Intriguingly, Rama took two portable biofeedback machines to the conference and lectured on "Yoga and Biofeedback Training" (Green et al. 1979, 137; Hills 1977, 496).

for fifteen seconds resulted in his growing fame in the United States and beyond.[603] The Voluntary Controls Program equally benefitted from their research collaboration. The Greens spoke about their results on several occasions, including the annual meeting of the "Association for Humanistic Psychology" (1970) and the annual conference of the "International Transpersonal Association" (1982). Institutes interested in paranormal abilities and human potential, such as the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), the California Institute of Asian Studies (CIAS), and Esalen, celebrated the Greens' research in voluntary control (IONS, n.d.; Esalen 1971c, 22; E. Green and Green 1989, 208; S. Grof 1984, xi). Additionally, key protagonists within the entangled fields of consciousness research and transpersonal psychology, including Christopher Hills, John White, and Charles Tart, highlighted Elmer and Alyce Green's contributions to understanding the psychophysiology of altered states of consciousness (Hills 1977; J. W. White 1974a; Tart 1972).

As demonstrated in this chapter, the Greens increasingly viewed BFT as a key tool to demonstrate, measure, and invoke yogic attainments. A research trip to South Asia in 1973 reinforced their perception of biofeedback as the "Yoga of the West" (E. Green and Green 1989, 76). Subsequent research into kundalini with the help of electronic instruments, as discussed throughout the next chapters, largely builds on the Greens' distinct fusion of biofeedback, autogenic training, and yoga. While Krishna assumed a critical stance towards biofeedback instruments, their unparalleled popularity during the 1970s required his positioning. The next chapter will explore Krishna's uneasy relationship with both the machines and protagonists of biofeedback research.

21.3. The Relationship Between Biofeedback Pioneers and KRF

In his 1978 book *Secrets of Kundalini in Pachastavi*, Krishna criticised the frequent comparison of higher states of consciousness as induced by kundalini with conditions achieved through technology:

> The assertions made by the exponents of certain new-fangled methods of meditation or the designers of biofeedback devices that, with a few minutes daily exercise or a few hours practice on the machine, one can attain to the same mental state which took Indian

[603] In 1971, Rama opened the Himalayan Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy, which continues to run several branches worldwide (Tigunait 2001, 2).

> yogis or Zen masters a whole life to achieve, appear childish in the extreme. (Krishna 1978a, 129–130)

Krishna did not oppose biofeedback as a medical tool. His criticism was rather directed towards neurofeedback training and the associated claim that it could facilitate alpha and theta brainwave frequencies resembling those associated with higher states of consciousness (Degler 2023, 196). Although Krishna maintained this opinion throughout his career, he interacted with biofeedback pioneers and occasionally consented to examinations with technological instruments.

21.3.1. Elmer and Alyce Green's Relationship with Krishna

During the 1970s, Elmer and Alyce Green were the most important researchers at the intersection of yoga and biofeedback technology and, therefore, on Kieffer's radar. Although Krishna never met them, Kieffer assured him that Elmer Green "knows about you to some extent. […] He has received your books" (Kieffer to Krishna, October 15, 1973, LGK, box 6.10.2.). Initially, Kieffer considered a meeting between Elmer Green and Krishna a priceless opportunity to disseminate Krishna's views among scientists interested in consciousness, underscoring Green's esteemed position (*ibid*.). However, after a brief, personal meeting, Kieffer reconsidered this assessment.

While he praised Elmer Green's sincerity and character, he took issue with what he took to be Swami Rama's influence over Green:

> He is a nice man, sincere and dedicated. But his ideas about higher states of consciousness have been greatly influenced by Swami Rama. Apparently the swami is from some Buddhist sect […]. They emphasize Tantric yoga and believe they are fully knowledgeable about Kundalini.[604] So Elmer and his wife, Alicia [*sic*], are open to Kundalini, but they already have their minds made up as to what it is and how it works, etc. (Kieffer to Krishna, October 23, 1973, LGK, box 6.10.2.)

Despite Kieffer's statement, the Greens' published material demonstrates that kundalini played no significant role in their early biofeedback experiments. Nevertheless, they were certainly interested in kundalini.

[604] The writings of Rama addressed what he interpreted as the tantric notion of kundalini. However, he was not exclusively concerned with tantra (Rama et al. 1976; Tigunait 2001, 77).

In a 1972 letter to Kieffer, Elmer Green emphasised the value of kundalini research: "It is important to begin full research in the area of 'bioenergy control' and, as you say […], the solution to the crisis in our history may depend on it" (Green to Kieffer, July 31, 1972, LGK, box 6.2.5.). There is no doubt that by "research", he referred to biofeedback investigations. Green's use of "bioenergy control", on the other hand, is somewhat unusual; none of his writings mention it. Either he adopted it from a previous letter by Kieffer or created it by fusing the notion "bioenergy", a term that Krishna and his supporters frequently employed to depict kundalini, with "control", an essential term in the vocabulary of his research descriptions. Therefore, "bioenergy control" likely indicated Green's willingness to integrate kundalini research into the Voluntary Control Program at Menninger. For this purpose, Elmer Green expressed a certain interest in meeting Krishna, although not explicitly inviting him to the Menninger Foundation: "If Gopi Krishna should have a chance to stop at Topeka during a trip from East Coast to West Coast, we would like to meet him and talk about this area of research" (*ibid*.). Krishna's initial plans to travel to the United States changed, and thus the opportunity to meet the Greens at Menninger passed.

Another potential opportunity to meet, exchange ideas, and perhaps conduct tests with Krishna arose during the Greens' research trip to South Asia in 1973. During this trip, they sought to validate their hypotheses that yogis could control brain wave activities and autonomous functions (E. Green and Green 1989, 261–263). For this purpose, they brought a "portable psychophysiological laboratory" (*ibid*., 196) to conduct biofeedback experiments (Figure 20).

At least one of their subjects reported a kundalini experience. While the individual who claimed to have an awakened kundalini did not want to be tested, one of her students agreed to be connected to the biofeedback instruments while receiving shaktipat from her. The instrument recorded a decreased heart rate when the teacher touched his head. The Greens noted, "it would be interesting to conduct such a test in which *shakti* was transferred at a prearranged signal. The hand, never touching, could be maintained in place about an inch from the head. If properly designed, such an experiment might throw light on the idea of energy transference" (*ibid*., 263, original emphasis).

Figure 20: Elmer Green preparing a research subject for biofeedback experiments during Elmer and Alyce Green's research trip to South Asia in 1973 (ARC, Mss 1, Special Research Collections, UCSB; printed with permission of the Special Research Collections, UCSB).

The Greens' trip lasted from October 1973 to January 1974. Krishna returned from his fourth journey from Europe in April 1972 and did not leave again until November 1975. The Greens' schedule would therefore have matched perfectly with Krishna's. Nevertheless, the anticipated meeting did not happen. Degler writes that "for whatever reason, [Elmer] Green did not come to Delhi" (Degler 2023, 197). Their detailed travel report outlined in *Beyond Biofeedback* (1977), however, clearly shows that they visited Delhi at least twice (E. Green and Green 1989, 246, 251). It is rather questionable whether Krishna was not dwelling at Srinagar instead of Delhi during their visit. Usually, he spent the winters in New Delhi due to the cold temperatures in Srinagar. Despite this habit, a letter by Kieffer indicates the opposite: "The real deciding factor [for the Greens' cancellation] was the great distance involved in driving from Rishikesh to Srinagar. They hadn't even secured their bus as of the time Tom wrote" (Kieffer to Krishna, November 21, 1973, LGK, box 6.10.4.).[605] Krishna's disappointment with the missed opportunity was limited:

> I am not disappointed that Dr. Elmer Green has not finally come here. I am not sure if […] [they] are prepared to change their views. […] Since they have proceeded for some

[605] By "Tom", Kieffer refers to his son, Tom Kieffer, who happened to join the Greens' research team as a filming assistant for the documentary *Biofeedback: Yoga of the West*, which showcased the Greens' research trip to South Asia (E. Green and Green 1989, viii). Although Tom Kieffer did not influence the Greens' itinerary, he proved a valuable source of information for Kieffer and Krishna.

> distance in their own department it is not possible for them to retrace their steps. Therefore, it would be rather too much to expect that they would turn their support to us for that would mean a drastic change in their own area of investigation also. It is, therefore, wiser for us to depend on the assistance of the friends we have already made. (Krishna to Kieffer, November 14, 1973, LGK, box 6.10.4.)

This quote highlights Krishna's reluctance to work with Elmer and Alyce Green. It suggests that he was more focused on convincing scientists of a "truth" that he already "possessed" rather than collaborating to find empirical evidence for kundalini. Moreover, Krishna rejected what he perceived as the Greens' tendency toward sensationalism (*ibid*.).[606] Thus, he concluded that they were not suitable partners for collaboration.

However, other factors also contributed to Krishna and Kieffer's growing doubts about the Greens as potential collaborators. Beyond the aforementioned "misconception" regarding kundalini's "true" nature, Krishna and Kieffer had reservations about Elmer Green's interest in theosophy.[607] Prior to a meeting with the South Asian physiologist B. K. Anand, Krishna compared Green's presumed theosophical background with Anand and other AIIM scientists' roots in South Asian culture and religions:

> Possibly all these scientists are well up in the Indian tradition about Yoga. It would, therefore, be easier to talk to them about the scientific implications of what I assert than it would be with Dr. Green, who, as you say, is bread [*sic*] in the atmosphere created by the writings of Madan Blovalsky [*sic*] and others. (Krishna to Kieffer, December 21, 1972, LGK, box 6.10.3.)

In sum, despite Elmer and Alyce Greens' interest in kundalini and empirical yoga research, the Greens and Krishna seemed to share a mutual understanding that even if the Menninger Voluntary Control Program commenced research into kundalini, a collaboration between them was unlikely to be fruitful. Krishna showed little interest in such an undertaking, as the above quotes illustrate. Elmer and Alyce Green, on the other hand, had become somewhat

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[606] During their examination of Rama, the Greens expressed interest in his performance of psychic demonstrations. Additionally, during their trip to South Asia, they specifically sought extraordinary cases, such as yogis meditating on a bed of needles (E. Green and Green 1989, 212, 249).

[607] The Greens first delved into theosophy during the 1950s and maintained an interest in theosophical authors, as evidenced by references in *Beyond Biofeedback* (1977). While travelling in South Asia, they stayed at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Adyar and were invited to speak at their International Conference (1973) about their biofeedback research (E. Green and Green 1989, 13, 264). Kieffer and Krishna had collaborated frequently with the Theosophical Society themselves. Therefore, their criticism of the Greens' interest in the Theosophical Society may have been rather rooted in their disappointment over the cancelled meeting with Krishna than in the Greens' involvement with theosophyl per se.

disillusioned after their experience with Swami Rama and refrained from getting too involved with another South Asian teacher.

21.3.2. Gay G. Luce and Erik Peper's Relationship with Krishna

In June 1972, Krishna received two guests: Gay G. Luce (d. 2023) and Erik Peper (n.d.a.), who travelled to South Asia to visit Krishna in his Srinagar home.[608] The two had published an influential *New York Times Magazine* article on biofeedback (1971), were involved in the annual Council Grove Conferences, which Elmer Green initiated in 1969, and were generally considered experts in the field.[609] The initial reason for their journey was an offer by Gene Kieffer, who reached out to them and asked if they were interested in studying Gopi Krishna. Erik recalled that KRF provided them with plane tickets, recording equipment, and full board at the guesthouse of the Central KRF in Nishat for over two weeks, so they accepted the offer. Moreover, both were intrigued by the paranormal and sought scientific means to explore it. Gopi Krishna, as they assumed, seemed to be situated at the intersection between the paranormal and science. Peper recalled the remarkable hospitality and generous treatment they received, including servants and homemade food (Peper 2024; Luce and Peper 1971; Peper and Shaffer 2010, 144).

During their visit, the two biofeedback proponents interviewed Krishna for five hours daily for over two weeks, from June 20 through July 8, 1972.[610] The topics ranged from Krishna's biological interpretation of kundalini, to mystical experiences, his vision of kundalini research, and biofeedback (Degler 2023, 177; Krishna to Singh, October 27, 1973, LGK, box 6.10.4.). At one point during the interview, Gay Luce asked Krishna, "at what time in the future do you think you will be ready to undergo different scientific tests yourself?"

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[608] Portions of this chapter are based on an interview conducted with Erik Peper, conducted on April 2, 2024 (Peper 2024).

[609] Luce and Peper received the "National Media Award" from the "American Psychological Association" for their article "Biofeedback: Mind Over Body, Mind Over Mind" (American Psychological Foundation 1973, 78).

[610] The recorded interview was not transcribed until 1982. Despite KRF financing Peper and Luce's trip to South Asia, they did not use the gathered data earlier, mainly due to the technical format of the recordings. They were initially recorded on reel-to-reel and required conversion to cassettes, a complex and expensive process. By July 1982, Kieffer had accomplished the task, resulting in almost thirty hours of recordings spread across eighteen cassettes, which he marketed as "Phoenix Tapes". In addition, he enlisted someone to transcribe the interview, producing several hundred pages of transcription (Kieffer to Kobelt, July 15, 1982, LGK, box 6; Kieffer to Krishna, July 6, 1982, box 6.9.2.; Degler 2023, 178).

(Menos 2013)[611] Krishna's response sheds light on his reluctance to be tested: "I have no objection to scientific tests, but […] I don't want to offer myself to experimentation to people who have not first understood what I say" (*ibid*.).

This explanation resonates with the few occasions when Krishna presumably accepted being examined with medical instruments: At the Starnberg-based FWW and during "Project Consciousness" in South Asia. In both cases, Krishna cherished the scientific environment, mutual respect, and understanding of kundalini (W. I. Thompson 1974, 85; J. W. White 1977, 60).[612]

Luce and Peper had also brought along equipment with the hope of connecting Krishna to it.[613] According to Degler, Krishna "had, after evident cajoling by the two scientists, allowed himself to be hooked up to the biofeedback equipment they had brought with them. The result was that the pair were clearly amazed at the speed with which he was able to alter brain waves" (Degler 2023, 196). In an endnote, she adds: "Luce and Peper's recording was turned off during part of the biofeedback session, quite probably because of Gopi Krishna's general attitude regarding such experiments" (*ibid*., 309). What is striking about Degler's detailed presentation is Erik Peper's opposition to this version of the story, maintaining that they never monitored Krishna. While he mentioned that he and Luce carried the feedback equipment with them, he states that Krishna preferred not to be measured (Peper 2024). This is further underpinned by White's statement that "Gay [Luce] and Erik [Peper] were initially confused and disappointed about their inability to examine your brainwaves" (White to Krishna, May 7, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5.).

Although neither Peper nor Luce ever met Krishna again, they left on good terms. Peper expressed his deep respect for Krishna, whom he remembered as a generous and genuine person. Nevertheless, he seemed disappointed that he could not gather Krishna's data with his portable EEG. In March 1973, Erik Peper had contacted Kieffer, suggesting X-ray as a possible method to demonstrate kundalini, as Kieffer told Krishna:

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[611] Unfortunately, I was not able to access the transcript of the interview. However, several YouTube videos include portions of the recordings. The quotes are derived from these videos. I am indebted to Erik Peper for sending me the links.

[612] Karanjia mentioned in a *Blitz* article that "[Gopi Krishna's] accomplishment of Kundalini-Shakti is undergoing, at his own request, severe clinical tests in the United States" (Karanjia 1976d, 12). This rather unspecified assertion could not be verified by additional sources.

[613] Kieffer asserted that the equipment that Peper and Luce carried with them belonged to Elmer Green, who loaned the instruments to them. Peper himself could not recall from where they had rented the equipment (Kieffer to Krishna, October 15, 1973, LGK, box 6.10.2.).

> A possible scientific test of Kundalini might be the absence of calcification of the pineal gland. […] In normal adults it usually calcifies after puberty and hence can be indicated by an X-ray. If in the process of awakening of Kundalini the pineal also is awakened, one might expect the pineal to slowly decalcify. This might then be shown on the X-ray. Erik wonders whether you might not have a X-ray made in New Delhi. (Kieffer to Krishna, March 3, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.6.)

Krishna was likely not convinced by X-rays either. Thenceforth, Peper did not make any further attempts to encourage Krishna to undergo tests (Peper 2024).[614]

Luce maintained contact with Krishna through Gene Kieffer and tried to promote Krishna's cause in the United States. Perhaps the most notable event for Luce's efforts to disseminate knowledge about Gopi Krishna and kundalini was the 1973 Council Grove Conference. The Conference took place from April 30 through May 1, 1973, with Luce as its chair. Several affiliates of Esalen and proponents of consciousness research attended the meeting – Kieffer even praised it as a "historic event" (Kieffer to Krishna, October 29, 1972, LGK, box 6.3.2.). Luce invited Krishna to the conference and planned a "Gopi Krishna discussion" session (White to Krishna, May 7, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5.). This confirmed Kieffer's opinion that "she is very willing to help" (Kieffer to Krishna, March 12, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.6.).

However, neither Krishna nor Kieffer could attend the conference, which accounted for future suspicions and frustrations – particularly on Kieffer's part. As discussed above, White replaced Krishna and Kieffer at the gathering, summarising his impressions in a long report (see Chapter 16.1.1.). A major reason for Kieffer's dismay was White and Luce's opposing opinions about the success of the conference for Krishna's cause. White claimed "that a significant percentage of the conferees were either totally unaware of both the kundalini concept and your work, or else they were informed only at an elementary level" (White to Krishna, May 7, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5.). Luce, then again, assured Kieffer that "John White was not right in saying that there was no real interest in our work at the Conference. She [Luce] said that Elmer Green and others are very much interested. She said the seeds were definitely planted now and that something would come of it" (Kieffer to Krishna, May 31, 1973, LGK, box 6.10.4.). Apart from these conflicting reviews, White expressed concern about Krishna's reputation among the conference attendees:

[614] After his trip to South Asia, Peper specialised in holistic medicine and closely collaborated with Dora Kunz (1904–1999), a theosophist writer and energy healer (Peper 2024).

> I simply want to let you know that there is a criticism of you being made by a few people – not, so far as I know, including Gay and Erik, who remain your supporters – that if you truly have something of significance to reveal to the world and if you truly have undergone the transformation of consciousness which you declare in your writings, then you must submit yourself to science for examination. These critics say that your reluctance to be examined is evidence that your writings are partly fictional. (White to Krishna, May 7, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5.)

White's assessment of the overall opinion demonstrates that the Council Grove Conference was, in any case, decisive for Krishna's reputation among US-American biofeedback proponents.

Krishna was probably not too concerned about these developments. From his letters and other writings, one may infer that he held a low opinion of the methodologies utilised among proponents of biofeedback and consciousness research:

> Any of the scientists engaged in Consciousness research are […] committed to a certain type of investigation, some to Bio-Feed-Back [*sic*], some to hypnosis, some to the psychological aspects of Hatha Yoga, some to psychic phenomena, some to healing […]. Moreover they want something phenomenal or exciting to create interest in their own line of research. (Krishna to Kieffer, November 14, 1973, LGK, box 6.10.4.)

Kieffer, on the other hand, seemed deeply unsatisfied with the reactions at the Council Grove Conference. His initial confidence about its positive ramifications had completely changed. Much later, in 1982, he even pondered whether their ongoing setbacks were rooted in Peper and Luce's visit to South Asia and the subsequent Council Grove Conference: "I am quite confident now that our real difficulties over the past 10 years stem or have their roots in the Gay Luce and Eric Peper visit to India" (Kieffer to Krishna, July 6, 1982, LGK, box 6.9.2.). As will be discussed below in Chapter 23.4., Kieffer framed the overall attitude evolving from the Council Grove Conference as the "New Aquarian Conspiracy" (Kieffer 1994, 165).

21.4. Summary

The developments discussed in this chapter have resulted in a stronger integration of biofeedback instruments and empirical yoga research. Swami Rama's agreement to participate in a series of experiments garnered significant media attention and captured the interest of a growing number of scientists. Kundalini played a somewhat marginal role in

these early biofeedback circles. However, its frequent association with physiological processes made the energy notion an appealing concept for biofeedback pioneers, who were interested in exploring the link between mind and body. The underlying hypothesis suggested that if biofeedback training could unravel and control various states of consciousness, it could also detect and regulate components of the subtle body.

Gopi Krishna and Gene Kieffer did not join in the enthusiasm for Elmer and Alyce Greens' experiments and biofeedback training in general. In fact, Krishna was concerned about the potential implications of empirical research into consciousness. He feared that it could hinder the type of research he envisioned, which would involve the examination of psycho-physiological concomitants in individuals with a supposedly awakened kundalini. However, given Krishna's vague descriptions of the experiments he intended to conduct, the purported "significant difference" between his empirical research and that of the Greens remains questionable. Additionally, he worried that the general understanding of higher states of consciousness might become conflated with various altered states of consciousness – a concern he had previously expressed regarding psychedelic substances.

These reasons contributed to his hesitations about working with biofeedback pioneers, and, with the exception of Gay Luce and Erik Peper, he chose not to engage in such collaboration. The fact that KRF financed their research trip to South Asia demonstrates that Krishna's opinion was not set in stone from the outset of his kundalini project.

22. The Kundalini Clinic

In 1972, three men attended a so-called shaktipat initiation by Swami Muktananda in his ashram in Oakland, California.[615] In total about one thousand people attended the initiation event, and the three men witnessed what they perceived as a "mass awakening". Looking at each other, they thought, "we have been hospitalising people for this kind of experience. We have been diagnosing them as psychotic, delusional, and schizophrenic" (Sovatsky 2023).[616] The three men in question were the psychiatrists Lee Sannella (1916–2010), Harold Streitfeld (1921–1983), and Gabriel Cousens (b. 1943), the initiators of what was to become known as San Francisco's Kundalini Clinic. According to their successor and current head of the Clinic, Stuart Sovatsky (b. 1949), Muktananda's shaktipat initiation revealed to them the utmost necessity of an institution offering alternative treatment for "spiritual awakenings" that exhibit symptoms resembling those of a mental illness.[617] As a reaction to this experience and against the backdrop of the flourishing anti-psychiatry movement (Chapter 20.4.3.), Sannella, Streitfeld, and Cousens rented a Victorian house on Union Street in San Francisco and converted it into a therapy office (*ibid*.).

Sovatsky's perspective on the founding of the Clinic is contrasted by Cousens' account, which introduced the intriguing element of a technological invention. According to him, he and Sannella developed a device called the "Kundalini Machine", designed to activate kundalini.[618] In 1975, as Cousens recalled, they presented their invention to Swami Muktananda. Despite acknowledging their effort, Muktananda asserted that only shaktipat

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[615] Shaktipat, as already outlined in Chapter 7.2., is a religious technique that aims to transmit the guru's grace to a disciple. This transmission may be realised through gaze, touch, or mere presence. Many disciples of Swami Muktananda – a self-proclaimed authority on kundalini (see Chapter 7) – claimed that their kundalini moved upon receiving Muktananda's shaktipat (Muller-Ortega 1997, 409).

[616] Stuart Sovatsky narrated this story (Sovatsky 2023). The historical accuracy of his narration remains unverifiable. Given the scarcity of sources on the development of the Kundalini Clinic, much of the information is drawn from two extensive interviews with Sovatsky conducted in March 2023, an interview with Cousens in November 2023, and archival material.

[617] Stuart Sovatsky's role as the current head of the Kundalini Clinic is not uncontested. Gabriel Cousens made a similar claim (Cousens 2023).

[618] As elaborated below, Itzhak Bentov developed a technological device called the transcendometer (Chapter 22.1.1.3.). While his invention did not aim to trigger kundalini or induce a sublime state of consciousness, it endeavoured to measure such conditions. According to Cousens, he and Sannella drew inspiration from some of Bentov's ideas but expanded upon them significantly, with Bentov playing no role in developing the Kundalini Machine. However, Cousens' statement is rather implausible. Despite Bentov having already worked on his transcendometer when Sannella and Cousens allegedly commenced construction of the Machine in 1973, Bentov had not yet crossed paths with Sannella nor published his book *Stalking the Wild Pendulum* (1977). Therefore, in 1973, Cousens and Sannella must have still been ignorant of Bentov's concepts (Cousens 2023; Muir 2005, 186).

could effectively activate kundalini. He invited Sannella and Cousens to participate in a shaktipat meditation, which they ultimately did in 1975. Cousens recounted experiencing a profound kundalini awakening during this event, framing it as a personal initiation. Subsequently, Muktananda appointed Sannella and Cousens to work with kundalini, specifically to assist individuals grappling with the experience (Cousens 2023).

Thus, the founding of the Kundalini Clinic is enveloped in two distinct origin narratives, each told by a key figure involved in the Clinic's history. Both narratives converge on a pivotal element: the profound impact of Muktananda and his shaktipat meditation on the Clinic's inception.[619] While Sovatsky's narrative posits that shaktipat was the sole origin, Cousens maintained that they were already engaged in the technologisation of the kundalini experience prior to their initiation. In this version, they subsequently received a directive from Muktananda to work therapeutically with kundalini based on their expertise, and charged through shaktipat.[620] Considering the current state of knowledge, it remains indeterminate which narrative aligns more closely with reality.

Another thread adds to the origin myths of the Kundalini Clinic. Between 1973 and 1974, Lee Sannella made the acquaintance of Itzhak Bentov, an Israeli-American engineer and inventor whose theories on the physiological symptoms attending a kundalini activation significantly influenced Sannella's own views. Therefore, Bentov's contribution is key to fully comprehending Sannella's theoretical framework, which arguably shaped the overall orientation of the Clinic.

In this chapter, I will examine the Kundalini Clinic by highlighting its sociocultural environment, structure, concepts, activities, and treatment. First, a special focus will be placed on its pivotal protagonists, the working definition of kundalini, and the Clinic's historical context, followed by a reconstruction of the Clinic, its functions, and activities, and finally, an elaboration of the Clinic's relation to Krishna and his KRF.

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[619] Both Cousens and Streitfeld became devoted disciples of Muktananda. Cousens was initiated by Muktananda in 1975 and lived with him for the next seven years. Streitfeld bought a house in Oakland that was in proximity to the Muktananda ashram. Moreover, many of the patients at the Clinic had made the therapists' acquaintance at the Muktananda ashram. Their involvement in the ashram hence supported the promotion of the Clinic (Cousens 2023; Sovatsky 2023). Muktananda played no significant role in Sannella's life.

[620] Encouraged by Muktananda's assertion, Cousens became equally convinced that shaktipat was more powerful than any machine and Cousens thenceforth aimed to "re-balance" his clients' kundalini by transmitting energy to them (Cousens 2023).

22.1. Itzhak Bentov and Lee Sannella's Physio-Kundalini Models

Mary Scott counts among the few authors who thoroughly reviewed the idea of physio-kundalini as elaborated by the "Sannella-Bentov group" (Scott 1983, 6).[621] Her book, *Kundalini in the Physical World* (1983), underscores the collaborative element of their model while simultaneously emphasising the differences between Sannella and Bentov (*ibid*., 182–195). This chapter follows Scott's approach insofar as it accentuates the significance of their collaboration, which proved seminal in founding the Kundalini Clinic and implementing "physio-kundalini" as a clinical unit. Bentov and Sannella will be discussed in more detail since no other early protagonist at the Clinic developed a theory that played an equally notable role for its framework.[622]

This chapter will first introduce Bentov, his mechanical and holographic views, his definition of kundalini as a physiological purification mechanism, and his empirical research into kundalini. This will be followed by an examination of Sannella and his physiological understanding of kundalini as a rebirth process, which was largely influenced by Bentov. These detailed accounts are necessary to fully comprehend the Kundalini Clinic's physiological framework.

22.1.1. Itzhak Bentov and the Mechanics of Consciousness

Itzhak "Ben" Bentov (1923–1979) was an Israeli-American inventor, engineer, and advocate of technology-based consciousness research.[623] He is best known for his book *Stalking the*

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[621] Mary Scott acknowledged Bentov's pivotal role in the development of what she calls "kundalini science" (Scott 2006, 111). Other authors who took notice of Bentov's ideas included Bruce Greyson, who credits Bentov in his article "Near-Death Experiences and the Physio-Kundalini Syndrome" (2009) with formulating "a scientifically verifiable version of the kundalini concept" (Greyson 2009, 176). Moreover, John White included Bentov's article "Micromotion of the Body as a Factor in the Development of the Nervous System" in his edited volume *Kundalini. Evolution and Enlightenment* (1976).

[622] I am not aware of any records in which Streitfeld explicitly states his views on kundalini. Sovatsky, who had closely worked with Streitfeld for several years, classified Streitfeld as a non-believer who viewed kundalini as a biological force only, detaching it from any religious meaning (Sovatsky 2023). In his (unrelated) book *God's Plan: The Complete Guide to the Future* (1981), Streitfeld provides a glossary of the most essential "Hindu expressions" used in the book. Surprisingly, kundalini is not among them (Streitfeld 1981, xiv–xv). This omission perhaps confirms Sovatsky's assessment. On the other hand, Streitfeld was a loyal disciple of Muktananda. Therefore, kundalini must have played a certain role in his religious practice.

[623] For this chapter, two sources are of foremost importance: Sannella's *On Genius* (2006) and Sharona Muir's *The Book of Telling* (2005). While Sannella portrayed Bentov idealistically, Muir – Bentov's daughter – was critical of her father's work and questioned his mental state as his explorations into the nature of the cosmos and consciousness progressed. Her memories and criticism allow an invigorating perspective on Bentov.

Wild Pendulum (1977) and his contribution to Lee Sannella's *Kundalini: Psychosis or Transcendence* (1976),[624] where he discussed the evolution of the nervous system in relation to kundalini experiences.[625] As an engineer, Bentov aimed to explore the potential effects of altered states of consciousness induced by meditation on human physiology. Prior to his death in a plane crash at age fifty-five, he dedicated most of his time to (self-)experiments in his basement laboratories. While somewhat of an enigma, with only a few sources discussing his life and work, his contributions to kundalini research are noteworthy.

22.1.1.1. Bentov's View of the Universe

Bentov was born Imre Tobias in Humenné, former Czechoslovakia (present-day Slovakia), into a Jewish family. In 1940, he was among some one hundred other children who were relocated to what was then known as Mandatory Palestine. There, he co-founded Kibbutz Shoval, an agricultural community situated in the Negev desert. He was the only survivor of his family, all the other members of which fell victim to the Holocaust (Muir 2005, 67–68; Sannella 2006, 72–73).[626]

During Bentov's time in the Middle East, one incident played a particular role in the further development of his life. Prior to the outbreak of the first Arab-Israeli War (1948–1949), Bentov joined the Science Corps, known by its Hebrew acronym *Hemmed* (or *Hemed*), whose task was the development of weapons and military technology (Karpin 2006, 35).[627] Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres (1923–2016) credited this secret group of scientists as laying "the foundation of Israel's industrial and defense technology" (Peres, in

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Moreover, Bentov's own books help elucidate his views on consciousness, the universe, and kundalini – all three central topics of his oeuvre.

[624] In Chapter 22, I will use the abbreviated title, *Kundalini*, for *Kundalini: Psychosis or Transcendence*. In the remaining part of the thesis the abbreviated title *Kundalini* refers to Krishna's *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man*.

[625] Bentov's third wife, Mirtala Bentov (b. 1929), posthumously published Bentov's second book, *A Cosmic Book. On the Mechanics of Creation* (1988). Based on a preliminary draft, research notes, and taped lectures, she completed the book, which explores consciousness and cosmology from a spiritual-mechanic viewpoint. For this study, it is of secondary interest as kundalini barely plays a role in it (Bentov 1988a).

[626] Lee Sannella states that upon hearing the message from his parents and siblings' death, Bentov changed his name, with Itzhak denoting "laughter" or "he will laugh" and Bentov "son of good". When moving to the United States, friends started referring to him as "Ben" (Sannella 2006, 72).

[627] The Science Corps' research was initially carried out clandestinely before moving to the Weizman Institute of Science, located in Rehovot, today's Israel. As part of the Israeli Ministry of Defense, Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, was directly involved in the Science Corps' activities. Karpin's *The Bomb in the Basement* (2006) provides a good overview of this early scientific wing of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

Muir 2005, 6). Despite not having earned a formal degree, Bentov became an integral part of the group. The reason for his acceptance was a weapon, which became known as Loretta. It was Bentov's first notable invention (Muir 2005, 5, 45).

After serving in the Science Corps for some years, Bentov was invited to the United States to work as an engineer. He ultimately moved there in 1954 and became a biomedical engineer and industry consultant. In his basement laboratory, situated below a Catholic Church in Belmont, Massachusetts, he developed a steerable catheter, celebrated as a major biomedical achievement. He then founded a research and development company called I.B. Development and collaborated with medical hospitals and other companies developing medical instruments (Abele 2010; Sannella 2006, 73).[628]

However, Bentov was much more than an inventor of weapons and biomedical devices. He was a self-proclaimed explorer of consciousness who developed a model of the universe, which he hoped to demonstrate empirically. Intriguingly, his burgeoning fascination with the potential connection between consciousness and the universe propelled his fame far beyond that garnered by his previous inventions. In *The Book of Telling* (2005), Sharona Muir, Bentov's daughter, described Bentov's career and vision with the following words:

> [My father] went to the United States to become, first, a self-taught medical inventor nicknamed Invention-a-Minute Ben. Then an author whose book, *Stalking the Wild Pendulum: On the Mechanics of Consciousness*, made him a popular guru, attracting thousands of spiritual seekers. […] A tall, vividly handsome man, with black upswept brows and a signature laugh, soft and childlike, he lectured to packed halls; and like all true utopians who cannot live with humanity unless they plan to improve it, he was widely loved. (Muir 2005, 6, original emphasis)

As Muir underscores in this quote, it was the publication of *Stalking the Wild Pendulum: On the Mechanics of Consciousness* (1977) that "transformed [Bentov] from a hi-tech hermit into a semi-celebrity" (*ibid*., 181). The book generated significant attention due to his explanatory model of the universe and consciousness, which Bentov detailed within its pages. Supplemented with whimsical illustrations, Bentov emphasised that his model resulted from "intuitive insights" (Bentov 1988b, 2) and (self-)experimentations. Muir further suggested that Bentov's meditation practice and, more generally, "the popularized

[628] According to Sannella, Bentov's company, I.B. Developments, stood for "In-Basement-Development", a typical notion of Bentov's "whimsical style" (Tiller, in Bentov 1988b, ix; Sannella 2006, 73).

Eastern religious ideas of the time" (Muir 2005, 91) significantly contributed to his theories (*ibid*., 123).

In a nutshell, Bentov assumed that the universe was a hologram or interference pattern whose parts were interconnected, composed of waves, and constantly vibrating:

> We live in a vibrating world. Everywhere are waves. Sound waves, light waves, electro-magnetism, the ballistic energy of the body […]. In fact, this whole world is rippling, shaking like jelly. […] My hunch is, all these wave energies, affecting one another, make a giant interference pattern containing all the information in the universe. (Bentov, in Muir 2005, 16)

Bentov employed the metaphor of the hologram to explain the structure, creation, and meaning of the universe.[629] He also used his holographic theories to make sense of consciousness, the physical and the subtle body.[630] Deeming his model "holistic", he underscored that it encompassed "not only the physical, observable universe […] but also other 'realities' […], like psychokineses [*sic*] […], telepathy, out-of-body phenomena, clairvoyance, etc." (Bentov 1988b, 2).

According to Bentov, altered states of consciousness governed these "realities".[631] These states assumed a central role, as for Bentov they represented the pivotal link between the human mind and the holographic structure of the universe. Bentov maintained that consciousness was yet another vibrating interference pattern, which potentially – when altered – enabled access to the "giant hologram composed of the universe's vibration" (Muir 2005, 92). In other words, when attaining an altered state of consciousness, one could interact with the cosmos and thereby gain insights into the entirety of the information accumulated in the holographic universe. As Bentov emphasised, interactions between

[629] Bentov's model countered the Big Bang theory, suggesting that the universe does not increasingly expand but rather continuously collapses and re-emerges. He called this the "continuous bang universe" (Bentov 1988a, 15) and attributed matter's incessant motion to the holographic nature of the universe (Bentov 1988b, 143–144, 158; Sannella 2006, 78–79).

[630] Bentov was not the only representative of theories revolving around "holographic consciousness". Other important advocates include David Bohm and Karl Pribram. At the 1978 symposium "New Dimensions of Consciousness" (New York), Bentov spoke along with Pribram. A newsletter report indicates that Bentov's "examination of the holographically evolving human nervous system nicely complemented" (Rosen 1979, 11) Pribram's presentation (Gopi Krishna also attended and spoke at the event). However, no information is available on which terms they were. Bentov, in any case, did not refer to Pribram (or Bohm) in his book (Bentov 1988b; 1988a). For an introduction to the "holographic paradigm" in the context of New Age Science, see Hanegraaff (1996, 67–68).

[631] Bentov referred to Charles Tart's theory of "altered states of consciousness" (1969) when addressing consciousness and its possibility of alteration (Bentov 1988b, 61).

human consciousness and the cosmos happened constantly and instantaneously. However, in a normal waking state, one could not decode the received information or remember the interactions (Bentov 1988b, 76, 158). Muir explains Bentov's views regarding these glimpses into the holographic universe with the following words:

> Our very bodies, vibrating up and down to the beat of our hearts, are pendulums. They must expand to the ends of the universe and contract again […]. That is the wild pendulum. […] As the body blurs to all points of the universe, it's in contact with the vibrations of all nature, including those produced by thinking brains. But it can't register them […]; our nervous systems don't work that fast. But in altered states of consciousness, like deep meditation, […] [we] recall, some of the amazing information in the universal hologram. (Muir 2005, 92–93)

Bentov's model of the universe sought to elucidate the interconnectedness of all matter in the cosmos, proposing that vibrations and wave patterns linked everything from the tiniest cells to vast galaxies. Assuming a somewhat animistic perspective, he further aimed to clarify how all matter, beyond mere interconnectedness, could interact and communicate when vibrating at identical frequencies. Referring to the concept of altered states of consciousness, he argued that their modified vibration enabled temporary omniscience and direct contact with the fundamental source of existence. Bentov thus attributed flashes of inspiration, profound insights, and mystical encounters to the shifts in vibrational frequencies (Bentov 1988b, 109; Muir 2005, 95).[632]

Another captivating facet of his model involved delineating the physical body and its associated subtle bodies – or, as he called it, "other" bodies. The physical body, as Bentov explained, comprises vibrating electromagnetic energy fields able to interact with its corresponding physical environment, which resonates at the same frequency. Conversely, other bodies vibrate at higher frequencies and permeate the physical body.[633] These alternate bodies become accessible during altered states of consciousness, aligning with the frequencies of the respective bodies involved. In Bentov's words:

[632] It is telling that Bentov initially intended to title his first book *The Relationship of Psychic Frequency to Consciousness* (Meek 1974, 87).

[633] Bentov posited that the physical body is enveloped, in sequential order, by the "health aura", the "astral body", the "mental body", and the "causal body". He argued that as these bodies extend further from the physical body, their vibratory frequencies increasingly diverge from that of the physical form (Bentov 1988b, 112).

> The [physical] body is interpenetrated by "bodies" or fields having higher vibratory rates. They extend beyond the limits of the physical body […]. This is what clairvoyants can perceive as colorful egg-shaped halos or auras surrounding our physical bodies. […] The most strongly visible of them would be the astral body because of the nearness of its vibratory scale to the physical. (Bentov 1988b, 111–112)

Interactions at the physical level are thus most effectively conducted when vibrating at the frequency of the physical body. Transitioning the interference pattern leads to entry into a different "reality", characterised by an altered state of consciousness and a body with a frequency rate differing from that of the physical body. In other words, numerous "realities" exist in Bentov's model, each vibrating at distinct frequencies and imperceptible unless one's consciousness aligns with the corresponding rate of vibration (Bentov 1988b, 110–112; Muir 2005, 96).

As an engineer and inventor, Bentov did not confine himself to theoretical descriptions of his model. Instead, he sought to validate it empirically. For his experiments on consciousness, he primarily used two devices: a transcendometer and a ballistocardiograph.[634] The experiments conducted with these devices significantly informed his views on kundalini and were based on a distinctive definition of consciousness:

> We can say that [consciousness] is the capacity of a system to respond to stimuli. […] Suppose we stimulate an atom by applying ultraviolet light or other electromagnetic radiation to it. One or more of the electrons may get excited and respond by jumping into a higher orbit farther away from the nucleus. […] By applying different stimuli, we shall elicit different responses from this system. […] The higher and the more complex the organism, the more varied and the more numerous the responses per stimulus. (Bentov 1988b, 77)

Bentov characterised the number of responses as the "quantity of consciousness" and the level or complexity of responses as the "quality of consciousness", thereby establishing the framework for his experimental investigations (*ibid*., 77–79).

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[634] Sannella mentions that Bentov built a "sensitometer" for further experiments. He designed the device to apply "a pulsing magnetic field to either side of the head. Those inclined towards kundalini arousal would report significant subjective effects" (Sannella 2006, 76). According to Sannella, he and Bentov conducted experiments involving a few subjects exposed to the sensitometer (*ibid*., 75–76). However, neither Bentov nor Muir made any reference to the sensitometer in their writings, suggesting that Bentov considered other devices to be more significant. Moreover, since Sannella omitted additional explanations, it is utterly unclear what a "sensitometer" should entail and how it differed from "sensitometers" applied in photography – which clearly do not utilise a "pulsating magnetic field" but rather the sensitivity of photographic paper to light.

His theories of the holographic nature of the universe are rooted in an animistic perspective, which posited that consciousness pervaded all matter. According to his framework, altering one's consciousness allowed entry into alternate realities, granting access to information spanning all space and time. Considering the pivotal role of altered states of consciousness within his model, he attached significant importance to the means and techniques for inducing such states. Consequently, kundalini, which according to Bentov facilitated altered states of consciousness, assumed a dominant position in his model.

22.1.1.2. Bentov's Physiological Kundalini Model

Bentov detailed his views on kundalini in his article "Micromotion of the Body as a Factor in the Development of the Nervous System", appended to Sannella's *Kundalini* (1976), and in an appended chapter of his *Stalking the Wild Pendulum* (1977), titled "The Physio-Kundalini Syndrome". Although both pieces revolve around the same topic, they cater to different audiences. "Micromotion of the Body" employs a sophisticated language tailored for scientific circles, while "The Physio-Kundalini Syndrome" elucidates the same argument using simple language, day-to-day metaphors, and a whimsical style.[635] This chapter serves as a mere overview of Bentov's intricate kundalini model, considering both sources.

Breaking down Bentov's argument to its core, he asserts the following: The human nervous system harbours a latent potential for evolution. Kundalini, viewed as a sensory stimulus, acts as a catalyst, expediting this development. While the stimulus initiates a sequence of physiological symptoms, it primarily operates as a current coursing through the sensory and motor cortex of each hemisphere of the brain. Essentially, bodily responses and psychological states associated with the rise of kundalini stem from its cerebral stimulation. To comprehensively delineate his views, Bentov employed different terminologies across his writings: the "kundalini effect" (Bentov 1976, 73) signifies kundalini's role in fostering the development of the nervous system; the "sensory-motor cortex syndrome" (*ibid*., 87)[636]

[635] As Bentov underscored, Earl Ettienne (PhD Harvard Medical School), Richard P. Ingrasci (M.D. Boston State Hospital), and William A Tiller (PhD Stanford University) reviewed the article and presumably refined its scientific presentation. Tiller wrote the preface for *Stalking the Wild Pendulum*. Therein, he referred to Bentov as his friend and praised his ideas as a "useful model for the development of our future science" (Tiller, in Bentov 1988b, ix). No details on Ettienne and Ingrasci's relationship with Bentov are available. Muir emphasised that "despite having no college degree, [Bentov] regularly consulted with engineers, scientists, and medical doctors" (Muir 2005, 184; Bentov 1976, 93).

[636] In *Stalking the Wild Pendulum*, Bentov slightly modified the term "sensory-motor cortex syndrome" by adding the prefix "progressive". However, he did not explicitly specify the distinction between "progressive

characterises kundalini's traversal along the cerebral cortices and delineates its attendant physiological and mental symptoms; and the "physio-kundalini syndrome" (Bentov 1988b, 174) particularly stresses the physiological symptoms accompanying kundalini's movement. Each of these designations elucidates Bentov's physiological interpretation of kundalini, embedded within his overarching model of the universe.[637] Of these designations, only the physio-kundalini syndrome played a role beyond his own writings.

The "classic" movement of kundalini, characterised by its ascent from the base of the spine along the central channel of the subtle body toward the crown of the head, where it dissolves, occupies a marginal position in Bentov's model.[638] In *Stalking the Wild Pendulum*, Bentov characterises kundalini as an energy notion imagined as a "luminous serpent" (*ibid*., 176), which may bring about psychic powers and other paranormal capacities (*ibid*., 176–177). Although he references kundalini in relation to an "exotic", "mysterious", and "esoteric" yoga tradition, the main purpose of invoking this concept was to bolster his own views (*ibid*., 175–177).

Unlike premodern descriptions of *kuṇḍalinī*, Bentov suggested a dual movement of kundalini within the human body: one along the cerebral cortices and the other through the physical body. While these two cycles happen simultaneously, the latter is contingent upon the former. In other words, kundalini's movement through the physical body requires prior stimulation of the sensory and motor cortices. This stimulation can be induced by micromotions within the body, such as blood circulation, acoustic vibrations, such as one's own heartbeat, or externally through mechanical exposure. These micromotions cause vibrations in the lateral ventricles, thereby stimulating and polarising the sensory and motor cortices, which in turn initiate the "kundalini current" (Bentov 1976, 85) along the cerebral cortices (Bentov 1976, 83–85; 1988b, 178–180).

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sensory-motor cortex syndrome" and "sensory-motor cortex syndrome". Considering his theory on stress relief, which will be outlined below, the term "progressive" might imply that kundalini progressively resolves areas of stress in the body and brain (Bentov 1988b, 172–173, 177).

[637] While Bentov's primary focus was on the physiological symptoms of the physio-kundalini syndrome, he also addressed its psychological aspects. He advocated for Roberto Assagioli's system of Psychosynthesis to elucidate the psychological components of the physio-kundalini syndrome. In *Stalking the Wild Pendulum*, Bentov included a lengthy quote from Assagioli, who suggests that the ascent of consciousness into new realms invariably coincides with nervous, mental, and emotional upheavals (Bentov 1988b, 184–185; Assagioli 1971).

[638] Bentov describes the "classical" interpretation of kundalini along theosophical lines (see Chapter 5.2.). This involves the perception of kundalini as dormant energy and associating the chakras with their assumed anatomical equivalents, i.e., nerve centres and endocrine glands (Bentov 1976, 71).

According to Bentov, cerebral stimulation is directly linked to the onset of a sequence of physiological symptoms: "A stimulus [is] moving along the [cerebral] cortex. This moving stimulus may be viewed as a current. According to our hypothesis, this current is responsible for the effects of the 'awakened kundalini' on the body" (Bentov 1976, 83). Accordingly, he refers to kundalini's physical ascent as the "path of initial stimulus" (Bentov 1988b, 188), commencing from the left toe and progressing sequentially through the left ankle, calve, thigh, hip, along the spine to the head, and then descending back down to the hip (Figure 21).[639] The "kundalini current" simultaneously traverses along the cortices. Bentov supported the modified route through the physical body with case studies that reported a tingling sensation originating at the left toe prior to their kundalini experience.[640] This process may be accompanied by sensations such as numbness, tingling, headaches, and other aches (Bentov 1976, 87; 1988b, 180, 187–190).

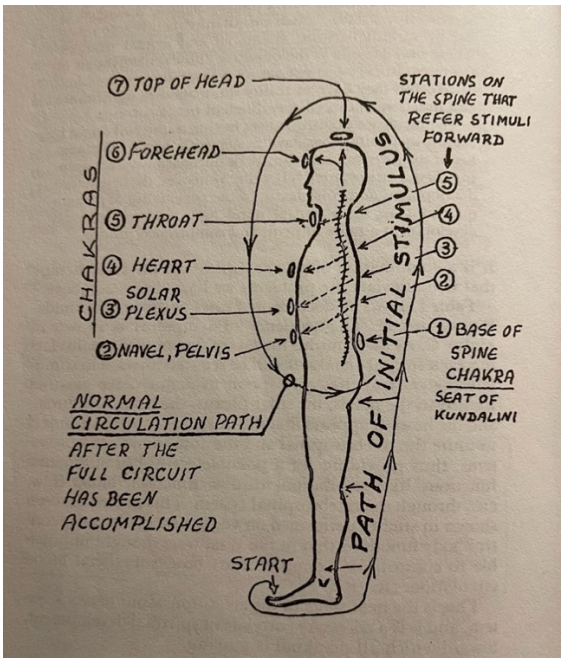

Figure 21: Itzhak Bentov's illustrated image of physio-kundalini's "path of initial stimulus" and its subsequent "normal circulation path" (Bentov 1988b, 186).

[639] Bentov only provides a vague explanation for why the initial stimulus would begin on the left side, associating it with the common attribution of intuition, emotions, and creativity to the right hemisphere. Moreover, he does not unequivocally specify whether the stimulus descends on the right or the left side (Bentov 1988b, 180).

[640] It is noteworthy that Sannella supported Bentov's assertion that the left toe marked the origin of kundalini's physical route. According to him, several of his patients at the Kundalini Clinic reported pain in the left toe at the beginning of their physio-kundalini cycle (Sannella 1976, 39, 41).

Bentov introduces an intriguing explanatory theory for the occurrence of kundalini's accompanying symptoms. These are supposed to be indications of physiological and psychological stress release. When referring to "stress", Bentov actually means "energy patterns [that] have to be converted and eliminated from the body" (Bentov 1988b, 173). During kundalini's physical route, it may encounter such areas of stress, bringing its journey in that particular part of the body to a halt until its stress has been resolved. The action of stress release manifests itself in involuntary body movements, temporary physiological pain, and emotional states, such as brief outbursts of tears or lengthy episodes of depression. Upon improvement, kundalini resumes its journey until it encounters yet another area of stress. The accomplishment of kundalini's journey, therefore, relies on the full resolution of physiological and psychological distress: "When the kundalini has run its course, the body is basically free of deep-seated stresses, and since the body is reflected in the cortex, we may say that the brain is also relieved of stresses. Thus, the kundalini is a great stress-relieving system" (Bentov 1988b, 181, 173; 1976, 88–89).

The duration of kundalini's journey and the severity of accompanying symptoms serve as indicators of the amount of stress accumulated within one's body. The alleviation of stress can be further facilitated through various practices such as meditation, hatha yoga postures, and breathing exercises. Consequently, individuals proficient in these practices tend to exhibit fewer areas of stress within their bodies. This implies that kundalini's movement through a previously "cleansed" body is smoother, encountering fewer obstacles along its path. This further explains, according to Bentov, why the typical sequence of symptoms, progressing from toe to head to hip, may not emerge uniformly in each case, contingent upon their proficiency in the above mentioned meditative and body-related techniques (Bentov 1976, 88; 1988b, 173).

Once the initial physical and cerebral loops are completed, marked by kundalini's return to the hip, the sequence of physiological symptoms comes to an end, and the physio-kundalini enters a new phase of physical movement: the "normal circulation path" (Bentov 1988b, 188) (Figure 21). Kundalini now circulates between the hip and the head, approximately following its "classic" route. Bentov emphasised that with kundalini's transition to "normal" circulation, the nervous system accomplished a complete purification from stress and gained increased resistance, preventing the accumulation of further stress (*ibid*., 181–183). Thus, the physiological symptoms accompanying the "path of initial stimulus" play a central role in Bentov's model, distinguishing the full-body cycle from its subsequent "normal" cycle, which is devoid of physiological symptoms.

Employing a self-illustrated cortical homunculus, Bentov aimed to demonstrate how the "kundalini current" corresponds to its simultaneous journey through the full body (Figure 22). According to this idea, the "kundalini current" initially stimulates a particular region in the brain devoted to the toe, which aligns with the homunculus' toe. It then sends a corresponding signal to the physical toe, thereby triggering kundalini's physical journey (*ibid*., 178–180).

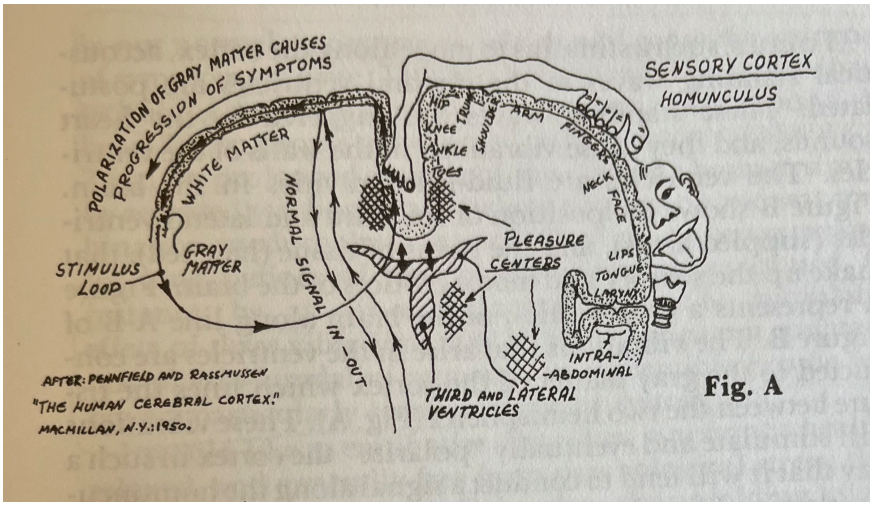

Figure 22: Itzhak Bentov's illustrated cortical homunculus, depicting the "kundalini current" along the sensory cortex, with pleasure centres (Bentov 1988b, 179).

Utilising the cortical homunculus as a "map" of the physical body, Bentov asserted that he could reconstruct kundalini's physical movement and discern its correlated physiological symptoms:

> This sequence of points on the cortex is called the "homunculus" or the "little man", for if one draws a picture of the parts of the body to which the points in the cortex are connected, a distorted human form results […]. I am trying to show that the layout of points on both the sensory and the motor cortices corresponds closely to the path the kundalini takes in the body. This path is described in Esoteric literature. (*ibid*., 179)[641]

[641] There is a significant difference between Bentov's use of "esoteric literature" in his first and second publication. In "Micromotion of the Body", Gopi Krishna's *Higher Consciousness* (1974) and Richard M. Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901) serve as Bentov's primary sources for the description of kundalini's awakening (Bentov 1976, 83). In *Stalking the Wild Pendulum*, in contrast, he appended a much shorter but more accurate bibliography. Its eight titles included Leadbeater's *The Chakras* (1927), Krishna's *Kundalini* (1970) and *Awakening of Kundalini* (1975), Rele's *The Mysterious Kundalini* (1927), Assagioli's *Psychosynthesis* (1965), research reports from the Menninger Foundation, and Sannella's *Kundalini* (1976) (Bentov 1988b, 194).

Premodern South Asian texts depict *kuṇḍalinī*'s dissolution in the highest *cakra* as the ultimate goal of its activation, resulting in one's liberation. Bentov implemented this religious idea in his physiological model by making a correspondence between kundalini's conclusion of the full-body circuit with the premodern image of *kuṇḍalinī* reaching the highest *cakra*. As detailed above, with the completion of the "path of initial stimulus", the "kundalini current" along the cortices comes to a closure, too. According to Bentov's model, alongside its closure, self-stimulation of the pleasure centres in the brain occurs, which results in a state of bliss (Figure 22). In other words, what yogic literature characterises as religious ecstasy, Bentov construed as kundalini's crossing and self-stimulation of a cerebral pleasure centre (*ibid*., 180).

According to his model, kundalini's activation either occurs as a result of meditation or spontaneously. The spontaneous triggering of kundalini might be attributed to exposure to mechanical or acoustic vibrations or electromagnetic waves within one's immediate environment.[642] Instances of vibratory exposure include riding in a car with a suspension system producing vibrations within the range of four to seven Hertz or being subjected to acoustic vibrations from an air-conditioning duct: "The cumulative effect of these vibrations may be able to trigger a spontaneous physio-kundalini sequence in susceptible people who have a particularly sensitive nervous system" (Bentov 1988b, 181; 1976, 71–72).

In both cases, whether spontaneous or gradual, the activation process follows the same trajectory and targets the goal of evolving the nervous system. However, as outlined above, the severity of the physiological symptoms might vary depending on the individual's preparatory level, with spontaneous cases suffering more often from severe physiological symptoms. Moreover, the spontaneous development of the nervous system may cause a psychological overload, potentially leading to behaviour that might result in misdiagnoses of schizophrenia and hospitalisation. Bentov attributes such behaviour to the sudden alteration of consciousness (Bentov 1988b, 174, 183).

As outlined in the previous chapter, he associated altered states of consciousness with a transition of one's interference pattern. This implies entering a different reality and adopting another "body" whose frequency rate varies from the "physical frequency". According to this idea, the spontaneous development of the nervous system, as triggered by kundalini, suddenly allows an unprepared individual to align their consciousness with the vibrational

[642] While Bentov associated electromagnetic waves with uncontrolled activation of kundalini, he further suggested that electromagnetic waves could be used in an experimental setting when employing a biofeedback machine to induce a controlled activation of kundalini (Bentov 1988b, 181).

rate of other realities, unveiling a novel range of visual and audible information. Bentov considers this process dangerous:

> They have been catapulted suddenly into a situation in which they are functioning in more than one reality. They can see and hear things occurring in our neighboring realities, that is the astral or other higher realities, because their "frequency response" has been broadened. However, since they did not have a gradual systematic evolution that meditation affords, they cannot handle the situation. The onslaught of information may be overwhelming, and they begin to mix and confuse two or three realities. (*ibid*., 183)

Considering the increasing number of persons practising meditation, some of whom were likely to become "Kundalini Casualties" (Sannella 2006, 78), Bentov saw the necessity for adapted medical treatment and pleaded against kundalini's pathologisation. Instead, as Bentov highlighted, there is an increased need for "holistic medical centers" (Bentov 1988b, 184), which offer a combination of psychological and physiological treatment. The staff must comprise a diverse range of experts, including physicians, psychotherapists, chiropractors, osteopaths, acupuncturists, and "natural psychic healers" (*ibid*.), all of whom were either trained or experienced in the physio-kundalini syndrome. They were able to properly diagnose and treat the symptoms of stress release and assist those whose physical cycle had been completed but were overwhelmed by the new realities and psychic attainments. Accordingly, such centres integrated medical and religious aspects of kundalini's movement (*ibid*., 183–185).

There is no doubt that Bentov based his description of "holistic medical centers" on the Kundalini Clinic. Furthermore, while not openly addressed, Bentov advocated basic arguments of the anti-psychiatry movement. For instance, he maintained that drastic psychiatric treatments, such as electroshock or heavy sedatives, were responsible for severe damage to highly sensitive nervous systems of "advanced mutants of the human race" (*ibid*., 175), assessing this as "a tremendous waste of human potential" (*ibid*.). Moreover, he claimed that 25–30 percent of institutionalised schizophrenics were misdiagnosed, indicating the failure of psychiatry to diagnose and treat the physio-kundalini syndrome adequately (Bentov 1976, 89; 1988b, 175, 183).

In a dialogue with a Unitarian minister, who was hosting a TV show, Bentov takes the side of the geniuses misdiagnosed as insane:

> "Ben, can you tell me, tell us, are there actually people whose nervous systems have evolved to the point you're talking about, where they're actually superhuman beings? And if so, what would they look like?" […]
> "Vell" [*sic*], he says, and coughs. "Suppose you tell me. Where do you think we are finding the most spiritually evolved people?"
> "Ah, in universities-they would be intellectuals, our great artists, uh, Nobel Prize-winning scientists.…" […]
> "No, no", he murmurs. "They are sitting in mental institutions". (Muir 2005, 99)

This brief dialogue clearly demonstrates Bentov's position on hospitalised individuals, which aligns with Sannella's viewpoint and the overall perspective of the Spiritual Emergency Network (SEN), which will be discussed below.[643] Furthermore, Bentov's views echo Krishna's emphasis on the religious, intellectual, and physical superiority of individuals with an active kundalini. Both men advocated for the acknowledgement of a sublime class of illuminated individuals. They further shared the belief that spontaneous activation of kundalini might cause tremendous physiological effects – with Bentov referencing Krishna's works in that regard (Bentov 1976, 83).

The hypothesis that certain symptoms and challenges are inherent in the spontaneous development of the nervous system informed Bentov's experimental investigations. These experiments, conducted with the transcendometer and a modified ballistocardiograph, were intended to gather empirical evidence for kundalini's existence, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

22.1.1.3. Empirical Explorations into Consciousness

"Invention-a-Minute Ben" started experiments with his latest creation, the transcendometer, in 1973.[644] The transcendometer was basically a chair linked to a sensor, a signal-processing

[643] Sannella credited Bentov with initiating what eventually would become known as the Spiritual Emergency Network (SEN). However, neither Christina Grof, who established SEN in 1980, nor Stan Grof referred to Bentov in any of their publications. Instead, they referred to Sannella as the initiator of the physio-kundalini process, considering his book *Kundalini* (1976) as a central inspiration for SEN (Sannella 2006, 78; C. Grof and Grof 2017, 33).

[644] Intriguingly, neither *Stalking the Wild Pendulum* nor *A Cosmic Book* mentions the transcendometer. However, both Sannella and Muir report on it (Sannella 2006, 77; Muir 2005, 177–190). Muir even accessed Bentov's laboratory notes, where he detailed his experiments, the equipment used, and the intended applications of the transcendometer (Muir 2005, 184–189). The transcendometer certainly occupied a central role in Bentov's research. However, its shortcomings and incompleteness perhaps prompted Bentov not to mention it in his books.

unit, and a strip-chart recorder. Its intention was to "*measure and outline the human aura*" (Bentov, in Muir 2005, 187, original emphasis), along with detecting shifts in consciousness. In other words, the measurements to be carried out with the transcendometer were intended to underpin Bentov's model of the universe and his mechanics of consciousness. According to Sannella, Bentov's initial inspiration for this apparatus was his initiation into Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation. At the behest of Maharishi, Bentov developed a device supposedly capable of measuring altered states of consciousness (Sannella 2006, 77).[645]

According to Muir, as with all his devices, Bentov mainly self-experimented with the transcendometer. However, after five years, he additionally conducted experiments with somewhere between thirteen and fifteen befriended research subjects. They were asked to sit in the chair, meditate,[646] and concentrate on reaching higher states of consciousness. During the experiment, a sensor traversed the research subject's body, capturing ballistic and electromagnetic signals, which were then mapped against the corresponding physical areas from which they emanated (Muir 2005, 185, 188).[647]

Bentov suggested several clinical applications of the chair, e.g., measuring heart contractions or determining anxiety, but, as Muir underscored, the true purpose of the transcendometer was "to detect, and measure, the transcendent moment of the mind's union with God" (*ibid*., 188). He kept several research notebooks documenting his experiments. In one of these, he stated, "*I see this tool as a major development which may shed light on the otherwise fuzzy and contradicting claims of the people involved in the study of the paranormal*" (Bentov, in Muir 2005, 188, original emphasis). Ultimately, Bentov aimed to gain access to the divine realm through mechanical understanding and a technological device.

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[645] Unlike R. K. Wallace and other followers of the Maharishi with a scientific background, Bentov maintained his independence. While exchanging ideas and theories with Maharishi's scientific entourage, he dissociated himself. Moreover, he expressed some criticism of Maharishi's indifferent attitude regarding kundalini's potential dangers. This indicates that while he discussed his ideas with Maharishi and TM scientists, Bentov was no scientist follower of Maharishi. Nevertheless, Maharishi "had great respect and admiration for Ben and his work" (Sannella 2006, 78). See Chapter 16.3.1. for a discussion of Maharishi's TM and his "scientist followers".

[646] Bentov refers to Transcendental Meditation (TM) whenever he mentions meditation. However, while TM represented Bentov's foundational and paramount meditative technique, he never recommended it in his writings. Instead, he emphasises the importance of practising meditation "properly", systematically, and consistently over several years (Bentov 1976, 71, 84).

[647] The body locations scrutinised by the transcendometer's sensor appeared to correspond with the prevalent concept of the position of the chakras. No information is available as to whether this was intended (Muir 2005, 185).

Although not explicitly expressed, it seems plausible that Bentov employed the transcendometer to detect empirical evidence for the rise and movement of kundalini. By the time he began using it in 1973, he had apparently undergone "kundalini experiences" for several years. While it is challenging to pinpoint the exact moment of Bentov's presumed kundalini activation, according to Sannella it correlated with the beginning of his meditation practice: "[Bentov] was soon [after taking up meditation] involved in an increasingly active arousal of the energies of kundalini in himself and began a detailed study of this phenomenon in his well-equipped laboratory" (Sannella 2006, 73, 77).[648] Tiller mentioned in the preface to *Stalking the Wild Pendulum* that Bentov had engaged in regular meditation for approximately ten years, meaning roughly since 1967 (Tiller, in Bentov 1988b, ix). At the same time, Sannella emphasised that conclusions drawn from the work with the transcendometer represented the basis for Bentov's physiological kundalini model. Owing to these inconsistencies, this study infers that Bentov's initial kundalini experience and early experiments date back to a period between the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In addition to the transcendometer, Bentov employed a modified ballistocardiograph[649] to gather evidence for physiological correlations of psychic activities.[650] Ballistocardiography is a noninvasive method for measuring and analysing the mechanical activity of the heart and the flow of blood through the cardiovascular system by detecting the body's recoil movements in response to the ejection of blood with each heartbeat. The method and its associated device, the ballistocardiograph, were developed in the late nineteenth century but did not attract significant scientific attention until the 1940s through the 1980s, during which they underwent a period of intensive research (Giovangrandi et al. 2011, 2).

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[648] Considering Bentov's background in TM, it is likely that upon his initiation by Maharishi, Bentov commenced experiencing what he took to be kundalini's rise.

[649] I was not able to locate a definitive explanation regarding the nature of the modification made to the ballistocardiograph. At one point, Bentov mentions using the ballistocardiograph along with a "capacitive probe apparatus" and a "capacitor" to measure the body's micromotion. Although these devices can be used in ballistocardiography, they are not the primary component in sensing body motions – an accelerometer usually accomplishes this. Instead, capacitors are used to store electric energy, while capacitive probe apparatuses are employed to measure capacitance (the ability of an object to store energy). Perhaps the combined use of a ballistocardiograph with a capacitive probe apparatus and a capacitor constituted the modification Bentov referred to (Bentov 1976, 73; Smith 1974).

[650] Bentov mentioned experiments with a ballistocardiograph only in his article "Micromotion of the Body as a Factor in the Development of the Nervous System" (1976), with Arnold Weissler's edited volume *Non-Invasive Cardiology* (1974) serving as his main reference (Bentov 1976, 71–73). Moreover, neither Muir nor Sannella referred to ballistocardiography as a method employed by Bentov. Scott mentions it once briefly, as a device used to monitor physiological reactions to a physio-kundalini cycle (Scott 1983, 183). Therefore, as with the "sensitometer", the extent of Bentov's use of ballistocardiography is somewhat difficult to determine.

Bentov described two experimental setups for the application of the ballistocardiograph. In one scenario, the research subject was seated between two metal plates – one positioned above the head and the other beneath the seat. In the second setup, the subject reclined on a platform equipped with accelerometers (Bentov 1976, 73). Each setup is intended to measure micromotions in the body and determine an assumed pulsating magnetic field within the brain. Moreover, another goal of the experiments was to find empirical evidence for kundalini's contribution to the development of the nervous system, targeting its activity as a stimulus in the brain. The experiment's fundamental premise posited that the body exhibited micromotions, e.g., due to the heart's ejection of blood into the aorta, the human body's main artery. During meditation, these micromotions induce the entrainment of kundalini's movement in a closed loop on the sensory and motor cortices of each hemisphere, i.e., the "kundalini current", presumably generating a fluctuating magnetic field within the brain (*ibid*., 71–72).[651]

Despite describing the experiment's premise, parameters, and expected outcomes, Bentov refrained from offering a thorough experiment report or analysing its results in tandem with the experiment. Consequently, reconstructing the exact procedure of the experiments, such as the number of research subjects involved, the frequency of measurements, and the specific devices utilised for each purpose, poses a challenge. Moreover, Bentov fails to establish a correlation between the experimental setup and his research findings. These purportedly demonstrate kundalini's role in activating a magnetic field within the brain and facilitating omniscience by aligning with the frequency of higher states of consciousness. Therefore, despite underscoring the accuracy and singularity of these claims, Bentov did not offer accessible details of his experimental findings (Bentov 1976, 91; 1988b, 182).

Bentov himself appeared to acknowledge the shortcomings of his experiments and their findings, considering them preliminary. This notwithstanding, his environment celebrated his invention and the possibilities it entailed (Bentov 1976, 73; Muir 2005, 182). Muir remembered how Bentov had gained significant fame among alternative religious groups and proponents of parapsychology and the paranormal: "He, Itzik [*sic*] Bentov, was their

[651] Bentov further targeted other "oscillators" generated by the body's micromotions, e.g., acoustic plane waves caused by the skull's acceleration of the brain. He claimed that if these were all tuned into the same rhythm, a pulsating magnetic field around the head would emerge. This would increase the functioning of the nervous and circulatory systems and further allow communication with other magnetic fields in the environment, vibrating at the same frequency (Bentov 1976, 72, 86).

hero. […] Indian gurus swung their wise heads in figure eights when he spoke to them.[652] He fit here, in the New Age, among teleports and telepaths, psychics and channelers, in the merry old land of Oz" (Muir 2005, 181).

Moreover, his mechanics of consciousness and the work on his devices got him to travel to many places, including Japan, Switzerland, Haiti, Canada, Israel, and the Esalen Institute in Big Sur (*ibid*., 178). During one of these trips, scheduled for Japan, Bentov met Lee Sannella: "How prophetic for Ben and me. We were immediately simpatico. We connected like two lost brothers" (Sannella 2006, 73). Their personal bonding aside, Bentov and Sannella's trip to Japan holds significant value for the history of kundalini's scientification during the late twentieth century. It resulted in Sannella's seminal publication *Kundalini*, Bentov's formulation of what he first framed as the "kundalini effect" (Bentov 1976, 73) and later expanded as "Physio-Kundalini Syndrome" (Bentov 1988b, 174), and in the first international endeavour to validate kundalini empirically with the help of technological devices.

As this and the previous chapters have demonstrated, Bentov's kundalini experiments had a dual objective: to provide empirical evidence for its physical existence and to induce its movement and stress-releasing activity. He pursued these objectives in several experimental settings. However, he did not elaborate further on his theories until he travelled to Japan and revisited his investigations. It is therefore appropriate to suggest that Sannella and Bentov's theories on kundalini can be traced directly back to what Sannella termed a "life-changing trip to Hiroshi Motoyama's lab in Japan" (Sannella 2006, 73).

22.1.2. Bentov, Motoyama, and Sannella's Experimental Investigations into Kundalini

Sannella and Bentov considered Motoyama's laboratory at his Tokyo Institute for Religious Psychology (IRP) as "the best in the world – excluding those top-secret Government

[652] By "Indian gurus" Muir likely referred to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (see above) and Swami Satyananda Saraswati, who held Bentov in high esteem. In *Kundalini Tantra* (1984), Satyananda dedicates substantial portions to Bentov's physio-kundalini model. The chapter "The Cosmic Trigger" discusses Bentov's physio-kundalini syndrome and his experiments, praising him as a "world renowned scientist" (Satyananda 1984, 25, 235–246). As discussed below, Satyananda also respected Motoyama, who perhaps introduced Satyananda to Bentov's model. Refer to the Chapter 13.2.2. for further information on Satyananda.

installations in the USSR and the US" (Sannella 2006, 74).[653] Therefore, according to Sannella, Bentov's goal for the trip to Japan was to "repeat and confirm his own lab findings [at Motoyama's laboratory]" (*ibid*.). Sannella's remark about Bentov's "lab findings" presumably refers to preliminary results from his self-experimentation with the transcendometer.[654] In any case, the "lab findings" in question evidently pertained to Bentov's investigations into kundalini, or more precisely, what he termed the "kundalini current". The precise timing of Bentov and Sannella's trip to Japan, and thus their initial encounter, remains unclosed. However, they likely convened between 1973 and 1974, embarking on their collaborative endeavour during this interval.[655] While Bentov himself does not mention his trip to Japan, Sannella provides accounts of the journey and the experiments in both of his books. From these accounts, I will aim to reconstruct this experimental attempt to detect kundalini's physiological activity.

According to Sannella, Bentov "had the intrinsic physiological skill […] to go into a highly-resonant state at will" (*ibid*., 75). By "high-resonant", Sannella referred to a meditative state wherein Bentov generated micromotions by synchronising pulse, cerebral-spinal fluid, and breath. As detailed previously, Bentov's model suggests that these micromotions could potentially trigger the "kundalini current" and stimulate the pleasure centres (see Chapter 22.1.1.2.). In other words, Sannella asserted that Bentov was capable of inducing kundalini's movement and a state of bliss at will. Due to these attributed capabilities, Sannella evaluated Bentov as the ideal research subject for experiments aimed at monitoring the correlation between physiology and altered states of consciousness. After several years of self-experimentation, Bentov was used to the procedure. Consequently, it was Bentov who underwent an examination in Motoyama's laboratory. The team employed Motoyama's Chakra Instrument (CI) and a sensitive magnetometer to gauge Bentov's physiological activities while meditating (Sannella 2006, 75; 1976, 68).

In the first experimental setup, Motoyama placed two sensors on each side of Bentov's head with the aim of evaluating his micromotions. The findings "showed amplitude differences

[653] The below excursus on Hiroshi Motoyama discusses his parapsychological contributions to modern kundalini discourses.

[654] Since information on the ballistocardiograph is scarce, it is impossible at this stage to determine whether Bentov had already conducted experiments with this device before travelling to Japan.

[655] It is reasonable to infer that Bentov and Sannella's trip to Japan transpired after Bentov had started working on his transcendometer in 1973 and before Sannella published *Kundalini* in 1976. Moreover, engineer and paranormal explorer George W. Meek (n.d.a.), another participant in the Japan trip, referenced Motoyama and Bentov in his 1974 book *From Enigma to Science* (Muir 2005, 186; Sannella 2006, 77; Meek 1974, 69–99).

in the body's micro-motions on the right and left sides of the head" (Sannella 1976, 66–67), with the left side exhibiting approximately fifty percent greater amplitude. As the session progressed and Bentov entered deeper states of meditation, the discrepancies in micromotions between the right and left sides markedly decreased, eventually reaching near equality. Based on the collected data, the research team inferred that an altered state of consciousness could influence the distribution of micromotions between the left and right hemispheres of the brain (Sannella 1976, 67; 2006, 75).

In the second experiment, the team utilised the CI to target the pattern of electrical activity in Bentov's brain. Sannella described the experiment and its "unexpected" findings with the following words:

> We did an interesting experiment […] using H. Motoyama's electric field sensor, or "chakra measuring device". When the subject sat quietly in this machine, we could observe the usual EEG waveform. After a few minutes of deep meditation, […] there suddenly appeared a diminution of these signals […]. To our surprise, this new waveform was in the frequency range of 350 to 500 Hz, much higher than the 0-to-50 Hz frequency range of a normal EEG waveform. These higher frequency EEG signals could be an easily measured physiological indicator of certain meditative states and out-of-the-body experiences. (Sannella 1976, 68)

The experiment's findings stirred much discussion among the research participants. Sannella, Bentov, and Motoyama seemed convinced they were on the verge of uncovering electrophysiological evidence supporting claims about higher states of consciousness.[656] The remarkably high EEG frequency potentially indicated the existence of a physiological variable that varies in proportion to the alteration of consciousness. Sannella maintained that all of Bentov's theories, including those concerning micromotions, kundalini's cerebral stimulation, and consciousness as a vibrating interference pattern, were validated by the experiments. He did not specify what exactly stimulated his conviction that Bentov's hypotheses were verified by the experiment (Sannella 2006, 76).

However, they all agreed that these promising results required further research to collect additional data on the physiology of altered states of consciousness and the role of kundalini. Sannella suggested that further research might include low-level magneto-encephalography tests in a special shielded enclosure. Bentov underscored the necessity to "develop a

[656] As discussed below, Motoyama had already postulated such claims after several years of empirical research with his AMI and CI. Refer to the excursus on Motoyama, Chapter 3, for a brief overview of Motoyama's empirical research endeavours.

biofeedback system to aid meditators in reaching resonance" (Sannella 1976, 54). In other words, Sannella and Bentov hoped to conduct additional experiments to confirm their hypotheses and develop techniques to trigger and perhaps navigate kundalini's physiological movement (Sannella 1976, 69; Bentov 1976, 55).

The source material does not provide any information as to what extent Motoyama was involved in subsequent undertakings. Considering Sannella's detailed report from their trip to Japan, it seems unlikely that he would have omitted to report on an ensuing trip. It is therefore improbable that the three men repeated their experiments in Motoyama's laboratory or elsewhere in the original constellation. Motoyama seemed particularly fond of Bentov, highlighting his role in then current endeavours to study "nonphysical energy" and establishing the Motoyama-Bentov fund after his passing.[657] Conversely, despite Motoyama spending a significant amount of time in California in the early 1990s, when he founded CIHS, there are no indications of any ongoing contact between Sannella and Motoyama or the Kundalini Clinic and CIHS (Motoyama 1978, 59; Sannella 2006, 93).[658]

The evaluated source material suggests that Bentov's theories, inventions, and experiments particularly inspired Sannella to delve deeper into the topic of kundalini. While Motoyama had previously engaged in clinical studies examining physiological equivalents of subtle energies and subtle centres, Sannella's fascination was substantially sparked by his encounter with Bentov. Motoyama nonetheless played a pivotal role as an intermediary in the unfolding events and a central figure in kundalini research. By providing his laboratory, he enabled Bentov to revisit his investigations and, as Sannella posited, confirm his theories. For this study, the experiments conducted at Motoyama's laboratory at IRP hold particular value as they mark the first international collaboration in empirical kundalini research.

It is worth considering whether Sannella's book *Kundalini* and his involvement at the Kundalini Clinic would have come to fruition without his meeting with Bentov in Japan and witnessing his brainwaves exceeding the common range while being exposed to the CI at Motoyama's laboratory. Therefore, by inspiring Sannella, Bentov significantly contributed

[657] The three-month fellowship was administered by Motoyama's IARP and dedicated to Bentov's memory. A 1982 newsletter of IARP describes the Motoyama-Bentov Fund with the following words: "To commemorate Mr. Bentov's blessed memory, Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama, Founder and President of the I.A.R.P., established the Motoyama-Bentov Fund in 1980, to assist promising young people who wish to study human existence in its holistic sense. This was Mr. Bentov's field of study" (IARP 1982).

[658] By the time Motoyama established CIHS in 1992, Sannella was no longer involved at the Kundalini Clinic – he had retired around 1980. Sovatsky reported that while Motoyama wielded influence on the experimental approach at the Clinic, he personally had never met him (Sovatsky 2023).

to the founding of the Kundalini Clinic.[659] Moreover, his views on the universe, altered states of consciousness, and the physio-kundalini syndrome informed Sannella's own views and clinical studies. These will be outlined in the next chapter.

22.1.3. Lee Sannella and His Book *Kundalini: Psychosis or Transcendence* (1976)

Lee Sannella assumed several roles during his life, including those of a psychiatrist, ophthalmologist, musician, author, and religious seeker. As a psychiatrist, he was particularly interested in altered states of consciousness, psychic phenomena, religious-induced crises, and the use of electronic devices in clinical psychiatry. Before his involvement at the Kundalini Clinic, he practised ophthalmology and psychiatry in San Francisco and the East Bay and lectured at Sonoma State College. From 1962 through 1972, Sannella ran a psychiatric clinic in Berkeley, along with an in-patient service for substance abuse problems. Moreover, at Esalen, he taught several seminars (1967), participated in a symposium (1973), and was invited as a resident physician during an Esalen-coordinated workshop (April through June 1976) (Legacy 2010; *Esalen Catalogs*, n.d.).[660]

Although Sannella commenced his career as a scientist (he graduated from Yale Medical School in 1940), he had a deep-rooted interest in religion and parapsychology. From the 1960s onwards, his parapsychological interpretations of experiments with electronic devices and his use of religious concepts in clinical settings demonstrate his scientistic tendencies (Esalen 1973, 9). Moreover, he was interested in the tie between altered states of consciousness and psychopharmacology, as suggested in the *Esalen Catalogs*: "Dr. Lee S. Sannella […] has developed his own technique for rapid and controlled evocation of altered states of consciousness, using methylphenidate and CO_2 gas" (Esalen 1967c, 13).[661] Owing

[659] In his book *Spiritual Nutrition and the Rainbow Diet* (1986), Cousens mentions Bentov as the originator of the physio-kundalini model. While never having met Bentov, Cousens acknowledged his valuable insights and mentioned that he and Sannella had incorporated these ideas into their theories (Cousens 1986, 52; 2023).

[660] The seminars taught at Esalen were "A Seminar on Death" (Big Sur, November 17–19, 1967) and "Altered States of Consciousness" (co-led with Leslie LeCron, Big Sur, November 19–21, 1967). The symposium was titled "Spiritual and Therapeutic Tyranny: The Willingness to Submit" (San Francisco, December 7–8, 1973). His residency was part of an Esalen co-ordinated workshop at Westerbeke Ranch, Sonoma, California (Esalen 1967c, 13; 1973, 9; 1976, 4).

[661] Unfortunately, no further information is available on Sannella's psychopharmacological technique involving methylphenidate and carbon dioxide (CO_2), either in the *Esalen Catalogs* or elsewhere. Reports about self-experiments with CO_2 reduction trace back to the nineteenth century and were frequently linked to the hibernation of yogi fakirs (Kraler 2022, 233). N. C. Paul and Kuvalayananda (see Chapters 5.2.1. and 5.3.5.) address the topic in association with pranayama (*ibid*., 316).

to severe health issues (he caught tuberculosis and suffered from it for over seventeen years), Sannella engaged with religious ideas, "leading eventually to remarkable journeys and his book, *Kundalini*" (Sannella 2006, back cover).

Several "gurus" of the long Sixties played a role in Sannella's personal and professional life. Inspired by Bentov, he got involved with TM, which he initially enjoyed and practised regularly. However, Sannella disapproved of Maharishi's somewhat indifferent attitude toward kundalini, which he considered irresponsible.[662] He especially criticised Maharishi for not providing any support for practitioners of TM, who underwent challenging kundalini experiences – and who would commonly end up at the Kundalini Clinic: "I was disappointed to see that their [TM] organization never developed any facility to assist their practitioners when the arousal of the kundalini energies would occur" (*ibid*., 78). For these reasons, Sannella "became disenchanted and soon left the TM movement" (*ibid*.). Ultimately, he found his inspiration in Da Free John (1939–2008), crediting the US-American religious teacher as his "primary spiritual guide" (Legacy 2010).[663] After his retirement, Sannella and his partner, who was a fervent follower of Da Free John, moved to Lake County, California, where the self-proclaimed religious master ran a community centre (Sovatsky 2023).

Sannella was more of an empiricist than a devoted writer. Throughout his career, he published three books: *Kundalini: Psychosis or Transcendence* (1976), *The Visionary Life: Selected Writings of Lee Sannella* (2003), and *On Genius: An Evolutionary Force Inherent in Every Being* (2006).[664] Without a doubt, *Kundalini* is by far his most significant publication.

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[662] Sannella believed Maharishi's levitation practices would more frequently arouse kundalini than lead to yogic flight. Moreover, he assumed that Maharishi was suffering from a disturbing kundalini experience and thus "dismissed all kundalini phenomena as a nuisance which potentially threatened his levitation program" (Sannella 2006, 78).

[663] The US-American religious teacher Da Free John, also known as Adi Da Samraj (b. Franklin Albert Jones, 1939–2008), belonged to the category that Ann Gleig and Lola Williamson termed "homegrown gurus" (Gleig and Williamson 2013). Inspired by Muktananda's Siddha Yoga, Da Free John framed his teachings as non-duality. For a brief period during the second half of the twentieth century, Da Free John was incredibly hyped among US-American (and particularly Californian) religious seekers. Following the publication of his book *Garbage and the Goddess: The Last Miracles and Final Spiritual Instructions of Bubba Free John* (1974), an increasing number of people acknowledged Da Free John as a realised being, with such notable followers as Georg Feuerstein, Ken Wilber, John White, and Lee Sannella. Like many other self-proclaimed gurus, Da Free John was eventually sharply criticised for immoral behaviour and involved in legal matters (Feuerstein 1991, 80–103; Kripal 2005b, 193–213).

[664] As a psychiatrist and ophthalmologist, he likely published scientific articles; however, I was not able to locate any.

The main argument discussed in *Kundalini* pertains to the interpretation of the physio-kundalini cycle as a rebirth process (see Chapter 22.1.4.). This claim is supported with the help of a survey of diverse cultures and religious traditions, along with case histories from the Clinic. With sixty-nine pages (excluding appendixes), *Kundalini* is relatively small but has proved very successful: The book sold over fifty thousand copies (as of 2006), was translated into three languages, and counts "a minor classic in the field" (Sannella 2006, vii), as Sannella puts it, and a "breakthrough contribution" (Feuerstein, in Sannella 2006, ix), as the South Asianist Georg Feuerstein framed it. Stan and Christina Grof enthusiastically state: "Over the years we have mentioned and recommended this little jewel in our lectures and seminars more times than any other single book. A ground-breaking work of great value" (Grofs, in Sannella 1987, back cover).

Aside from these ardent "insider" voices, it is nearly impossible to find any critical reviews of the book. It would be interesting to see how (or if) the book was reviewed by psychologists and psychotherapists who were not affiliated with or friends of Sannella. Perhaps the book remained within a closed circle of sympathetic supporters, who accounted for its hype. This assumption is further supported by the fact that despite Sannella's training as a psychiatrist, he struggled to find a publisher. Like Gopi Krishna, Sannella ultimately self-published *Kundalini*.[665] Owing to its success, in 1987, Integral Publishing published a revised version of the book titled *The Kundalini Experience: Psychosis or Transcendence*.

As already mentioned, *Kundalini* was closely tied to Itzhak Bentov, with parts of *Stalking the Wild Pendulum* (1977) already appearing as its appended article "Micromotion of the Body as a Factor in the Development of the Nervous System". In Sannella's last book, *On Genius*, he dedicated a chapter to (his friendship with) Bentov. There, he discloses that

[665] The book's imprint states "3101 Washington Street, San Francisco, California 94115" as place of publication. This address refers to the "Washington Street Research Center", "a multi-purpose office and laboratory facility" (Vaughan and Macdonald 1975, 15), which housed several activities, libraries, and office spaces, e.g., "Electronic Instrument Development" (providing the most recent technological devices), "Experimental Psychology and Parapsychology" (conducting experimental work), "Krippner Psychology and Parapsychology Library", "Reich Archive West", and more. The "Experimental Psychology and Parapsychology" section lists Lee Sannella among volunteer participants (*ibid*.). In 1978, the centre underwent a name change to the Washington Research Center, now also accommodating the "H. S. Dakin Company", which subsequently republished Sannella's *Kundalini*. Research associates at the Washington Research Center included US-American figures such as Sannella, Stanley Krippner, Michael Murphy and his wife Dulce Murphy, Jeffrey Mishlove, and Alan Vaughan, among others. A comprehensive description of the Washington Research Center, featured in the third printing of *Kundalini*, underscores its significance for Sannella. According to Cousens, they used the mutual office at Washington Street to see clients during the Clinic's early days (Sannella 1978, 132; Cousens 2023).

Bentov's experimental orientation and their trip to Japan served as his primary motivation to publish *Kundalini* in the first place:

> I started thinking about writing a book which would include my own medically and sociologically oriented description of Ben's work. I felt a conservator's responsibility to him. I was well-placed professionally and had many of the same interests and inclinations. It seemed I was the proper person to offer this very specialized perspective on Ben's work – even if publishers didn't seem to be interested at the time. (Sannella 2006, 77)

This sheds an entirely new light on Sannella and *Kundalini*. Thanks to the book's success, most in the field are familiar with Sannella and his "groundbreaking" theory. However, only a few remember Bentov or have ever heard of him.[666] A close reading of *Kundalini* reveals that Sannella openly acknowledged Bentov's fundamental position, crediting him with proposing "the first theory of the kundalini phenomenon subject to experimental verification" (Sannella 1976, 4). Throughout the book, Sannella also repeatedly refers to Bentov's ideas and experiments, even adding a chapter that evaluates his conclusions in light of Bentov's concepts. This credit and references notwithstanding, Bentov's role in the development and publication of Sannella's theories has so far been largely overlooked.[667] Despite Bentov's impact on the publication of *Kundalini* and Sannella's endorsement of the topic, their physiological models nonetheless differ. The next chapter will support this assessment by taking a closer look at Sannella's physio-kundalini model and how it underpinned treatment and therapy at the Kundalini Clinic.

22.1.4. Sannella's Model of the Physio-Kundalini Process as Rebirth

Sannella's view on kundalini was marked by ambiguity. Although he was a scientist-practitioner who engaged in religious practices and utilised scientific methods, he did not report firsthand encounters with kundalini. Nevertheless, his hypothesis was based on the conviction that kundalini is a legitimate and valuable concept worth exploring: "From a survey of literature, the clinical study of our own cases and laboratory findings, we present the thesis that a process, most usefully viewed as the 'rise of the prana' is a reality, [and] is

[666] In the latter half of the 1970s, Bentov's fame grew significantly with the publication of his book, while Sannella remained relatively obscure. However, after Bentov's death, this dynamic shifted, with Bentov's prominence fading (Sannella 2006, 94).

[667] A notable exception is Mary Scott's *Kundalini in the Physical World* (1983), which credits Bentov's role.

much to desired" (Sannella 1976, 4).[668] Contrarily, elsewhere in *Kundalini*, Sannella distanced himself from this view, questioning the "belief that this mystical concept [of kundalini] is accurate or corresponds to anything objectively real" (*ibid*., 13). Additionally, Sannella's stance on kundalini's nature was nuanced: he recognised both its role in religious contexts and its physical presence. This suggests that Sannella differentiated between a classical (or mystical) kundalini and a clinical (or physiological) kundalini.

In Sannella's model, which aligns with Bentov's, kundalini ascends from the legs along the back to the top of the head, then descends through the throat, and concludes in the abdomen (*ibid*., 55). Sannella characterises this process as a form of rebirth, engendering "an enlightened human being" (*ibid*., 1). His concept of rebirth involves a mystical death followed by a form of resurrection, distinct from physical death and reincarnation. Sannella does not clarify why he considered the "kundalini concept from yoga tradition as the classical rebirth model" (*ibid*., 4), nor does he provide sources for his interpretation of "classical rebirth". However, at the time of Sannella's publication, interpretations of rebirth were prominent among US-American New Agers, psychiatrists, and holistic health practitioners.[669]

The psychiatrist Stanislav Grof was a notable proponent of ideas on "spiritual rebirth". His book *Realms of the Unconscious* (1967) explored "dying" and rebirth within the context of LSD sessions (S. Grof 1976, 14), significantly impacting Californian counterculture and likely influencing Sannella's view of rebirth.[670] Krishna's *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967) may also have influenced Sannella's use of "rebirth".[671] According to Krishna, the symptoms of spontaneous kundalini awakenings exhibit "the essential characteristics of the rebirth, which were startlingly apparent in my case" (Krishna 1967, 132). In *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* (1972), Krishna reinforces this view even more explicitly: "The awakening of Kundalini denotes […] the phenomenon of rebirth,

[668] Lui takes other religious ideas, e.g., enlightenment, psychic abilities, and rebirth, equally for granted, e.g., appraising a "rebirth process as natural as physical birth" (Sannella 1976, 1).

[669] I am indebted to my colleague Johannes Endler for his helpful suggestions on the topic of rebirth in the US-American context.

[670] The psychiatrists Timothy F. Leary (1920–1996), Ralph Metzner (1936–2019), and Richard Alpert (1931–2019) had previously interpreted the psychedelic experience as a form of dying and rebirth in *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1964) using the *Bardo Thödol*. During this period, figures such as Chögyam Trungpa (1939–1987) responded to this psychedelic interpretation by offering a psychological reading of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, presenting it as a description of rebirth to countercultural US-Americans interested in Buddhism.

[671] Sannella used the 1971 edition of *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man*. However, this edition shows no significant modifications from the 1967 original.

alluded to in plain or veiled terms in the religious lore of mankind" (Krishna 1972c, 90).[672] James Hillman's assessment of Krishna's "rebirth" in *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* might have been an even more appealing reference for Sannella, as Hillman had become a respected psychologist by the 1970s. Hillman wrote: "An analyst cannot help but be enormously impressed with the overwhelming physical reality of Gopi Krishna's death experience. It confirms what I have tried to write about in my *Suicide and the Soul*, that only if the experience be [*sic*] totally convincing, totally 'real', can a convincingly real rebirth follow" (Hillman, in Krishna 1967, 244–245, original emphasis).

Richard Maurice Bucke, listed in Sannella's references and influential for the late Krishna, defined his "illumination" (Bucke 1905, 8), i.e., the experience of what he termed "cosmic consciousness", as a "new birth" (*ibid*., 9) in his *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901). Unlike Krishna, Sannella did not consider Bucke's "illumination" as a "kundalini experience" (Sannella 1976, 24; Krishna 1972c, 96). Nonetheless, he used Bucke's account to support his own views on rebirth, potentially drawing inspiration from it (Sannella 1976, 46–47).

Sannella used four interrelated terms to elucidate his ideas on kundalini as a "rebirth process".[673] The term "physio-kundalini cycle" or "progression" (1) distinguishes his proposed route of kundalini from the "classical yogic" model referring to the cyclical movement of kundalini through the human body. Individuals undergoing this cycle experience accompanying signs and symptoms that persist indefinitely. The "physio-kundalini complex" (2) encompasses all these signs and symptoms, collectively representing a "physio-kundalini process" (3). Sannella specified the "physio-kundalini process" as the combination of the journey and its effects, which he speculated might be a "separate entity […] activated as part of a full kundalini awakening" (*ibid*., 56). The "physio-kundalini mechanism" (4) finally denotes the physiological force triggered by the awakening of kundalini.

While Sannella classified the physio-kundalini process under the concept of "rebirth", his focus was not on the likelihood or nature of enlightenment but rather on the symptoms and signs associated with this process. To decode this process and "demystify" kundalini, Sannella developed four analytical categories of signs and symptoms: motor, sensory, interpretative, and non-physiological. Based on experiments conducted at the Kundalini Clinic, he detailed each category, noting observed signs and reported symptoms (Figure 23).

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[672] Sannella did not include Krishna's *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* in the reference section of *Kundalini*.

[673] I use the term "physio-kundalini model" when referring to the theory outlined by Sannella.

Sannella defined signs as “objective indications” and symptoms as “subjective descriptions” (*ibid*., 44). These definitions suggest a methodological approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods (*ibid*., 44–51).

Categories of signs and symptoms	**Subcategories derived from case histories**	**Examples from case histories and literature survey**
motor	body movement and unaccustomed postures	yogic postures, spontaneous movements
	abnormal breathing patterns	spontaneous rapid breathing, prolonged retention of breath
	paralysis	temporary lock into a certain posture
sensory	body sensations	skin sensations, ecstatic tickle
	heat and cold	extreme temperature sensations
	inner lights and visions	perceptions of illumination and colours
	sounds	internally heard sounds, e.g., voices, hissing, roaring
	pains	headaches, aching eyes
interpretative	unusual extreme emotions	feelings of ecstasy, depression, confusion, contentment
	distortion of thought processes	trance states, confusions, feelings of insanity
	detachment	sensation of watching oneself from a distance
	dissociation	hysteria, overconfidence
	single seeing	perception of infinity or unity
	great body	experiencing oneself to be larger as usual
non-physical	out-of-body-experiences	feeling to be located outside one’s own body
	psychic perceptions	telepathy, clairvoyance

Figure 23: Sannella’s categories and subcategories of “objective signs” and “subjective symptoms”, with examples from the Kundalini Clinic’s case histories (Sannella 1976, 44–51).

Some signs and symptoms, such as tingling, sensations of heat and cold, spasms, and auditory perceptions, occur more frequently than others. Based on this observation, Sannella proposed that certain physical symptoms are universally present in religious experiences: "All spiritual practices are activating the same basic process [which] […] has a definite physiological basis that gives rise to these specific bodily symptoms" (*ibid*., 10). In other words, Sannella argued that all religious practices activate a common physiological process associated with a shared set of symptoms, with the physio-kundalini process serving as a unifying element among diverse practices striving for enlightenment.

Additionally, Sannella postulated that these categories could help differentiate between the physio-kundalini process and psychosis, thereby assisting psychiatrists, psychotherapists, and physicians in diagnosing kundalini episodes. He acknowledged that the physio-kundalini process might be accompanied by hysterical or psychotic reactions, complicating its distinction from psychosis:

> Individuals who experience this transformation and do not understand what is happening sometimes feel they are going insane. This is because the early stages are often marked by great stress, confusion, disorientation, and schizophrenic-like symptoms. Tragically in these cases, clinicians have occasonally [*sic*] mistaken the rebirth process for acute schizophrenia. Some of these patients have been sent to situations destructive to their development, resulting in a great loss. (*ibid*., 65)

Sannella emphasised the importance of his analytical framework in facilitating long-term studies on the physio-kundalini process's potential for purification, advocating for alternatives to psychiatric institutionalisation.

A crucial aspect of Sannella's perspective was his emphasis on kundalini's therapeutic potential. Contrary to the belief that kundalini might induce severe physical and psychological distress, Sannella, on the contrary, maintained that kundalini has the capacity to prevent or resolve such pathological states, defining the kundalini process as a form of purification:

> Because it [the physio-kundalini process] is essentially a purificatory or balancing process,[674] and each person has only a finite amount of impurities of the sort removed by kundalini, the process is self-limiting. Disturbances seen are therefore not

[674] On several occasions in his book, Sannella uses the term "balancing" synonymously with "purifying".

> pathological, but rather therapeutic, constituting a removal of potentially pathological elements. (*ibid*., 59)

Sannella's perspective on impurities aligns with Bentov's notion of "areas of stress". Individuals accumulate impurities based on their physical and mental health and prior meditation experience. Upon activation of kundalini, a purification process begins, systematically removing these impurities. Although this process can produce symptoms resembling pathological conditions, Sannella contended that these symptoms are transient and dynamic indicators of healing, rather than signs of disease.[675] He argued that discomfort during this purification process is an unavoidable side effect and should be viewed as a pathway to improved health (*ibid*., 47–48, 64).

Like Bentov, Sannella used the concept of impurities to explain the varying intensity of kundalini's effects among individuals. Severe cases of physio-kundalini processes merely reflect the removal of greater quantities of impurities. Moreover, Sannella highlights that the number of impurities affects the process, suggesting that the physio-kundalini process has distinct starting and ending points. Furthermore, he highlighted that the psycho-physiological crises induced by the physio-kundalini mechanism are not chronic but rather indicative of recovery. As the individual's psychological and physiological health improves, these disturbances will diminish, making crises an essential component of the healing process (*ibid*., 11–13, 43).

A crucial aspect of Sannella's model involved incorporating kundalini into Itzhak Bentov's experimental approach. While Bentov's and Sannella's physiological models differed primarily in nuanced interpretations of the physio-kundalini mechanism, they shared a fundamental agreement on the reality of kundalini within the human body. Substantial portions of *Kundalini* deal with potential correlations between their models. This comparative approach serves two primary objectives, which also account for Sannella's relationship with Bentov: On the one hand, he endorsed the model created by his friend, whom he considered a "genius" (Sannella 2006, 75) and appraised said model as having "enormous heuristic value at this state" (Sannella 1976, 54). On the other hand, Sannella delineated the limitations of Bentov's model. While Sannella underscored that Bentov's model "accounts for much of what we have reported and observed" (*ibid*., 12), he simultaneously pointed out that "ultimately [it] proves to be only partially correct, or to

[675] Sannella points out that social pressure, internal resistance, and force are three central factors that increase disturbances during the purification process (Sannella 1976, 47–48, 64).

explain only a part of the full kundalini phenomenon" (*ibid*., 54). In other words, while Sannella aspired to present Bentov's findings as providing additional support for his own results, he presented his own model as an advancement of Bentov's concept.

To conclude, Sannella considered kundalini a physiological mechanism comprising signs and symptoms, and hence observable in a clinical setting. He distinguished his model from what he considered the "classical [yogic] kundalini concept" (*ibid*., 4) and subsumed his theory under the designation physio-kundalini process instead. Thereby, he emphasised kundalini's physicality instead of subtleness. The critical arguments of Sannella's book – and the whole Clinic project – were kundalini's purifying therapeutic potential and the distinction of its symptoms from psychiatric disorders. Along the lines of the understanding of kundalini awakening as a wholesome process, the Clinic operated as a therapeutic facility that significantly differed from conventional psychiatry institutions. Assisted by specifically trained therapists, clients could undergo the cleansing of their "impurities". Sannella calls the purificatory episode the "rebirth process", which is triggered and carried forward by the physio-kundalini mechanism. With the help of established analytical categories and a methodological variety, Sannella hoped to prepare the ground for long-term studies on the purifying potential of the physio-kundalini process. In the long run, he maintained that this would promote alternatives to psychiatric institutions. That said, clinical observations were a pivotal mission of the Clinic. By "describing the *objective* aspects of this [physio-kundalini] process" (*ibid*., 2, original emphasis), they intended to grasp kundalini as a "clinical entity" (*ibid*., 64). The underlying hypothesis of both therapy and clinical studies was the differentiation between psycho-physiological kundalini experiences and psychosis – a standpoint that became common sense within transpersonal circles.

22.2. The Kundalini Clinic

The Kundalini Clinic was probably co-founded by Cousens and Sannella between 1974 and 1975 and has continued to exist to date, if in a considerably different form. The term "probably" already indicates the uncertainties attached to the Clinic's founding.

There are inconsistencies regarding the initial founding figures of the Clinic. Sovatsky credits Sannella, Cousens, and Streitfeld as the Clinic's co-founders, while Cousens downplayed Streitfeld's involvement: "It was really Lee and I [who founded the Clinic]. Harold came [a few years] later" (Cousens 2023; Sovatsky 2023). It is, therefore, not verified

if Harold Streitfeld – who occupied an important role in the history of the Clinic – was involved in its co-founding. Nevertheless, Streitfeld is noted as a staff member ab initio, who played a vital role as the Clinic's primary telephone service operator. Moreover, since at least 1976, Sannella and Streitfeld have been referenced as equals at the Clinic, while Cousens' role is largely omitted ("The Kundalini Clinic: A New Service for Individuals and Organizations", n.d.; Kieffer to Krishna, November 14, 1976, LGK, box 6.5.4.).

Moreover, the exact year of the Clinic's opening has not yet been determined. Some indications suggest its founding between 1974 and 1975: in December 1973, the *Esalen Catalogs* published a brief biographical sketch of Sannella without mentioning the Clinic. Given Sannella's key position as its co-founder and perhaps best-known representative, it is unlikely that Esalen would omit reference to the Clinic if it had already opened by then (Esalen 1973, 9). Moreover, Sannella's book *Kundalini. Psychosis or Transcendence* was published in 1976 and relied on a series of case studies presumably from the Clinic. Information gathered from the interviews with Cousens and Sovatsky confirms these suggestions, with Cousens claiming 1975 and Sovatsky 1974 as the year of the Clinic's founding (Cousens 2023; Sovatsky 2023).

The overall goal of the Clinic was to provide alternative treatments for psycho-physiological issues rooted in religious experiences. Sannella and his colleagues aptly characterised their work at the Clinic as "the Western approach of enlightened clinical psychiatry and psychology" ("The Kundalini Clinic: A New Service for Individuals and Organizations", n.d.).[676] The Clinic's success largely derived from the flourishing anti-psychiatry movement during that period and the popularity of Sannella's book *Kundalini* (1976). It is somewhat difficult to determine whether the Clinic followed the concepts outlined in the book or whether the book's main arguments rested on the experiments and treatments carried out at the Clinic. In any case, the book and the Clinic are closely intertwined and cannot be studied separately.

[676] There are two ways to interpret "enlightened clinical psychiatry". One perspective views "enlightened" in a religious context, suggesting an understanding of existential truths derived from religious practice or divine intervention. Alternatively, "enlightened" can be understood as an approach grounded in reason and science, examining ideas and facts based on empirical evidence. Considering that "clinical psychiatry" inherently involves scientific reasoning, it is likely that "enlightened clinical psychiatry" emphasises a religious element. Furthermore, the absence of this term in Sannella's *Kundalini* suggests that it stemmed from Streitfeld's tongue. As a devotee of Muktananda, he might have used it to underscore the religious insights the Clinic's therapists had gained.

Information about the individuals who sought support at the Clinic is limited. Based on the thirteen cases reviewed by Sannella in his book, which were presumably patients at the Clinic, some preliminary observations can be made: there was a relatively balanced representation of male and female clients, a variety of educational backgrounds including psychology, arts, literature, and engineering, and individuals with experience in meditation or claims of psychic abilities, as well as some with prior mental-health challenges (Sannella 1976, 25–42). Cousens indicated that people worldwide came to the Clinic. From his account, however, it seems that international patients received phone consultations instead of flying to San Francisco. Another question concerns the costs involved. Cousens remained vague, stating that the Clinic was open to everyone with personalised services. Although he mentioned an hourly rate, affordability was not specified for individuals experiencing a crisis, especially those with low incomes (Cousens 2023).

According to Cousens, the Clinic only provided outpatient service. This implies that it offered diagnosis, treatment, and therapy but did not admit inpatients, i.e., provide beds and services for patients who must stay overnight or for a significant amount of time. This would have been simply beyond their capacity (*ibid*.). Sovatsky, however, pointed out that besides treatments at the Clinic, an ongoing custom was domiciliary consultations at clients' houses, as well as clients visiting Streitfeld (and later Sovatsky) in their homes – perhaps in separate therapy offices (Sovatsky 2023). Moreover, an early document, issued before the mid-1970s, mentions a residential programme in Mendocino County, California, for clients that needed special attention. This additional service, however, was a short-lived endeavour ("The Kundalini Clinic: A New Service for Individuals and Organizations", n.d.). These supplementary options notwithstanding, most patients were treated at the Clinic.

Although the source material does not provide any definite proof, during the first years of its existence, the Clinic presumably had yet to reach its consummated structure; it rather existed as a loose research association without any registered location. The earliest references to the Clinic label Clay Street as its initial location (*ibid*.). This seems plausible, given that Clay Street was Sannella's home address. In any case, by the end of the 1970s, the Kundalini Clinic was an officially registered therapy centre at Union Street, San Francisco. However, due to funding issues, changes in staff, and real estate problems, the Clinic changed its location several times. As Sovatsky outlined, it remained on Union Street until 1982, when it moved a few blocks further to Bush Street, where it lasted until 1984 (Figure 24). After Bush Street, it relocated to Green Street, to Montgomery Street, to

Sovatsky's home office in Richmond, California, and ultimately to Sovatsky's current home in Salts Springs, Florida (Sannella 1977; Sovatsky 2023).

Figure 24: Current building on Bush Street 1801, San Francisco, where the Kundalini Clinic moved in 1984 (photo credit: Marleen Thaler).

Soon after the Clinic opened, the allocation of time and energy each co-founder invested in it differed significantly. Cousens initially assumed the role of Director of the Clinic's residence centre in Mendocino County. However, from 1975 through 1982, he lived in Muktananda ashrams in California and South Asia. Hence, his involvement at the Clinic was relatively brief.[677] Lee Sannella, Director of Research and most prominently associated with the Clinic, also left his position after only a few years (around 1980). Perhaps, as Cousens suggested, Sannella's brief involvement was due to his retirement soon after the Clinic had opened. Another possible reason for his withdrawal could have been the death of Itzhak

[677] Cousens first moved to Muktananda's ashram in Oakland, and from 1976 through 1982, he primarily lived in his ashram in South Asia. According to Cousens, however, he continued his work while living in South Asia. He recalled how "Muktananda referred everyone with a difficult kundalini to me" (Cousens 2023) and that he treated "thousands of people" (*ibid.*) in this way.

Bentov in 1979, which he "mourned deeply" (Sannella 2006, 94). After all, it was Bentov who had initially inspired Sannella to get involved.

Harold Streitfeld, on the contrary, who did not hold the position of director in the first place and whose co-founding is contested, remained at the Clinic as its head Director until his passing in 1983 (Cousens 2023; "The Kundalini Clinic: A New Service for Individuals and Organizations", n.d.; Sovatsky 2023). Another protagonist who has played a vital role in the Clinic's history is Stuart Sovatsky. Although he was not involved in founding the Clinic, he has been its most devoted supporter.[678] Sovatsky joined the team in 1980 while still studying at CIIS. Upon Streitfeld's passing in 1983, he became the Clinic's sole director, a position he has held ever since. Today, he keeps the legacy of the Clinic alive and still runs an online-based version of its initial counselling wing (Sovatsky 2023).

A newsletter by the California Institute of Asian Studies (CIAS) presented the Clinic in its early days with the following words:

> The Kundalini Clinic For Counseling & Research has its roots in a research group started by Dr. Lee Sanella [*sic*] […] and other Bay Area clinicians interested in investigating the kundalini process. Now a formal clinic located on Union Street in San Francisco, the clinic handles clients experiencing various types of psychic and energetic openings. (CIAS, n.d.-a)

This quote offers three valuable insights.[679] First, it underpins the loose structure of the Clinic in its initial years. Second, it designates the Clinic as a "Counseling and Research" centre, implying that the Clinic had a multi-functional structure. As argued below, besides the therapeutic assistance offered at the Clinic, the staff further conducted research and delivered lectures to professionals and laypersons. Third, it discloses that besides the "kundalini process", the Clinic also dealt with other "types of psychic and energetic openings". So-called "openings" were believed to occur during mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual purifications triggered by a spiritual experience. Intriguingly, openings stimulated by the "physio-kundalini process" represented only a small fraction of the total number of openings treated at the Clinic: "According to Dr. Harold Streitfeld, the director of the clinic, only 10%

[678] It should be noted that Cousens minimised the contributions of both Streitfeld and Sovatsky at the Clinic. Although he highlighted Streitfeld's commitment and support, at the same time, he understated Streitfeld's involvement: "He wasn't a big part of the team […] and he wasn't exactly in the inside of things" (Cousens 2023). Regarding Sovatksy, Cousens only remarked that he did not know him well (*ibid*.).

[679] Considering the limited availability of source material, it is challenging to assess to what extent the newsletter distributed by CIAS (see Chapter 24.1.3.) depicts reality or whether it was programmatic in nature. Therefore, the contained information needs to be treated accordingly.

of the 400 cases that have been handled by the clinic have been the full-blown kundalini awakenings described in the literature. Most clients have experienced either a pranic or a psychic opening" (*ibid*.). Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that clients at the Clinic were diagnosed in medical and religious terms.

This study suggests a threefold division of the Clinic's functions: therapeutic, research, and educational. These three functions were not equally employed. While Streitfeld and Sovatsky mainly provided therapeutic support, Sannella prioritised research, and Cousens emphasised teaching and religious support. Given Sannella's and Cousens' comparatively brief involvement at the Clinic, therapy thus likely prevailed among the Clinic's foci. The following chapters will examine the Clinic's multifunctional structure and highlight some assigned activities, cases, and efforts.

22.2.1. Therapy

In his book *Kundalini*, Sannella states: "Usually the [physio-kundalini] process, left to itself, will find its own natural pace and balance. But if it has already become too rapid and violent, our experience suggests it may be advisable to take steps such as heavier diet, suspension of meditations, and vigorous physical activity, to moderate its course" (Sannella 1976, 59). Most clients who sought help at the Clinic probably considered their physio-kundalini process as beyond control, thus requiring assistance.

The assistance in question was not confined to general health recommendations, as those quoted above. Additionally, the staff at the Clinic offered a range of therapeutic techniques. Sovatsky mentions psychotherapy, music therapy, and bioenergy therapy as three important examples of the Clinic's therapeutic repertoire.[680] The applied treatment depended on the client's distress and the therapist's diagnosis. As mentioned above, despite its name, the Clinic's cases were not confined to patients experiencing kundalini, nor did they represent its majority – quite the contrary. This underrepresentation notwithstanding, the therapists at the Clinic developed a specific treatment strategy for kundalini-related agonies. The CIAS newspaper describes the therapeutic approach with the following words: "Kundalini awakenings are often accompanied by spontaneous purificatory movements. These

[680] According to Cousens, "talking therapy" (Cousens 2023) would complement the range of other treatments. In an interview, Sannella even considered "to be with that person [the client] and to let them communicate with you what they're experiencing […], without judging them […] [as] the primary mode of therapy" (The Intuition Network 1988, 2).

movements may become repetitive and dysfunctional to the client. In such a situation, Dr. Streitfeld might use Neo-Reichian techniques to help the client release the energy blockage and allow new levels of energy to move through the body" (CIAS, n.d.-a). The reference to "Neo-Reichian techniques" needs further elaboration.

The Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957), best known for his concept of "orgone energy", played a pivotal role in the development of several approaches to psychotherapy. In the early 1970s, interest in Reich-influenced therapies was prevalent among psychologists and psychotherapists. Therapeutic techniques influenced by Reichian thought include body psychotherapy, Gestalt therapy, and bioenergetic analysis (Kripal 2007, 230–231). The concept of bioenergetics traces back to Reich's student Lowen, who was a regular teacher at the Esalen Institute. Accordingly, Reich and bioenergetics were popular topics at seminars, workshops, and conferences held at Esalen from 1966 through 1979 – at times by Lowen himself (*Esalen Catalogs*, n.d.).[681] Sovatsky confirmed that Wilhelm Reich held sway over the Clinic's therapists – particularly over Streitfeld.[682]

Streitfeld, a University of Chicago graduate, developed an early interest in bioenergetics and somatic psychology. In a lecture held in 1966 as part of the Psychosynthesis Seminars, Streitfeld introduced several body-centred techniques and theories. While the lecture did not prioritise any approach, Streitfeld underlined the key position of the body for mental health and religious attainment: "You can use the body for personal development or for inter-personal relations, but I would like to remind you that you can use the body as a means to obtain spiritual enlightenment. […] The Yogis, as is well known, go up the body through various 'chakras' to achieve supreme consciousness" (Streitfeld 1966, 11). This quote indicates Streitfeld's knowledge of South Asian subtle-body concepts and his belief that components of the subtle body affect consciousness. Streitfeld's early affirmation of the body's position would become a key pillar for his subsequent work, and thus for treatment methods at the Clinic.

In addition to body centres, Streitfeld speaks of so-called "tension points", linking them to potential disruptions of a body's energy flows:

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[681] The Austrian psychotherapist Otto Rank (1884–1939) and the US-American psychotherapists Arthur Janov (1924–2017) and William "Bill" Swartley (1927–1979) represent other influential sources for the therapeutic orientation at the Clinic (Sovatsky 2023).

[682] Sannella did not mention any of these therapists in *Kundalini* or in his interview with Jeffrey Mishlove at "Thinking Aloud" (see below). Cousens equally minimised Reich's influence (Sannella 1976; The Intuition Network 1988; Cousens 2023). It is therefore likely that the Clinic began to focus on bioenergetic therapy only by the end of the 1970s when Streitfeld replaced Sannella and Cousens as the Clinic's director.

> There is a concept that starts with Reich and is continued with Lowen, which is based on energy flow and energy poles in the body, and if you stretch out these poles, […] the energy should be able to flow back and forth, and if you have tensions, […] the energy just doesn't flow through that part of the body. (*ibid*., 12–13)

Body-oriented psychotherapies, as introduced by Reich and adopted by Lowen (i.e., Neo-Reichian bioenergetics), thus played a seminal role in Streitfeld's approach.[683] Sovatsky confirmed this observation, recalling how Streitfeld applied "Neo-Reichian bioenergetic therapy" at the Clinic. It is likely that the Clinic's "Neo-Reichian bioenergetic therapy" emphasised the harmonious flow of energy and the release of tension (*ibid*., 2). Unfortunately, there are no records of treatment procedures that could underpin this assumption.[684]

Besides somatic therapy, orthomolecular psychiatry was – according to Cousens – another central therapy form that was practised at the Clinic. Nobel laureate Linus Pauling (1901–1994) published a paper in *Science* in 1968 suggesting that vitamin deficiencies might cause schizophrenia. Initially labelled "megavitamin therapy", orthomolecular therapy is an approach to mental health treatment that uses vitamins, minerals, and amino acids (Lipton et al. 1973, vi). Classifying orthomolecular psychiatry as a "rebalancing therapy", Cousens describes it as the use of "vitamins and minerals and herbs to help rebalance their [the clients'] energies and rebuild the neurotransmitters" (Cousens 2023). Although not recognised by the American Psychiatric Association (and similar organisations),[685] some alternative nutritional therapists continued to advocate the use of orthomolecular psychiatry in treating schizophrenia and other mental disorders.[686] Cousens, for instance, endorsed orthomolecular psychiatry in his books and apparently implemented multivitamin therapy at the Clinic (Cousens 1986; 2023).

Cousens' understanding of nutrition as a means for energy healing developed in the wake of his kundalini experience. He observed his physical, mental, and religious alterations and

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[683] Kieffer mentions that Streitfeld was further involved in the Arica school, initiated by the Bolivian philosopher Oscar Ichazo (1931–2020) in 1968, an approach that Esalen's co-founder Dick Price and other Esalen-related figures equally cherished (Kieffer to Krishna, November 14, 1976, LGK, box 6.5.4.; Kripal 2007, 178).

[684] In an attempt to secure the original case files, Sovatsky sought a suitable academic archive. However, despite his efforts, he could not find a proper institution to store the files. Eventually, he had to dispose of the files due to the lack of means to store them himself (Sovatsky 2023).

[685] The American Psychiatric Association rejected orthomolecular psychiatry as ineffective and even toxic (Lipton et al. 1973).

[686] This is evident, e.g., from the *Journal of Orthomolecular Medicine*, a quarterly publication dedicated to nutritional and orthomolecular medicine (Hoffer, n.d.).

concluded that "with an appropriate diet, the transforming and purifying action of the Kundalini takes place faster and more easily" (Cousens 1986, 56). He provided dietary guidelines for the clients at the Clinic, targeting physical and religious health. As Cousens underscored, the physio-kundalini process involves bodily transformations requiring specific nutritional considerations. Moreover, given kundalini's subtle nature, Cousens suggests particular food for a smooth flow of energy in the body. In other words, these kundalini-related dietary recommendations may ease any physical complications of the physio-kundalini process and, at the same time, support kundalini's steady flow (*ibid*., 57). An example of such a dietary recommendation is the following:

> My observations in working with Kundalini and diet is that flesh foods act as "intense sludge" to the purifying and spiritualizing flow of Kundalini. Because of this "sludge effect", it is the primary dietary treatment I recommend when people feel the Kundalini energy has become too intense for them. If one wants to slow down the spiritualizing process of the Kundalini with diet, a flesh food diet is the most effective way. (*ibid*., 114)

Another practical instruction in case of an overwhelming kundalini experience was the use of honey: "The awakening of the Kundalini energy seems to increase the need for glucose. This need can be easily met by increasing the high complex natural carbohydrates in the diet. […] Sometimes the Kundalini becomes too activated, and the glucose from honey has been found to calm this Kundalini" (*ibid*., 146). These are just two practical guidelines on how nutrition could intensify or ease a physio-kundalini process. Based on these dietary consultations, Cousens later developed his "Rainbow Diet" theory, a key component of his concept of spiritual nutrition.[687]

In sum, one of the Clinic's main premises was the belief in unconventional treatments and therapies, offering an alternative to psychiatric institutions. As Cousens stressed: "For a Kundalini awakening people really never need to go to hospital. That's for psychosis" (Cousens 2023). However, in exceptional cases where mentally ill clients were unresponsive to other treatments, Cousens recalled that prescribing medication was considered a final option. As trained psychiatrists, all of them had the license to do so. However, owing to the

[687] The concept of "spiritual nutrition" examines the impact of food and diets on an individual's spiritual evolution or well-being: "[The Rainbow Diet] is a diet system that is based on the relationship of the color of the foods eaten to the corresponding rainbow colors of the human chakra system" (Cousens 1986, 1). Cousens dedicated several books on the topics in question.

therapists' conviction and their clients' desire for alternatives, medication and referrals to psychiatric institutions were seldom carried out (Cousens 2023; Sovatsky 2023).

22.2.2. Research

In the second half of the twentieth century, experimentations with biomedical instrumentations increasingly gained ground among scientific and scientistic researchers (see Chapter 21.). The most widely used devices comprised all sorts of biofeedback machines, which aimed at measuring physiological parameters, such as heart rate or brainwave activity, and providing real-time feedback to individuals, commonly for therapeutic purposes. At the Clinic, Sannella carried out such technology-based experiments with clients who had sought support.[688] The experiments in question were aimed at testing the physio-kundalini hypothesis elaborated by Bentov and Sannella. Furthermore, they aimed to gather additional data to describe the physio-kundalini process.[689] In other words, the research team targeted experimental verification of kundalini's presence, activities, and impact on the human body.[690]

Different machines were in use. In *Kundalini*, Sannella highlights experiments with a magnetic stimulator and a ballistocardiograph (Bentov's device of choice) (Sannella 1976, 41, 66). The experiments at the clinic principally followed Bentov's model and suggestions and were rooted in earlier empirical yoga research. Some of the experiments that Bentov suggested included the following:

> Measure the very weak magnetic fields around the head of an expert meditator. […] Study the effects of magnetic stimulation on one side and then on both sides of the head. […] Study light, heat, and sound sensations reported by meditators, and determine which of these can be correlated with physically measurable conditions. (*ibid*., 54)

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[688] Neither Cousens nor Sannella called the Clinic's research efforts "experiments". Cousens said that "initially, [we were] just trying to learn what was going on. So, I wouldn't really call them experiments. We were trying to understand what this kundalini energy was and what affected it" (Cousens 2023). Considering that Sannella undertook his scientific procedures to test his physio-kundalini hypothesis, determine its physiological concomitants, and generate empirical data, I am nonetheless referring to these undertakings as "experiments".

[689] Sannella likely hoped to employ biofeedback for therapeutic purposes, too. At one point in his book, he refers to Bentov's suggestion to develop a biofeedback system as an auxiliary means for meditators. This system could potentially support individuals undergoing challenging religious episodes (Sannella 1976, 54).

[690] Unlike Sannella, Bentov did not confine his research to questions of the existence and activities of kundalini. He additionally used biomedical instruments to trigger the process by exposing the body to electromagnetic waves or mechanical or acoustic vibrations – successfully, as he claimed (Bentov 1976, 72).

Sannella primarily used a magnetic stimulator to carry out such measurements and observations. An article by Brenner, Williamson, and Kaufman titled "Visually Evoked Magnetic Fields of the Human Brain" (1975), which Sannella refers to, provides additional information on the device in question.

In this article, the authors argue in favour of studying magnetic over electric activity of the brain. Based on the premise that "neural activity of the human brain produces a detectable magnetic field outside the head" (Brenner, Williamson, and Kaufman 1975, 480), they suggest the feasibility of measuring the magnetic field in question. They argue that studying neuronal activity using magnetic fields requires modest equipment only. As a user-friendly method, many laboratories and experiments could thus benefit from it (*ibid*., 480–481). Therefore, Sannella's reference to the Clinic's magnetic simulator likely points to a non-invasive tool used for transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS). This tool stimulates the brain through magnetic fields and may be used for therapeutic, diagnostic, and research purposes (Chemerinski 2012; BioMag Laboratory, n.d.). TMS is based on the famous electromagnetic induction discovered in the 1830s by Michael Faraday (1791–1867).

Sannella's main interest in employing TMS at the Clinic was to detect and measure "magnetic fields around the head" (Sannella 1976, 97) and electric activities in the body, both "generated by the effects of kundalini" (*ibid*.). Sannella thus assumed magnetic and electrical "imprints" of the physio-kundalini process, which are potentially observable with the help of a magnetic stimulator. The viability of observing any such effects of kundalini further rested on the assertion of the existence of "fluctuations" (*ibid*.). Based on his observations with the ballistocardiograph, Bentov suggested that these "fluctuations" are triggered by neuronal activity and related to the physio-kundalini process. Drawing on this suggestion, Sannella interpreted the "fluctuations" as "intuitive powers" (*ibid*.) facilitated by the physio-kundalini process and observable in his clinical experiments. Looking at the fluctuations through a different lens, as Sannella underlines, the physio-kundalini process and its psychic properties could be misinterpreted as a psychotic episode. Thus, Sannella employed the experiments at the Clinic as the empirical underpinnings for kundalini's psychic effects. It is therefore critical, according to Sannella, to consider the option of an active physio-kundalini when diagnosing a mental disease (Bentov 1976, 72; Sannella 1976, 97–99).

In the Clinic's early days, Sannella was listed as "Research Director". Building on Bentov's model, he designed and conducted experiments with the magnetic stimulator. According to Sovatsky, most of the Clinic's initial clients participated in these experiments, forming the

basis for the case histories in *Kundalini* (Sovatsky 2023; "The Kundalini Clinic: A New Service for Individuals and Organizations", n.d.). In the book, Sannella describes several cases of clients participating in his magnetic experiments. One such experiment was conducted with a "professional psychic" (Sannella 1976, 37).

Sannella stimulated the psychic's right hemisphere, which is often associated with creativity and intuition.[691] Upon stimulation, the psychic noticed modifications in his use of language and his visualisation. While Sannella did not directly refer to kundalini in this example, he considered the results of his experiments as a confirmation of the general sensitivity of the human organism:

> We believe that this man had been operating as a successful psychic from a mode in which his will was prominent. […] His inherent sensitivity permitted him, when stimulated, to respond to a new kind of activity stirred up by the test. This new activity of his right brain then came into competition with the usual, well-controlled state in which the left brain was dominant. […] Thus the temporary state of confusion followed until his accustomed homeostasis was again established. (*ibid*., 37–38)

In his argumentation, Sannella refers to Motoyama, Bentov, and other researchers of the "energies of consciousness".[692]

In reports like the one quoted above, Sannella remains rather vague about the setting, procedure, and results of the experiments carried out at the Clinic. In most cases, he confines his report to narrating the client's religious experience, adding clinical observations and analyses of their religious practice. In other words, Sannella merged empirical data derived from his experiments with the narratives of religious experiences in his argumentation. Moreover, he correlated his observations with data gathered by Bentov. Thereby, he hoped to support the hypothesis of kundalini's physiological nature.

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[691] The lateralisation of brain functions implies that certain cognitive processes tend to be primarily controlled or localised in one hemisphere of the brain. Research has provided little evidence for the hypothesis that cognitive or motor functions are asymmetrically distributed between the left and right hemispheres. Therefore, there is no compelling evidence whatsoever for attributing creativity and intuition, or language, and logic, solely to the right and left hemispheres, respectively. The asymmetric attribution of, e.g., language and creativity traces back to the French physician Pierre Paul Broca (1824–1880). His 1861 theory that the left hemisphere generated language was the first expression of the left-brain vs. right-brain bias. This oversimplified myth has become widely acknowledged in the popular view while lacking scientific evidence (Corballis 2014; Nielsen et al. 2013).

[692] Sannella referred in his book to the eponymous edited volume *The Energies of Consciousness* (1975), which mainly explored acupuncture, human energy fields, and Kirlian Photography (Krippner and Rubin 1975).

Notwithstanding the results and interpretations drawn from the experiments, the Clinic assumed a pioneering role in carrying out empirical research on kundalini.

22.2.3. Education

The third pillar of the Clinic was education. Sannella wrote in *Kundalini* that accounts of kundalini were hitherto "confined to distant cultures, esoteric traditions, and a few isolated individuals […] and often permeated with vague mysticism and strange mythology" (Sannella 1976, 1). Based on the premise that knowledge about the physio-kundalini process had been scarce, Sannella and Cousens emphasised the necessity to inform psychiatrists, physicians, and the public. Cousens even considered education as the Clinic's primary function: "This was a clinic designed to inform the public, physicians, and psychologists that people were having such things as Kundalini awakenings in our society, [and] to supply general information about the meaning and characteristics of the awakening" (Cousens 1986, 2). According to Cousens, the Clinic was only a temporary solution until knowledge of kundalini had widely spread.

Educational efforts included lectures, workshops, interviews,[693] and seminars for professionals and laypersons,[694] and extended the Clinic's role beyond a therapeutic institution, transforming it into an educational and training centre for fellow experts and the interested public. Perhaps the most notable educational programmes were seminars offered at Esalen.

As mentioned, Sannella had been involved with Esalen before the opening of the Clinic. In 1979, he returned to Big Sur along with Streitfeld, offering a workshop titled "Kundalini Awakening". The workshop description explains the approach, methods, and target group:

> In this workshop kundalini awakening will be approached from an enlightened psychiatric point of view through lectures, case material from the files of the Kundalini Clinic, meditation enhanced by energy transmission (*shaktipat*) and a unique set of

[693] Perhaps most significant was Sannella's interview with the TV series "Thinking Allowed" (not to be confused with the BBC radio programme first broadcasted in 1998). The show aired on one hundred and twenty public television stations throughout the United States and Canada for eighteen years. Guests at "Thinking Allowed" included Fritjof Capra, Michael Murphy, Huston Smith, Krishnamurti, Marilyn Ferguson, and many more (Thinking Allowed 2010). I am indebted to Mark Kelly at Pacifica Graduate Institute (Carpinteria, CA) for introducing me to "Thinking Allowed".

[694] Cousens recalled giving lectures at different universities and departments of psychiatry all over the United States (Cousens 2023).

> Taoist exercises for stabilizing the kundalini flow. This workshop is for professionals and students in the areas of psychiatry, psychology, general medicine and the healing professions. (Esalen 1979c, 21, original emphasis)

Considering Esalen's far-reaching impact (see Chapter 23.1.), this workshop counts among Sannella and Streitfeld's most essential educational contributions. Unfortunately, the Esalen course description omits details about participants, the daily schedule, and the Daoist material.[695]

In *Kundalini*, Sannella compares Chinese Daoist meditation exercises with the yogic experience of kundalini.[696] He describes a Daoist meditator's experience, akin to descriptions of kundalini experiences. He does not, however, specify any Daoist exercises. During an interview with Lee Sannella, Jeffrey Mishlove recalls that he and Sannella "were involved in Taoist yoga exercises" (The Intuition Network 1988, 4). This is the most explicit reflection of Sannella's experiences with subtle forces and suggests that he might have taught "Taoist yoga" at his Esalen seminar (Sannella 1976, 18–19).

Before the 1980s, the term "Taoist Yoga" was commonly used to describe the energy-cultivation practice of qigong. Two notable sources account for the link between Daoist practices and yoga: Richard Wilhelm's *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life* (1931), with an influential commentary by C. G. Jung, and Charles Luk's *Secrets of Chinese Meditation* (1964) and *Taoist Yoga: Alchemy and Immortality* (1970) (Baier 2024; Siegler 2003, 335–336). While Sannella did not refer to Wilhelm and Jung's *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, he (and Cousens) used Luk's books to compare Daoist energy practices and kundalini (Sannella 1976, 18).[697]

Despite Sannella's reference to Luk's publications – which, in fact, omitted mention of kundalini – the linking of kundalini yoga with Daoist cultivation was not popularised until 1983, when the interpreter of Daoist philosophy and practice, Mantak Chia (b. 1944),

[695] At Esalen, the writer Alan Watts and the Taiwanese dancer Chungliang Al Huang (b. 1937) introduced Daoist philosophy and practice to the curriculum. Watts' first Daoist seminar dates back to 1963, and Al Hunag's to 1965 (co-taught with Watts); the latter continues to teach at Esalen to this day (Siegler 2003, 133–137).

[696] John Woodroffe added a chapter on "Shakti in Taoism" to his *Shakti and Shakta* (Woodroffe 1928, 212–219). However, Sannella seemed to have been unaware of it.

[697] Gopi Krishna sharply criticised Jung's commentary on *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, condemning what he perceived as Jung's exclusive preoccupation with the unconscious and his lack of interest in looking beyond his own theories (Krishna 1972c, 93). In a similar vein, he condemned Jung's views on kundalini, as discussed in Chapter 10.2.3.

published *Taoist Secrets of Love: Cultivating Male Sexual Energy* (1984).[698] Chia, who cannot be thoroughly introduced at this point, opened his "Taoist Esoteric Yoga Center" in New York in 1978. However, considering that it was not until 1981 that Chia's centre attracted European and US-American students, it is unlikely that he had much influence on Sannella, who withdrew from the Clinic around 1980. Cousens, on the other hand, mentions both Luk and Chia in his *Spiritual Nutrition* (1986), where he compares the physio-kundalini cycle with a Daoist energy cultivation technique.[699] The so-called "microcosmic orbit" aims to develop *qi* flow along subtle pathways in the human body. Like Sannella and Chia, Cousens maintains parallels between kundalini and Daoist awakening processes (Siegler 2003, 192–193; Cousens 1986, 51, 56).

Cousens mentioned in the interview conducted for this study that he also led workshops at Esalen. According to him, these workshops revolved around "Kundalini, Psychosis or Transcendence" and included shaktipat meditation.[700] There are several reasons why this statement is questionable. First, extensive research of the *Esalen Catalogs*, which have recorded every course taught at the Institute since 1962, revealed no evidence of a course led by Cousens (*Esalen Catalogs*, n.d.). Second, Cousens mentioned teaching such a workshop together with Lee Sannella (Cousens 2023). The source material, however, only provides information on Sannella co-teaching with Streitfeld (Esalen 1979c, 21). Third, Cousens said he gave shaktipat, and awoke people's energy. From at least 1975, Cousens was a devoted follower of Muktananda, who had empowered him to offer shaktipat initiation to people. Therefore, Cousens' shaktipat meditations must be considered a religious practice affiliated with Siddha Yoga. At Esalen, however, practices linked to particular religions were unwanted. Michael Murphy is very clear about this rule. In an interview conducted for this study, he emphasised Esalen's dissociation from any religious group (M. Murphy 2023).

Other scattered information on educational efforts included a 1980 European lecture tour by Sannella and a lecture co-led by Sannella and Sovatsky. The German "Forum für

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[698] Michael Winn, the true author of *Taoist Secrets of Love* and a devoted student of Chia, claimed that Chia taught Daoist techniques to ease kundalini's devastating effects (Siegler 2003, 195).

[699] Despite Luk's omission of kundalini from his books, Cousens maintained that "in the Chinese Taoist tradition, Luk, in his book *Secrets of Chinese Meditation*, describes an awakening process that is directly parallel to Kundalini awakening" (Cousens 1986, 51, original emphasis).

[700] According to Cousens, he met Stan Grof in Muktananda's ashram in South Asia and visited Esalen afterwards – perhaps at Grof's invitation (Cousens 2023). While there is no reason to question Cousens' visit to Esalen, there is no evidence in the source material to support Cousens' claim of teaching and offering shaktipat during his visit. A more likely scenario would be that Cousens visited Esalen as a guest, perhaps visiting his friend Grof. During that stay, Cousens may have given an informal lecture on his work and meditated with other guests on the lawn, at the farm, or in another public space at Esalen.

humanistische Psychologie + Psychotherapie E.V." (Forum for Humanistic Psychology and Psychotherapy Inc.) invited Sannella to deliver lectures in Munich, Heidelberg, and Cologne. From the event description, it is evident that his lectures were entirely based on his book. Intriguingly, Sannella supplemented his lecture with a "demonstration of experimental exercises aimed at invoking altered states of consciousness associated with kundalini" (Sommerprogramm Humanitische Psychologie, LGK, box 6.8.3.).[701] Several years later, in 1986, Sovatsky (then already the director of the Clinic) gave a presentation with Sannella. Titled "Kundalini", the event was sponsored by SEN and part of a workshop series on spiritual emergence (ITP 1986a, 7). Sovatsky has continued lecturing at international events to date (Sovatsky 2023).

22.3. The Relation Between the Kundalini Clinic and KRF

The previous chapters have examined the history, key protagonists, influences, and primary activities of the Kundalini Clinic. Despite its small size and short period of active research activities, the Clinic enjoyed an international reputation and counts among the most pivotal examples of modern kundalini research. It not only cared for patients from around the world, but Sannella toured through Europe, and Cousens continued the work while staying with Muktananda in South Asia. Moreover, as argued earlier, Sannella's book attracted attention from kundalini enthusiasts worldwide. From the mid-1970s through the 1980s, the Clinic was an internationally active institute.[702] Therefore, it makes sense to elucidate the specific interrelations and references between the Clinic, particularly Sannella's contribution, and Krishna and his international branches of KRF. I will first elucidate on perspectives advocated by Krishna's supporters, followed by those by Kundalini Clinic associates.

[701] German original: "Dr. Sannella wird einige der mit Kundalini verbundenen veränderten Bewußtseins- und Wahrnehmungszustände in experientiellen Übungen demonstrieren" (Sommerprogramm Humanitische Psychologie, LGK, box 6.8.3.), translated by M.T.

[702] Claims of dominance and authority undermine the argument that the Clinic espoused a unified view and programmatic line with international reach. This pertains particularly to the activities of Cousens and Sovatsky. The Clinic's co-founder Cousens did not recognise Streitfeld's and Sovatsky's activities as a continuation of what he and Sannella had started. Sovatsky omitted to mention Cousens's continued efforts in South Asia when discussing the Clinic's activities. Owing to these divergent perspectives, speaking of two narratives and two parallel Kundalini Clinic projects connected to one and the same Clinic is plausible – even more so since Cousens uses the designation "Kundalini crisis clinic" (Cousens 1986, 2) in his *Spiritual Nutrition*. Due to the limited availability of source material, this study nonetheless presumes a single Clinic.

The relationship between the Clinic and KRF was at best non-existent and at worst strained. It is telling, for instance, that Degler's biography of Krishna completely ignores Sannella, Bentov, and the Kundalini Clinic (Degler 2023). Perhaps she followed the example of other KRF associates, as little reference to Sannella is evident in the archival material. Gene Kieffer poses a notable exception, maintaining an ambiguous attitude towards the Clinic. On the one hand, he showed interest in the Clinic's research efforts, expressing hope that this might promote kundalini research at large: "If the Kundalini Clinic proves to be popular, the idea could spread" (Kieffer to Krishna, November 14, 1976, LGK, box 6.5.4.). On the other hand, he assumed a dismissive and sceptical attitude towards the Clinic and Lee Sannella in particular.[703] In a letter to Krishna, Kieffer writes:

> On Sunday Dr. Lee Sannella is coming to our house for dinner. […] He told me in a letter the other day that he had read everything you had written, but did you see any credits? Only a small paragraph and the listing of Kundalini in his bibliography. I feel almost certain that he is another TM meditator and that eventually he will write a book on how TM can "safely" awaken Kundalini. (Kieffer to Krishna, August 15, 1975, LGK, box 6.5.1.)[704]

The sarcastic tone, suspicion, and disappointment expressed in the letter are typical of Kieffer's relationship with Sannella. Inviting him to his house despite his reservations about the Clinic underscores Kieffer's ambiguous attitude. Much later, after Krishna's passing, Kieffer ultimately surrendered to a negative stance towards Sannella, accusing him of being the leader of a conspiracy against Krishna and KRF and of misappropriating intellectual assets. Two letters testify to this. In 1986, Stan Grof published an article which omitted mention of Krishna in favour of Sannella.[705] In a letter to Margaret Kobelt, Kieffer voiced his strong discontent:

> What happens is that all of these new age leaders are under the impression that Gopi Krishna is a newcomer and that he only wrote one book, his autobiography. […] Dr.

[703] Kieffer's opinion of Itzhak Bentov echoed that which he held of Sannella (Kieffer to Krishna, June 3, 1975, LGK, box 6.5.2.). In general, little or no information on Krishna and his supporters' relationship with Bentov is available. I could only trace one personal encounter between Bentov and Krishna, at the 1978 symposium "New Dimensions of Consciousness" in New York. Whether they spoke or met is not known (Rosen 1979, 11).

[704] The date of the letter is wrong. While the letterhead states that Kieffer sent his letter to Krishna in August 1975, the referenced book by Sannella was not published before the second half of 1976. In another letter, Kieffer states that Sannella visited him in 1977 (Kieffer to Kobelt, July 14, 1986, LGK, box 6).

[705] Perhaps the article in question was titled "Psychology and Consciousness Research", published as part of a special issue on "Critical Questions about New Paradigm Thinking" (S. Grof 1986).

> Grof's article, crediting Lee Sannella with the breakthrough, may be a blessing in disguise. Now we have absolute proof of the "conspiracy". Lee Sannella came to my home in 1977 and got all the material for his book. But he had read the autobiography before that, of course. Dr. Grof has heard from us many times and has received books, etc. He even visited the Pandit in your home [in May 1983]. So it is a conspiracy, and now we can begin to move around it by pointing to the article in Re-VISION as evidence. (Kieffer to Kobelt, July 14, 1986, LGK, box 6)

Two years later, in response to a book review of Sannella's *Kundalini* in the *Yoga Journal*, Kieffer revisited his earlier accusation:

> Note the review of Dr. Sannella's book in Yoga Journal. What is [*sic*] shows is that in the 20 years that we have been pushing the correct understanding of Kundalini, other forces have been spreading another story. Dr. Sannella is the leader, it would now seem, of those other forces. He simply doesn't want to understand Kundalini at all. (Kieffer to Kobelt, June 16, 1988, LGK, box 6)

While not representative of KRF's overall attitude towards Sannella and the Clinic, these two letters underscore the challenging relationship between supporters of Krishna and Sannella, particularly given Kieffer's key position among Krishna's supporters. The letters, however, mainly echo Kieffer's frustration, which was shared among others of Krishna's supporters (Bradford and Degler 2022).

Despite such occasional (and perhaps personal) tensions, Sannella's attempt to promote kundalini research was also met with approval. This assumption derives from Sannella's attendance at an international event by Krishna's Canadian supporters. In November 1981, KRFC – the Canadian KRF branch – organised the conference "The Future: Our Decision" in Toronto. The invited speakers included Lee Sannella, New Age celebrity Marylin Ferguson (1938–2008), Neuropsychiatrist Peter Fenwick (b. 1935), and psychic healer Olga Worrall (1906–1985). The conference folder describes Sannella and his lecture in an affirmative manner: "Lee Sannella is one of North America's most foreward thinking [*sic*] psychiatrists. […] In his talk on 'Psychosis or Transcendence' he will discuss the process of awakening and outline therapeutic and counselling techniques that can be helpful to persons undergoing transcendental experiences" (Conference folder, LGK, box 4).

Sannella, in turn, had acknowledged Krishna's KRF as a reliable research institution in his book *Kundalini*. Therein, he writes: "[The rebirth process] now occurs regularly, with and without training, as is shown by the growing number of cases in the files of the Kundalini

Research Foundation in New York, and by our own increasing number of authenticated cases" (Sannella 1976, 7). Here, too, Sannella treats Krishna's KRF as equivalent to his institute. However, Sannella and KRF's mutual recognition was perhaps less well-meaning behaviour than a strategic move to strengthen kundalini research and thereby advance their own agenda.

Let us now turn to perspectives advocated by associates of the Kundalini Clinic. Among the Clinic's therapists, Sovatsky was the most involved with KRF. He was on good terms with Kieffer, highlighting his contribution in providing support, funding, and establishing connections with other Krishna-related organisations (Sovatsky 2023). Despite never having met Krishna before his death, Sovatksy joined what was to become KRN (see Chapter 13.1.2.). According to him, he served as KRN's vice president from 1994 through 1999. In this position, he co-organised KRN's annual conferences and worked closely with Bonnie Greenwell (his student) and Joan Shivarpita Harrigan.[706] Moreover, Sovatsky, along with Greenwell and Harrigan, was a board member of what he called the Kundalini Research Board (Sovatsky 2023).[707]

Neither Streitfeld nor Cousens interacted with KRF or associated protagonists. Streitfeld was either not interested in Krishna – perhaps owing to his devotion to Muktananda – or potential interactions are not recorded in the archival material. Cousens, in contrast, conveyed some of his views. In his book *Spiritual Nutrition*, he briefly mentions Krishna as an example of somebody attaching meaning to kundalini. However, as a devoted Muktananda disciple, Cousens relied on his guru's views on kundalini (Cousens 1986, 51). In my interview with Cousens, he described Krishna as a meditation teacher who wrote a helpful book. Intriguingly, Cousens expressed his opinion that Krishna was "most likely [influenced by

[706] Aside from her involvement with KRN and SEN, Joan Shivarpita Harrigan was the director of the Tennessee-based Patanjali Kundalini Yoga Care (PKYC). Founded by Swami Chandrasekharanand Saraswati, PKYC had US-American and South Asian branches and offered individualised guidance and treatments for those who claimed to have undergone a kundalini experience. Chandrasekharanand Saraswati chose his devoted disciple Harrigan to represent what he framed as his lineage, i.e., Kundalini Vidya, in the United States. As Director of PKYC-USA, Harrigan provided services in North America and the United Kingdom. Another PKYC branch is still active in South Asia and is currently led by Silvia Viryananda, who serves Europe and other parts of the globe. In some sense, PKYC aligns with the Kundalini Clinic's work by offering consultations, education, and referrals to third parties if needed. Having said that, PKYC dissociates itself from any clinical approach, assuming a religious stance: "PKYC does not provide medical, psychological, or emergency services and is not designed to address emotional or health crises or instabilities. It is not a clinic or a yoga center" (Patanjali Kundalini Yoga-Care, n.d.).

[707] Despite Sovatsky's involvement with KRN, little information is available on his activities in the archival material. Given the time frame of this study, perhaps there is additional material that was not reviewed, which could provide more detailed evidence of his involvement.

their work]" at the Clinic (Cousens 2023). Originally published in 1967, Shambala distributed the US-American edition of *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* from 1971. Krishna's report thus clearly preceded the Kundalini Clinic by years. Cousens may have mistaken the year of publication of Krishna's *Kundalini*. This notwithstanding, he underlined the Clinic's pioneering importance for kundalini research, stressing how they had explained and explored the topic before Krishna's account. It is interesting to note that a *Blitz* article, evidently a pro-Krishna medium, proposed a contrary hierarchy of influence: "Case histories of Kundalini awakenings recorded by this Institute [the New York KRF branch] have enabled Dr. Lee Sannella, MD. of Berkelay [*sic*], CA, who is leading a research group [at the Kundalini Clinic], to investigate several cases" (Karanjia 1976c, front page).[708] Karanjia's article and Cousens' statement perfectly illustrate how claims of authority were challenged within the arena of kundalini research.

Another reason why Cousens rejected Krishna's views on kundalini was due to his independent approach without belonging to any particular lineage or school. Compared to Muktananda's lineage, which Cousens claimed to trace back "over a thousand years" (Cousens 2023), he deemed Krishna's spontaneous experience relatively insignificant. He categorised kundalini as a "lineage energy" (*ibid*.). By asserting that only shaktipat initiation can reveal the true nature of kundalini, Cousens undermined the authenticity of Krishna's kundalini experience. Furthermore, Cousens neglected to acknowledge or was unaware of Krishna and KRF's efforts to promote kundalini research (*ibid*.).

Unlike Cousens and Streitfeld, Sannella engaged with members of KRF. Perhaps owing to this engagement, Sannella took Krishna's work more seriously than Cousens did – with an emphasis on "more" rather than "fully". Noting that his own "thesis is consistent with the observations of Gopi Krishna" (Sannella 1976, 4), Sannella inserts several quotes from Krishna in *Kundalini* and allows substantial space for describing Krishna's experience. It is evident, however, that Sannella's interest in Krishna's experience outweighs any serious interest in his theories. Placing Krishna's case under the category "some classical yoga accounts" underscores Sannella's classification of Krishna as a practitioner. In essence, he viewed Krishna as just another case study, contributing to his clinical observations (*ibid*., 20–22).

Sannella and Krishna advocated different views on kundalini's potential to cause mental disease. As argued earlier, Sannella interpreted psychotic episodes accompanying a physio-

[708] Chapter 18.2. discusses K. R. Karanjia's "Kundalini Yoga" series published in the South Asian tabloid *Blitz*.

kundalini process as symptomatic of temporary impurities. According to him, what might be diagnosed as psychosis or schizophrenia is, in fact, not an actual psychotic condition. Instead, it is either illusional or a condition that will wane once kundalini has calmed down. Krishna, in contrast, believed that kundalini might indeed cause mental disorders. In 1976, shortly after the publication of Sannella's treatise, Krishna elaborated on this view during an interview with his closest supporters and collaborators: "In the case of insanity and psychosis, you always find the people affected complaining of sensations, burnings, terrible lights, fire, noises that is Kundalini that is in a morbid state" (Krishna 1976a, 10). John White, who interviewed Krishna, then carefully inquired: "So in addition to creativity, genius and enlightenment, you now are saying that Kundalini in a morbid state is responsible for mental illness" (White, in Krishna 1976a, 10). Krishna's clear response: "For psychosis and neurosis" (Krishna 1976a, 10). In other words, Krishna pictured two potential outcomes of spontaneous kundalini awakening: On the one hand, a temporary psychosomatic crisis, yet ultimately resulting in an enhanced state of being, and on the other hand, a mental disorder.[709] Krishna and Sannella thus assessed kundalini's potential dangers differently.

Sannella largely agreed with Krishna's universalism, such as the belief in kundalini's prevalence across a large cultural spectrum. In *Kundalini*, Sannella addressed this universalism as "cross-cultural aspects of kundalini" (Sannella 1976, 14–24). However, Sannella rejected Krishna's approach as too inclusive. This becomes evident from Sannella's perspectives on Krishna's views on genius. In Mishlove's interview with Sannella, Mishlove inquired about Krishna's claim that kundalini engenders genius:

> MISHLOVE: Many years ago a Hindu writer named Gopi Krishna wrote a book on kundalini, in which he suggested that this was the force that underlies great genius, and that by practicing yoga, having a kundalini experience, one could awaken great intellectual powers or great musical powers, the abilities of great genius. Do you think there's something to that argument?
>
> SANNELLA: Well, I think it's a valid argument. Take certain exceptions to it, because he calls almost everything that is oddball kundalini, whether it's psychotic or whether it's genius.
>
> MISHLOVE: You mean he might say, for example, by definition Mozart had experienced kundalini.

[709] Kundalini's "morbid state" does not play a significant role in Krishna's writings. He mostly focused on kundalini's potential to trigger an enhanced state of being – which could, however, result in evil character traits (see Chapter 10.2.3.).

> SANNELLA: Oh, of course, by definition, yes. But I would not necessarily agree with that. But that's just a technical difference. I don't think it's very important. (The Intuition Network 1988, 4)

This quote highlights Sannella's criticism of what he saw as an excessive application of kundalini to explain genius. Moreover, Sannella disapproves of Krishna's ambiguous distinction between psychosis and genius. Given that Sannella has published a book on genius himself – though two decades after the interview with Mishlow – it is notable that he critiques Krishna's concept of genius. Sannella's book *On Genius: An Evolutionary Force Inherent in Every Being* (2006) presents a range of remarkable individuals whom Sannella labels as "cosmic explorers" (Sannella 2006, xiv), "geniuses" (*ibid*.), and "outstanding visionaries" (*ibid*.). Although Sannella does not mention Krishna in the book, its central themes clearly resonate with Krishna's thought and echo his anthology project.[710]

First, Sannella's definition of genius in *On Genius* equally assumes a divine origin and an inherent "visionary essence" of genius:

> I came to see that genius is a Divine gift, […] which all people have at birth. […] As you will see, my fascination is with the visionary essence of genius. That has been the perspective which has evoked the most meaning and is the source of the excitement which adorns and renders holy all my life. (*ibid*.)

He invites his readers "to a feast of genius, the remarkable force which drives humankind ever on and up, even to the everlasting source of all and all" (*ibid*.). While Sannella had previously rejected Krishna's idea that kundalini is the driving force behind genius in his interview with Mishlow, his perspective had notably shifted by the time he wrote *On Genius*. Although Sannella does not reference Krishna or kundalini in this work, his revised understanding of genius clearly aligns with and reflects Krishna's views.

Second, evolution is a central theme in Sannella's books and Krishna's entire oeuvre. In *Kundalini*, Sannella wrote: "The 'rise of the kundalini' […] can be described as an evolutionary process taking place in the human nervous system" (Sannella 1976, 4). Within the framework of evolutionary principles, the alignment between Sannella's and Krishna's views on genius becomes even more apparent, as reflected in the (sub)titles of Sannella's and Krishna's books, i.e., *An Evolutionary Force Inherent in Every Being* and *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius,* respectively.

[710] Krishna initiated the anthology project in the late 1970s with his supporters to document cases of an activated kundalini in the lives of mystics, saints, and geniuses (see Chapter 13.2.1.2.).

In essence, Sannella was open to and appreciative of Krishna's efforts to study kundalini. However, he viewed Krishna as a practitioner and his experience as an intriguing case study, though criticising Krishna's theories as underdeveloped. Analysis of *On Genius* suggests that Krishna's influence on Sannella might be more significant than Sannella acknowledged. However, since this analysis pertains to a 2006 publication, it does not confirm Krishna's initial impact on Sannella or the Kundalini Clinic. In general, Sannella's and Krishna's perspectives on kundalini were often compared or associated, as evidenced by a folder promoting Sannella's 1980 European lecture tour, which recommended Krishna's *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* (Sommerprogramm Humanistische Psychologie, LGK, box 6.8.3.).

22.4. Summary

This chapter introduced the San Francisco-based Kundalini Clinic, highlighting its far-reaching impact and enduring legacy in clinical examinations of rare psycho-physiological processes. Although some details remain uncertain due to limited source material, this study acknowledges the Clinic and its key figures' pivotal role in advancing kundalini research. By examining the Clinic's primary functions and activities, the chapter aimed to illuminate its strategies for generating and communicating knowledge about kundalini.

The historical significance of the Kundalini Clinic lies in its role in integrating kundalini into clinical settings and interpreting it as a disease pattern. As discussed in subsequent chapters, the Spiritual Emergency Network (SEN) utilised the concept of "kundalini syndrome", as elaborated by Bentov and Sannella, to describe "spiritual emergencies".

A substantial portion of the chapter analysed Itzhak Bentov's and Lee Sannella's foundational contributions to the Clinic's theoretical framework. Bentov's holographic view of the universe and consciousness laid the groundwork for his influential concept of the physio-kundalini syndrome, which in turn informed Sannella's perspective on kundalini as a physiological rebirth process. This focus on rebirth distinguishes Sannella's model from Bentov's and contributed to its enduring success in the US-American context. Additionally, the chapter explored the therapists' relationships with Krishna and KRF, noting that Sannella's prominence and the Clinic's acclaim, coupled with Muktananda's role as a religious guide, led to some dissatisfaction among Krishna's supporters. Despite these tensions, some collaborations and alliances were realised.

The chapter further examined the technologisation of kundalini. Cousens claimed to have co-invented a device for activating kundalini – a claim also made by Bentov regarding his inventions. Both sought to provide evidence of transcendence with their machines, with Maharishi and Muktananda endorsing Bentov's and Cousen's devices, respectively.

The chapter also briefly mentioned Hiroshi Motoyama. Despite mainly operating in Japan, His contributions to empirical kundalini research and its technological applications, despite his focus in Japan, warrant further exploration.

Excursus: Hiroshi Motoyama and the Institute for Religious Psychology

The Japanese parapsychologist and philosopher Hiroshi Motoyama (1925–2015) plays a notable role in the modern project of kundalini research.[711] At his Tokyo Institute for Religious Psychology (IRP), he attempted to find empirical evidence for the existence and effectiveness of various components of the subtle body. Baier described Motoyama as a key protagonist of New Age Science, who attempted to "connect cakra theories with physics and physiology, Psi-research, perennial mysticism and the evolution of mankind" (Baier 2016, 345). As this chapter will demonstrate, Motoyama was not only a central figure in studying chakras against the backdrop of New Age Science but further played a pivotal role in empirical endeavours to detect kundalini within the human body.

No comprehensive (English) study[712] has hitherto discussed his experimental approach and analysed his influence on international endeavours to unravel the physiology of consciousness – an undertaking that clearly also exceeds the scope of the present study.[713] Therefore, Motoyama's *Science and the Evolution of Consciousness: Chakras, Ki, and Psi* (1978) and *Theories of the Chakras: Bridge to Higher Consciousness (1981)* serve as the main references for analysing his contribution to kundalini research.

This chapter will attempt a brief biographical sketch of Motoyama, examine the significance of IRP for ensuing kundalini research projects, and explore his relationship with Krishna.

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[711] In Japan, mentioning the surname before the given name is customary. For instance, the convention would render "Motoyama Hiroshi" in the case of Hiroshi. However, I have chosen to depart from this Japanese custom in this study to enhance readability. Moreover, I will refrain from using diacritical marks for transliterated Japanese terms unless when referring to Motoyama's key terms, e.g., shōshūten breathing method.

[712] According to the Japanese scholar Toshio Akai, an expert on Japanese new religious movements and counterculture, one edited volume exists in the Japanese language that addresses Motoyama's scholarship and practice (Kashio and Motoyama 2013). However, the volume, translated as *Do Humans Have a Soul? Hiroshi Motoyama's Research and Practice*, seems to be out of print (personal email communication).

[713] Although Motoyama was an important advocate of New Age Science, neither Hanegraaff's *New Age Religion* (1996) nor Hammer's *Claiming Knowledge* (2004) discuss Motoyama. He also plays no role in Lewis and Hammer's edited volume *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science* (2010), and Melton's edited volume *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* (2001) provides only a brief entry to Motoyama's IARP (Melton 2001c, 798). Monika Schrimpf (2018, 68) touches upon Motoyama in her study on medical discourses and practices in contemporary Japanese religions – however only briefly in a footnote. Leland counts among the very few sources that actually discuss Motoyama, yet also in a very brief manner.

1. Biographical Sketch of Hiroshi Motoyama

Hiroshi Motoyama was a central figure in twentieth-century parapsychological and new-religious circles.[714] As a Shinto priest, yogic practitioner, and founder of several parapsychological and scientistic institutions, he was held in esteem by distinct parties, including the parapsychologist J. B. Rhine and yoga and meditation teacher Swami Satyananda Saraswati.

His initial entry point to religious, mystical, and paranormal phenomena was Kinue Motoyama (1909–1974), a Japanese medium and founder of the Shinto-based new religious movement Tamamitsu Jinja.[715] Kinue Motoyama met Yojima Seiko and her son Hiroshi in 1935. The two women thenceforth cooperated in religious activities, establishing the first shrine of Tamamitsu Jinja, which was registered under the Religious Corporations Law in 1952. Moreover, in 1950, Kinue Motoyama officially adopted Hiroshi, who subsequently bore the surname "Motoyama" and was raised by both his biological and foster mother.[716] During this period, Motoyama started practising yoga (asanas and pranayama) and claimed a gradual development of psychic abilities (Motoyama 1978, 27; 1981, 243): "I suffered a lot from disease and instability and for this reason I often couldn't get up, so I decided to practise Yoga. After six months to a year I was so much better that I began to experience for myself the ki or prana energy in my body" (Motoyama, in Jackson 2011).[717] As discussed below, this early yoga practice led to what Motoyama took to be his kundalini activation.

The next notable episodes in Motoyama's life included his 1955 appointment as high priest at the main shrine of Tamamitsu Jinja, the completion of doctorates in philosophy (1956) and clinical psychology (1962), and the 1960 (or 1962) the founding of the Institute for

[714] This chapter consolidates biographical details on Hiroshi Motoyama using scattered information provided by several online sources. These include the webpages of Tamamitsu Jinja (2018) and IARP (2024) (for which I used a translated version), an interview conducted by Adrian Jackson with Motoyama (2011), and an online encyclopedia entry on Tamamitsu Jinja (Hirofumi 2005). All biographical information is derived from these sources unless explicitly stated otherwise. Due to the scarcity of source material, this chapter includes numerous unanswered questions and strongly advocates for further research into Motoyama's life and work.

[715] No academic study has yet addressed the new religious group Tamamitsu Jinja. For an overview of new religious movements in Japan, refer to Pokorny and Winter's edited volume *Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements* (2018).

[716] In his book *Theories of the Chakras* (1981), Motoyama claims that at age four, he had visited temples and shrines with both his biological and foster mother (Motoyama 1981, 239). In *Science and the Evolution of Consciousness* (1978), then again, he claims to have been adopted at age six (Motoyama 1978, 26). Due to the lack of additional material, it is difficult to assess when exactly Hiroshi was adopted by Kinue Motoyama.

[717] Unfortunately, information is scarce regarding teachers other than his foster mother and any particular yoga schools he attended.

Religious Psychology (Shukyo Shinrigaku Kenkyujo), which was located beside the Tamamitsu shrine in Tokyo.[718] Moreover, before embarking on his academic career, Motoyama pursued electronic engineering at the Naval Academy. His proficiency in this field proved invaluable when he later sought to construct his own technological apparatus to empirically validate his theoretical assertions regarding the subtle body.[719] These undertakings are characteristic of Motoyama's central pillars: religious practice, holistic medicine, and institutionalised research into the paranormal.

In 1962, he received a two-year scholarship to study at Duke University with J. B. Rhine, often considered the "father of parapsychology".[720] This was the first research stay abroad of several others that followed throughout his life. Upon Motoyama's return to Japan, he briefly worked at Tokyo University as a lecturer. However, due to his parapsychological teachings, he was soon discharged from his academic activities. He thenceforth solely operated from his Institute for Religious Psychology, where he conducted experiments, taught yoga classes and complied with his duties as a Shinto priest (Motoyama 1978, 28). Soon thereafter, he left the country again, following an invitation to South Asia to study with parapsychologist H. N. Banerjee at the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur.[721] In a letter to Gopi Krishna, Banerjee reported about Motoyama's visit:

> Some time back my friend Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama had visited our research centre under our exchange programme in order to conduct a research for finding out [the] co-relation between autonomic nervous system and extra sensory perception. The research reports of Dr. Motoyama were published [in 1962] in our quarterly Journal – [the] Indian Journal of Parapsychology. (Banerjee to Krishna, June 11, 1968, LGK, box 6.1.4.)[722]

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[718] I was not able to determine Motoyama's definition of "religious psychology". From his references to "psychology" throughout his publications, it is likely that "religious psychology" denotes a unique compound of parapsychology, transpersonal psychology, New Age Science, and metaphysical religions (Motoyama 1978, 25).

[719] Motoyama's translated works consistently employ terms such as "subtle body" (Motoyama 1978, 105), "subtle energy" (*ibid*., 53), and "subtle chakras and nādīs" (Motoyama 1981, 95). Occasionally, Motoyama refers to "subtle bodies" (Motoyama 1978, 29) and often equates the subtle body with the "astral body" (Motoyama 1990, 107).

[720] Duke's Institute for Parapsychology awarded Motoyama the McDougall Prize for "electrophysiological research in parapsychology" (IARP 2024).

[721] The exact date of Motoyama's trip to South Asia is unclosed. While he claimed to have stayed at Duke for two years, from 1962 through 1964, IARP's homepage states that Motoyama visited the University of Rajasthan in 1963. This study, therefore, conjectures that Motoyama went to South Asia between 1963 and 1965 (Motoyama 1978, 28; IARP 2024).

[722] After his visit to the University of Rajasthan, Motoyama assumed the role as contributing editor of Banerjee's edited journal, the *Indian Journal of Parapsychology*, along with the US-American

Motoyama returned to Japan, where he spent several years pursuing his research at IRP. Other research stays included a second tenure with Rhine at Duke in 1964 and a three-month stay in South Asia as a visiting professor from late 1969 through January or February 1970.[723] This time, he was affiliated with the Department of Psychology and Parapsychology at Andhra University, Andhra Pradesh. Motoyama was likely invited as a visiting professor by the parapsychologist and educator K. Ramakrishna Rao (1932–2021), then head of the Department.[724] The two met at Duke University in 1962 while studying and working under J. B. Rhine and maintained a close friendship (Motoyama 2002, 65; Rammohan 2002, 6; Nagatamo and Ames, in Motoyama 1990, x).

Throughout the subsequent decades, Motoyama established several additional institutes.[725] However, only two play a significant role in this study: the Institute for Religious Psychology (IRP) and the California Institute for Human Science: Mind Body Spirit University (CIHS).[726] While IRP represented Motoyama's international headquarters, CIHS was an attempt to gain momentum in the "West". Founded in 1992 as "a graduate school […] to

(para)psychologist Gardner Murphy and his British colleague George W. Fisk (1882–1972) (Banerjee 1962, i).

[723] In *Theories of the Chakras* (1981), Motoyama mentions lecturing at Andhra University for three months in 1967. Given that the Department of Parapsychology was not launched before December 1967, he either confused the dates or had gone to Andhra University twice (Motoyama 1981, 246).

[724] At the invitation of D.S. Kothari, then chairman of the Indian University Grants Commission, K. R. Rao founded the Department of Psychology and Parapsychology at Andhra University. Launched in December 1967, it experienced rapid growth before declining – perhaps due to Kao's relocation to the United States in 1982, where he continued J. B. Rhine's work at the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man. Despite facing challenges, the Department exists to date (Rammohan 2002, 6–10). Intriguingly, Rammohan underscored that the Department of Parapsychology at Andhra University was unique and the first of its kind in South Asia. However, H. N. Banerjee, who edited the *Indian Journal of Parapsychology* from the early 1960s (perhaps even from the journal's inception in 1958), stated that the Journal was the "quarterly official organ of: Department of Parapsychology, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur" (Banerjee 1962, i). A possibility remains that the *Indian Journal of Parapsychology* was already published before the establishment of Rajasthan's Department of Parapsychology. Nonetheless, it is more likely that this demonstrates that Rao's Department was *not* the first academic institution in South Asia solely dedicated to parapsychology.

[725] Institutes associated with Motoyama include: The Institute for Life Physics (Tokyo, 1990), the Motoyama Biophysics Research Institute (N/A), the Southern California Japan Graduate School (California, 1991), the International Association for Religion and Parapsychology (Tokyo, 1992), the California Institute for Human Science (CIHS) (California, 1992), and the Motoyama Graduate School of Human Science (Tokyo, 1994). With some of these institutions, it is challenging to determine whether they are distinct entities or merely different branches of the same establishment.

[726] According to Nandini Katre, a member of the CIHS leadership, Motoyama's founding of the CIHS was inspired by the California Institute for Integral Studies (CIIS) (personal online communication). In 1978, Motoyama was invited as a visiting scholar at CIIS's predecessor, the California Institute of Asian Studies (CIAS). Additionally, Thomas G. Brophy, CIHS's former president, recognised similarities between Motoyama's integral approach to education and the approach advocated by Haridas Chaudhuri at CIAS (CIAS 1978; Brophy 2022).

actuate an academic basis to build a global society for global humans" (Motoyama 2002, 65), CIHS remains active to date.

At these two institutes, Motoyama's experimental approach was implemented to pursue the healing capacities of subtle energies and, at a more fundamental level, to evidence their existence. The next chapter will explore Motoyama's experience and research into kundalini at IRP, CIHS, and related institutes.

2. Motoyama's Experience of Kundalini

Motoyama started meditating in 1950 at age twenty-five. According to his account, the "yoga meditation" (Motoyama 1990, xiv) he practised resulted from transcultural exchanges between South Asia and Japan after the Second World War. In later years, Satyananda represented the central authority on yoga for Motoyama (Motoyama 1981). Initially, however, he claimed to depend solely on his biological and foster mothers, who instructed him in religious matters. Among the two, his foster mother, whom Motoyama addressed with the respectful honorific designation "Odaisama", seemed to be his principal teacher: "Odaisama guided my spiritual growth for forty-five years. She exposed me to a wide range of esoteric teachings and initiated me into a series of rigorous disciplines, spanning the spectrum of Shinto, Buddhist, Taoist, and Hindu theory and practice" (Motoyama 1978, 26). Despite Motoyama's assertion that his biological and foster mother saw "no need for strict adherence to any one spiritual system" (*ibid*., 27), Shintoism was clearly their primary belief system – after all, they founded a Shinto-derived new religious movement. To what extent they were versed in yoga is unknown.[727] Shigenori Nagatomo and Clifford R. Ames, who translated Motoyama's *Toward a Superconsciousness* (1990) into English, referred to Motoyama's initial practice as encompassing Shinto and Kundalini Yoga traditions (Motoyama 1981, 245; Nagatamo and Ames, in 1990, xi).

In his book *Theories of the Chakras* (1981), Motoyama details his initial yoga meditation practice, explaining how it led to a kundalini experience followed by successive chakra openings (Motoyama 1981, 238–257). While the initial phase of his "spiritual awakening"

[727] Kenta Kasai shows how the Theosophical Society influenced individuals in Japan to establish their own theosophical groups. One such group was Ryuokai, founded by Sekizo Miura (1883–1960) in 1953. Miura translated and distributed major theosophical publications (including Leadbeater, who was prominently addressed in Motoyama's *Theories of the Chakras*) and disseminated ideas about Raja Yoga and the "physiology of Yoga" (Kasai 2012, 453, 438, 446). I am indebted to Franz Winter for recommending Kasai's article and other literature on Japanese new-religious movements to me.

lasted no longer than six months to a year of regular practice, Motoyama claims that it took approximately thirty years to achieve a fully awakened state (Motoyama 1981, 256; Jackson 2011). He described his practice as a daily rigorous morning routine, starting at three AM and lasting for three to five hours. The practice comprised two main components: a breathing exercise (what he called pranayama) at the outset, followed by a concentration technique centred on a specific chakra. Motoyama's variation of pranayama is noteworthy, as it clearly reflects his perspective on kundalini:

> Here is this the initial method of prānāyāma I practiced.[728] Inhale breath (prāna) through the left nostril to the lower abdomen for four seconds. Hold the prāna in the inflated lower abdomen for eight seconds. Then raise the kundalinī from the coccyx to the lower abdomen (the svādhishthāna chakra) and contract the abdominal muscles. Visualize mixing and unifying the prāna and the kundalinī for eight seconds. Exhale through the right nostril for four seconds. […] Repeat the entire process, inhaling through the right nostril and exhaling through the left, and so on, alternately. (Motoyama 1981, 240)

This quote demonstrates Motoyama's assertion that parts of his yoga meditation involved the deliberate movement of kundalini. In other words, Motoyama suggested that practitioners following his method were potentially able to regulate kundalini's flow. Notably, Motoyama maintained that this control occurred before kundalini's full awakening. After several months of consistent morning practice, he eventually experienced "the rising of the kundalinī shakti to the top of my head through the sushumnā" (*ibid*., 241). Thus, according to Motoyama, his yoga meditation not only entailed his preliminary control over the force but also triggered its complete ascent. This occurrence, Motoyama affirmed, came as a surprise, despite his prior encounters with kundalini:

> I was particularly feverish in the lower abdomen and saw there a round blackish-red light like a ball of fire about to explode […]. Suddenly, an incredible power rushed through my spine to the top of the head and, though it lasted only a second or two, my body levitated off the floor a few centimeters. I was terrified. (*ibid*.)

Motoyama's experience proper aligns with other reports, such as those by Gopi Krishna (1967) and Swami Muktananda (1974).[729] By 1981, when Motoyama published his *Theories*

[728] There is no consistent spelling of Sanskrit or Japanese words in Motoyama's translated books.

[729] Bonnie Greenwell refers to Motoyama's kundalini experience as an example of a "kundalini awakening [that] continues over many years and includes challenging experiences" (Greenwell 2009, 27). However, while Motoyama reported that completing his chakra activation took several decades, his kundalini

of the Chakras, he was likely aware of available accounts on kundalini experience. The most evident influence on Motoyama's report was Satyananda. This is apparent from Motoyama discussing Satyananda's understanding of the subtle body in detail and from the following quote that Motoyama printed in his *Theories of the Chakras*: "The awakening of the mūlādhāra chakra brings complete knowledge of the kundalinī […] and the power to awaken the kundalinī, thereby giving rise to abilities such as levitation" (Satyananda, in Motoyama 1981, 268). Satyananda included similar accounts in his *Kundalini Tantra* (1984), which considerably references Motoyama's experiments.

Later, Motoyama introduced other methods to facilitate the successful ascent of kundalini. Most notable were his "shōshūten breathing method" and the "susumṇā purification method", which he elucidated in several publications. Both methods involve control of breath, visualisation of the subtle body, and concentration on kundalini's deliberate circulation. In the case of shōshūten, kundalini circulates between the base of the spine to the top of the head. This shall be accomplished by

> raising the kundalinī shakti along the sushumnā to the top of the head and letting it fall to the ājnā chakra during inhalation. Then keep the shakti there and hold the breath for two to three seconds. Let it fall to the svādhishthāna chakra along the midsternal line of the front of the body and keep it there, again holding the breath for two to three seconds. Maintain a circulation of the shakti from the mūlādhāra chakra up the sushumnā to the top of the head, back to the mūlādhāra, and so on. (Motoyama 1981, 253)

The susumṇā purification method also entails kundalini's ascent from the coccyx. Unlike shōshūten, kundalini departs from the body and temporarily dissolves in the "universe" before the practitioner draws it back to the body, where it descends through the central channel. Regarding shōshūten, Motoyama claims that shōshūten was a "Taoist […] method of purifying the sushumnā" (Motoyama 1981, 253; 1990, 143–145).

In sum, Motoyama's experimental and overall understanding of kundalini was based on the assessment that it could be regulated by one's will through meditation techniques. He claimed that his complete mastery of kundalini led to the development of paranormal abilities, including levitation, clairvoyance, and telepathy, alongside substantial improvements in his health. These assertions guided his subsequent efforts in electrophysiological experiments on chakras and kundalini, as he deemed a deeper

awakening was rapid. Moreover, he underscored that he "did not experience as much physical or mental difficulty as is so often associated with this experience" (Motoyama 1981, 241).

understanding of subtle physiology essential for enhancing overall human health. Moreover, he believed that persuading others of his insights necessitated experimental validation of the subtle components (Motoyama 1981, 217; 1990, 11, 143–145).

3. Motoyama's Empirical Research into Kundalini

At Motoyama's institutes in Japan and California, the research staff perform(ed) experiments to gather electrophysiological evidence for the existence of subtle energies and other components of subtle physiology. Two devices were primarily used for these endeavours: the Apparatus for Meridian Identification (AMI) and the Chakra Instrument (CI), both of which were invented by Motoyama. Initially, he utilised EEG (electroencephalography) and ECG (electrocardiography) to detect subtle energies. However, the work with these methods was unsatisfactory. After Motoyama's research stay at Andhra University, where he and Rao collaboratively examined several individuals, he decided to develop a physiological recording device of his own:

> We examined, using EEG and so-on, Yogis and T'ai Chi Chuan masters. […] After my stay in India I thought perhaps my investigations of such an idea of prana or ki energy were wrong, as we cannot measure or detect these energies with traditional medical instruments. So, I decided to develop a new machine. I had studied electronic engineering […], so, now I was able to build a circuit to make a new machine. (Motoyama, in Jackson 2011)

The machine in question was the AMI. It aimed at monitoring the electrical conductivity and capacity at specific acupuncture points. Two to three years later, he developed the CI.[730] Unlike the AMI, the CI was designed – as the name suggests – to measure the energy emanating from an activated chakra (Motoyama 1981, 257). Motoyama used the CI as his primary (but not exclusive) device to gather electrophysiological data about kundalini.[731]

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[730] Unfortunately, I was not able to secure detailed information on the exact year when Motoyama finished developing the AMI and CI. The first publication addressing the AMI was Motoyama's 1977 book *Measurement of Ki Energy Diagnoses & Treatment: Treatment Principle of Oriental Medicine from an Electrophysiological Viewpoints*. Therefore, Motoyama likely finished the AMI during the mid-1970s (CIHS 2022).

[731] Throughout his publications, Motoyama consistently integrated perspectives on the subtle body from both South and East Asian traditions, with the AMI and CI not posing an exception (Motoyama 1978; 1981; 1990). One would assume that Motoyama utilised the AMI primarily for experiments related to meridians, reflecting East Asian subtle body concepts, while experiments involving the CI focused on chakras and other components of the South Asian subtle body. However, this was not the case. Motoyama did not attribute any

Most data primarily targeted the activity level of specific chakras and only indirectly addressed kundalini. However, as outlined above, chakra and kundalini activation are inextricably linked within Motoyama's views.

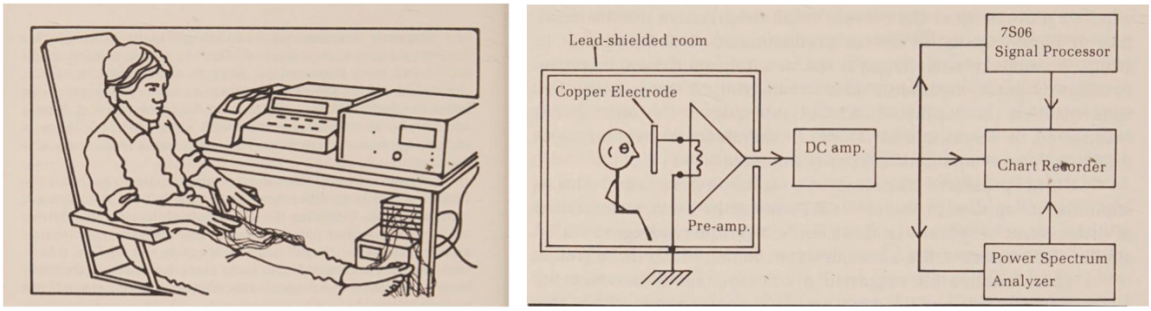

Figure 25: Motoyama's illustrations of an AMI with electrodes attached (left figure) and a CI measuring energy ejected through the chakras (right figure) (Motoyama 1978, 118, 94).

The AMI functioned in the following manner: twenty-eight electrodes are attached to twenty-eight acupuncture points at the tips of fingers and toes (Figure 25). These electrodes served dual purposes: they delivered short-duration square-wave voltage electrical stimulation and simultaneously measured the resulting "skin currents", i.e., electrical signals. Motoyama hoped to find empirical evidence for the existence of meridians, whose energy was believed to be particularly strong at their endpoints, i.e., at the acupuncture points that Motoyama chose. Moreover, he utilised the AMI to monitor how internal organ activity varied depending on chakra activation (Motoyama 1990, 122–136).

The CI was a non-invasive machine designed to measure the electric field enveloping a subject's body, eliminating the need to attach electrodes (Figure 25). The apparatus was situated in total darkness in a lead-shielded room and utilised a movable copper electrode capable of sinusoidal oscillation. This electrode would be positioned near the area of interest of the subject's body for approximately thirty seconds. The CI operated on the principle of capacitive coupling between the electrode, subject, and room environment, with the expectation that it would detect the presumed intensity and fluctuations of the electric field. The signal was then amplified by a preamplifier and further processed by a DC amplifier,

particular significance to the distinction between different concepts of the subtle body. The reasons for this attitude are probably rooted in Motoyama's religious education by his foster mother, who "believed in the unity of human experience and in a universal process of psychospiritual evolution. Thus, she felt that any practice that opens the gates to this process is valid; each practitioner may need a slightly different type of practice, but none is inherently better" (Motoyama 1978, 27).

signal processor, and power-spectrum analyser located outside the room. The data were recorded using a standard chart recorder (Motoyama 1978, 93–95).

In a standard experimental setting, the research team aimed to assess the activation of a specific chakra. For this purpose, Motoyama measured the electric field in specific body parts where he believed chakras were located. In the case of the CI, the electrode would be placed in front of the corresponding body part, with the research subjects being asked to visualise a chakra radiating in those areas, stop visualising, and then visualise again. According to Motoyama's interpretation, this method could demonstrate that people who imagine a radiant centre in a specific part of their body could induce measurable changes in the electric field through this visualisation. However, he did not attempt to prove that chakras exist as organs of a subtle body (*ibid*., 95–96).

In an advanced version of the CI, Motoyama placed a photoelectric cell beside the electrode inside the (completely dark) room. Motoyama noticed that "during the experiments, a signal was registered in the channel of the photo-electric cell implying that light was somehow created" (*ibid*., 97). While he was unable to elucidate the results, he claimed empirical evidence of his observation: "How can this remarkable phenomenon be explained? I do not know. Yet, somehow, when the subject concentrated on her anahata chakra, light was produced" (*ibid*.). Thus, in addition to the electric information gathered by the electrode and evaluated by the chart recorder, Motoyama claimed that with the help of the photoelectric cell, his team could record light signals generated by a presumably activated chakra (Motoyama 1978, 96; 1981, 258).

Motoyama did not seek to induce the activation of kundalini or the chakras through technological means – he believed that the psychic abilities of his research subjects would be sufficient for their activation. Instead, his objective was to gather empirical evidence demonstrating the presence of these subtle components within the physical body. Considering Motoyama's understanding of kundalini as the catalyst for activating the chakras, information on activated chakras would also provide insights into the positioning and operating of kundalini within the body. Satyananda referred to Motoyama's endeavour with the following words: "Kundalini awakening is definitely not fictional or symbolic; it is electrophysiological! Many scientists are working on this, and Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama of

Japan has developed a unit[732] by which the waves and currents of energy which accompany the awakening of kundalini can be recorded and measured" (Satyananda 1984, 20).

Moreover, Motoyama attempted to confirm a presumed link between matter and consciousness: "The results of the Chakra machine tests strongly suggest that a nonphysical cause (mental concentration on the empirically known chakras) can produce direct physical results" (Motoyama 1978, 98). In Motoyama's theoretical framework, psychic abilities were viewed as inherent to human beings and thus suitable for experimental exploration. Motoyama's particular emphasis on psychics' faculty for intentionally activating the subtle body stemmed from his experiences connected with kundalini and the chakras that he defined as clairvoyance (Motoyama 1981, 256).

Aside from gathering empirical data, Motoyama also hoped to install his devices as diagnostic tools in clinics, hospitals, and other medical institutions. During the 1970s and perhaps 1980s, several medical institutions in Japan and the United States, including the Kanagawa Prefectural Rehabilitation Centre (Japan) and the Bob Hope Parkinson Research Institute in Miami, realised Motoyama's vision and used his AMI to diagnose and detect diseases (Motoyama 1978, 119).

Referring to Gopi Krishna's agony during his initial kundalini experience, Motoyama further suggested that his devices "may be very helpful in determining the safest types of spiritual practice for a given individual. We can partially determine, for example, which chakra, if any, is naturally more active than the others and ascribe practice accordingly" (*ibid*., 137–138). Therefore, research results from Motoyama's electrophysiological experiments would allow the diagnosis of physical diseases and "spiritual subscriptions" to improve overall well-being.

Assessing the extent of Motoyama's influence and the reception of what he claimed to be empirical findings is somewhat challenging. While some celebrated his "groundbreaking" contribution to parapsychology and consciousness research, others considered his experiments ineffective or simply ignored them. Perhaps these dynamics shifted with the establishment of Motoyama's CIHS – a period that does not align with my primary research focus.

It is striking that none of John White's edited volumes mention Motoyama, which arguably united the main voices of contemporary kundalini and consciousness research. The only

[732] By "unit", Satyananda likely referred to the CI, which Motoyama designed to record and measure energy waves and currents.

exception is a brief reference to Motoyama in *Kundalini. Evolution and Enlightenment* (1979). As part of the volume's appendix, White suggested his book *Science and the Evolution of Consciousness* (1978) for further exploration (J. W. White 1990a, 469). Christopher Hills's *Nuclear Evolution: Discovery of the Rainbow Body* (1977) includes substantial portions of empirical meditation research but omits mention of Motoyama (Hills 1977). Perhaps his book was completed before Motoyama's first publications were distributed in the United States. Mary Scott, who thoroughly discussed research endeavours by Krishna, Sannella, and Bentov, writes about Motoyama's research: "A great deal of work in this area has been done by Professor Motoyama of Japan, without success" (Scott 2006, 48).

Motoyama's most important supporters included Lee Sannella, Itzhak Bentov, and affiliates of the Bihar School of Yoga.[733] Satyananda, the founder of the Bihar School of Yoga, seemed to be particularly fond of Motoyama. He contributed to his *Theories of the Chakras* with a foreword and dedicated substantial portions of his *Kundalini Tantra* to Motoyama's experiments and theories. As already mentioned earlier, he acknowledged kundalini's role in Motoyama's research and even claimed Motoyama had had experimental success: "Dr. Motoyama has bridged the gap [between yoga and medicine] and demonstrated the scientific reality of kundalini" (Satyananda, in Motoyama 1981, 15). Swami Karmananda Saraswati (n.d.a.), another representative of the Bihar School, highlighted in his short article, "Recent Research in Japan" (1978), Motoyama's role: "Dr Motoyama has carried out a great deal of research into the chakras and kundalini" (S. K. Saraswati 1978).

Today, Motoyama, his devices, and his theories have largely faded into obscurity, with the notable exceptions of the CIHS in California and the International Association for Religion and Parapsychology (IARP) in Japan. At CIHS, Motoyama established a "Subtle Energy Research Laboratory", dedicated to studying the human subtle body and associated subtle components. Under the guidance of Nandini Katre,[734] the Laboratory continues to research "the measurable subtle energy effects and underlying mechanisms by means of bio-electrical instrumentation with rigorous analytical methodology" (CIHS 2022). However, recent endeavours have not involved any research into kundalini. Moreover, Katre noted that the AMI is no longer utilised due to the unavailability of its electrodes. Motoyama apparently

[733] Chapter 22.1.2. examines the relationship and collaboration between Motoyama, Sannella, and Bentov. Chapter 13.2.2. provides additional information on Satyananda and the Bihar School of Yoga.

[734] The information provided in this paragraph is supported by an informal online communication with Nandini Katre in June 2023.

kept the construction details of the AMI secret, making reproduction impossible. She did not mention the CI at all. At IARP, Motoyama's sons carry on his work. The homepage shows that the association is still active, organising weekly seminars on meditation, yoga, and chakra activation. Despite both institutes being active and maintaining Motoyama's legacy, there are no ongoing collaborations between them (IARP 2024).

4. Motoyama's Relationship with Gopi Krishna

Gopi Krishna and Hiroshi Motoyama were in contact between 1969 and late 1983. They exchanged several letters, and Motoyama made references to Krishna's work in his book *Science and the Evolution of Consciousness* (1978). Despite several attempts, a personal meeting never happened. This chapter will shed light on their relationship, offering another example of how Krishna's work elicited reactions beyond his own loyal group of supporters. On October 19, 1969, Motoyama sent his first letter to Krishna (Krishna to Hopman, October 29, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.7.).[735] Although this is subject to speculation, it is probable that Banerjee introduced Krishna's work to Motoyama. As mentioned earlier, Banerjee facilitated Motoyama's initial trip to South Asia in the early 1960s and continued collaborating with him as part of his edited journal. Banerjee's correspondence with Krishna, on the other hand, mainly revolved around the latter's intention to launch and manage a Kashmiri branch of the Indian Parapsychological Society (see Chapter 13.2.1.2.). Therefore, Banerjee, who had a good relationship with Motoyama and Krishna, was likely instrumental in introducing them. In his 1969 letter to Krishna, Motoyama expressed his wish to meet Krishna during his second trip to South Asia, which was scheduled for late 1969 (*ibid*.). Moreover, Motoyama underscored that his research results aligned with Krishna's conclusions outlined in *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967). Krishna quoted Motoyama, who wrote, "that he has himself made psycho-physiological and parapsychological investigation on Yogis in Japan or men of Psi ability and obtained a result which accords with the contents of my book, Kundalini" (*ibid*.). Moreover, Motoyama indicates his trust in Krishna's mastering of yoga, as he requested Krishna "to take into my discipleship one Mr. Sakuyama, head of the religious sect, Yamato Kyodan, for instruction in Yoga for which he would come here for

[735] The original letter was not part of Krishna's literary legacy. However, he quoted from Motoyama's letter in another letter addressed to Tontyn Hopman (Krishna to Hopman, October 29, 1969, LGK, box 6.1.7.). This letter serves as my main resource for reconstructing Krishna and Motoyama's early correspondence.

four months" (*ibid*.). Although Krishna declined Motoyama's requests due to an already planned trip to Europe during this period, their correspondence nonetheless yields significance for two reasons: first, it verifies that Motoyama had investigated kundalini during his experimental settings, reaching similar (yet unspecified) conclusions as Krishna; and second, it demonstrates that Motoyama and at least one more Japanese religious authority knew about Krishna and considered his experience valuable.

Several years later, perhaps during Krishna's fifth stay abroad (1975–1976), Motoyama invited him to Tokyo:

> During my stay in Zurich [Motoyama] sent me two urgent invitations to participate in a conference he was holding in Tokyo. In fact he went out of his way to say that my expenses from Zurich to Tokyo and back to India will be met by them. But I am averse to travelling and declined the invitation. (Krishna to Keulemans, March 7, 1977, LGK, box 6.8.8.)

Despite Krishna's statement, "I know Dr. Motoyama since a long time [*sic*]" (*ibid*.), the archival material does not provide information on whether they had maintained their contact throughout all these years. In the same letter, Krishna credits experimental investigations into subtle energy flows to his publications: "The idea that there is a flow of prana or Bio-energy through the chakras has been taken from my books. Now experiments and research have been started at many places" (*ibid*.). Krishna likely interpreted Motoyama's ongoing interest in his books and work as a confirmation of his research orientation.

Browsing through Motoyama's books, however, reveals that Krishna did not assume as central a role as he perhaps expected. Only Motoyama's *Science and the Evolution of Consciousness* (1978) references Gopi Krishna's works and praises Krishna's knowledge about kundalini: "One of the most complete descriptions of kundalini is found in Gopi Krishna's work *Kundalini – The Evolutionary Energy in Man*" (Motoyama 1978, 136–137, original emphasis). In addition to depicting Krishna as an authority on the experience of kundalini, he reiterated Krishna's numerous appeals to conduct further research on kundalini, stating, "I share his sense of urgency" (*ibid*., 137). Elsewhere in the book, Motoyama referenced Krishna's book *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* (1972).[736] He included a lengthy quote by Krishna, where he critisised the lack of dedicated scientific study

[736] In a brief note issued in 1972, Kieffer informed Krishna that he had forwarded *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* to Motoyama (Kieffer to Krishna, June 23, 1972, LGK, box 6.3.4.).

on kundalini by any research group thus far. There is no doubt that Motoyama used Krishna's words as underpinnings for his own research efforts (*ibid*., 25–26).

Surprisingly, Motoyama mentioned Krishna in *Science and the Evolution of Consciousness* but omitted any reference to him in his subsequent *Theories of the Chakras* (1981). After all, *Theories of the Chakras* represents Motoyama's key publication in terms of kundalini, where he describes his own experience and discusses Woodrooffe's, Leadbeater's, and Satyananda's views – mainly regarding chakras but also including mention of kundalini. Another puzzling aspect of Motoyama's omission of Krishna from *Theories of the Chakras* is related to Motoyama's request for Krishna to write the book's afterword. Kiyomi Kuratani, Motoyama's secretary at IRP, underscored Motoyama's explicit intention to include Krishna's contribution: "We believe that this afterword by Panditji [Gopi Krishna] will be of great value in Dr. Motoyama's book" (Kuratani to Koops, September 2, 1981, LGK, box 6.7.7.).[737]

Between March and October 1981, Kuratani and Monica Koops, then Krishna's secretary at the Central Institute for Kundalini Research (CIKR) in New Delhi, exchanged several letters regarding Krishna's afterword for *Theories of the Chakras*. Koops (on behalf of Krishna) agreed that he would write the afterword, adding that Krishna "expressed his great appreciation of Dr. Motoyama's research" (Koops to Kuratani, April 27, 1981, LGK, box 6.7.7.). Ultimately, however, the Theosophical Publishing House released the book without Krishna's contribution due to delays, misunderstandings, and busy schedules.

Considering the uncertainty about whether Krishna's afterword would be ready in time, Motoyama's decision to omit reference to Krishna does not seem to be a reaction to these events. A statement from the publisher supports this assessment: "We still have not received the Afterword from Gopi Krishna. […] If it doesn't arrive within the next work week […] it will not be included. That is such a sham [*sic*], because Gopi Krishna has a large following in the U.S. and such an Afterword would add to the entire presentation" (Kuratani to Koops, October 7, 1981, LGK, box 6.7.7.). After this episode, no further collaborations – or rather

[737] According to Degler, Krishna was initially invited to write a foreword for Motoyama's *Theories of the Chakras*. However, Krishna could not meet the submission deadline due to health issues and other pressing reasons. He was then asked if he wanted to write an afterword instead (Degler 2023, 271, 312). Requesting a foreword from Krishna would have been most consistent with academic conventions and would have allowed Motoyama to leverage Krishna's authority for promotional purposes. Afterwords, by contrast, are rather unusual. However, from a typesetting perspective, it might have been simpler to integrate a late-arriving afterword into the book rather than a foreword. In that case, only a few pages would need to be added at the end. Unfortunately, Degler does not provide any sources for her claim that Motoyama had initially suggested a foreword, and the archival material does not include any references to her claim either.

attempts to collaborate – are recorded. However, Motoyama and Krishna continued their correspondence until at least late 1983 (Koops to Krishna, October 12, 1983, LGK, box 6.1.1.).

A final remark is due regarding Iwao Nakajima (n.d.a.), another Japanese figure who expressed interest in Krishna's work and whose name keeps showing up in the archival material. Although only little information is available, Nakajima likely translated Krishna's *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* into Japanese. In 1979, he informed Krishna in a letter of his intention to complete the translation of *Kundalini* within the next few months, having previously delayed the project due to a demanding schedule (Nakajima to Krishna, April 10, 1979, LGK, box 6.7.7.). It is unclear whether he achieved this goal and completed the translation. Nevertheless, a Japanese edition of Kundalini was certainly available for sale no later than 1983 (Hopman to Krishna, March 7, 1983, LGK, box 6.1.3.). Moreover, Nakajima emphasised that he wished to "set up a research institute on the higher consciousness affiliated to your Kundalini research center with the help of some of sincere medical doctors here" (Nakajima to Krishna, April 10, 1979, LGK, box 6.7.7.) – another Krishna-related endeavour that was likely never realised.[738]

A key link between Nakajima and Krishna was Anil Vidyalankar (n.d.a.), a professor of Sanskrit and collaborator of Krishna.[739] Vidyalankar recalled how he and Nakajima "met first in 1979, when I came [to Japan] as a representative of India's National Council of Educational Research and Training. Together with Bharat Bhushan Vidyalankar, we produced the first Basic Sanskrit English-Japanese Dictionary" (Jeffs 2001). During that stay, Vidyalankar also held a seminar revolving around kundalini and meditation. While no information on that seminar is available, considering Vidyalankar's collaboration with Krishna, the seminar likely revolved around Krishna's books and ideas (Nakajima to Krishna, April 10, 1979, LGK, box 6.7.7.).

Krishna maintained contact with Nakajima, who visited him in South Asia in February 1981. He brought along a group of fifteen Japanese scientists and medical doctors, assuming the role of the group's "Japanese leader", with Vidyalankar co-convening the trip.[740] Each

[738] Kieffer mentions that a certain Mr. Yoshimura had also considered establishing a Japanese KRF branch. However, since Yoshimura was not mentioned again, it seems unlikely the branch was realised (Kieffer to Krishna, June 23, 1972, LGK, box 6.3.4.).

[739] As of 1983, Vidyalankar was the editor of KRF's *Spiritual India*. While it is unclear when he commenced this role, archival material suggests that he started collaborating with Krishna in the late 1970s (Koops to Kobelt, June 8, 1983, LGK, box 6.1.3.).

[740] Another group member was Keijiro Fujikura (n.d.a.). According to Degler, he showed interest in translating Krishna's *The Shape of Events to Come* into Japanese. While it is uncertain if he accomplished that task, he

participant received a copy of Krishna's *The Real Nature of Mystical Experience* (1978) and *Kundalini in Time and Space* (1979), and an issue of *Spiritual India and Kundalini* (Degler 2023, 271; Vidyalankar and Nakajima 1981).

Figure 26 shows the Japanese Foundation for Fundamental Search (JFFS) newsletter, which released a special feature on Gopi Krishna following the visit of the Japanese group to South Asia (Nakajima 1981).[741]

Figure 26: JFFS newsletter, Special Feature Pandit Gopi Krishna (Nakajima 1981, photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich).

Degler underscored that the group's visit "marked a growing interest in Gopi Krishna's ideas in [Japan]" (Degler 2023, 271), an assessment that Hopman reinforced by emphasising that over six thousand copies of the Japanese translation of Krishna's *Kundalini* had already been sold (Hopman to Krishna, March 7, 1983, LGK, box 6.1.3.).

evidently invited Krishna to Japan in April 1984, which Krishna happily accepted. However, due to severe health issues, which ultimately resulted in his death, he could not follow up on the invitation (Degler 2023, 271; Krishna to Koops, June 27, 1983, LGK, box 6.1.1.).

[741] Although I was not able to secure any further information, it is likely that the fifteen members of the group travelling to South Asia were affiliated with JFFS. The newsletter mentions Nakajima, Fujikura, and a certain Mr. Sato – with whom Krishna also kept correspondence (Krishna to Koops, June 27, 1983, LGK, box 6.1.1.). I am indebted to my colleague Alisha Saikia for translating portions of the newsletter to me.

5. Summary

Krishna and Motoyama shared a mutual interest in the components of the subtle body and potential means to verify their existence. Additionally, they paid respect to each other, with Motoyama praising Krishna as a key authority on kundalini, and Krishna approving of Motoyama's empirical investigations into the subtle body. Nevertheless, defining the relationship between the two is challenging due to the limited availability of primary and secondary source material. It is particularly unfortunate that none of their letters have been secured as part of Gopi Krishna's legacy. Owing to these shortcomings, this chapter largely relied on "secondary letters" and material that referred to their correspondence.

My overall impression remains that Motoyama initially strongly desired to meet Krishna and perhaps collaborate on empirical kundalini research. However, due to Krishna's frequent cancellations and his aversion to long-distance travel, Motoyama likely gradually lost interest. Although they maintained contact and were on good terms, as evidenced by the episode with Motoyama's *Theories of the Chakras*, the two never collaborated. Ultimately, other interested parties from Japan collaborated more successfully with Krishna. Thus, ultimately, Krishna found growing success in Japan, where translated editions of his book enjoyed increasing popularity.

This excursus concludes with several unresolved questions. While some insights were gained through the combined analysis of Motoyama's publications, archival material, online sources from his successors, and an informal online communication with Katre Nandini, many aspects of his work remain unclear. Despite his active engagement in empirical meditation research, Motoyama occupies a marginal position in scientific circles, with limited availability of his books and little scholarly interest in his work.

Nevertheless, the aim of this chapter was to underscore Motoyama's importance as a seminal player in global kundalini research. He had contacts in the United States and South Asia, established several institutes dedicated to the research of subtle energies, and maintained correspondence with Satyananda and Krishna – both pivotal figures in kundalini research.

The technological devices he developed to examine the activity of chakras, meridians, prana, and kundalini are emblematic of the era's zeitgeist, during which many sought to explore the divine through technological means. In contrast to his friend Itzhak Bentov, Motoyama did not ascribe divine significance to his technological devices. For Motoyama, the AMI and the CI were purely functional tools, lacking any religious connotation. Nevertheless, he valued them for their ability to collect data and provide evidence that could persuade others of the

realities he believed he had gained access through his purported psychic abilities. Moreover, unlike Bentov and Cousens, Motoyama's objective was not to evoke energies, such as kundalini, prana or ki, but to diagnose and measure these energies in order to substantiate their existence.

The shortcomings of this chapter, such as the lack of source material and my own lack of proficiency in the Japanese language, suggest the need for additional research. The reconstruction of Krishna's network in Japan, in particular, warrants further investigations, which sadly exceeded the scope of this study.

B Kundalini in Seminar

Devoted to Integral Education, the Esalen Institute and the Californian integral institutes shared many ties. The following chapters will explore these similarities, emphasising their significant contributions to kundalini research. Unlike the previous chapters, these institutes redefined the seminar room as a laboratory of the body and the mind to study consciousness, somatics, and what Haridas Chaudhuri called "yoga psychology" (Chaudhuri 1975).

23. Esalen

Michael Murphy (b. 1930) and Richard "Dick" Price (1930–1985) founded the Esalen Institute in 1962, instigating a melting pot of different "alternatives": Alternative therapies, alternatives treatments, alternatives theories, alternatives methods, and alternatives social structures. Long-term Esalen affiliate George B. Leonard (1923–2010) described the Institute in his 1985 article "Encounters at the Mind's Edge" with the following words: "This is Esalen Institute […]: both a place and a vision. And though the vision has inspired hundreds of imitators all around the world, the vision is never entirely separate from the place" (Leonard 1985, 308).

Figure 27: Main gate Esalen Institute, Highway 1, Big Sur, California (photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Esalen Institute).

Leonard's sentiments align with the widely held axiom among regulars at Esalen that one must experience Esalen firsthand to grasp its essence fully. Consequently, individuals who have never passed the entrance sign on Highway 1 in Big Sur that reads "Esalen Institute: By Reservation Only" are often viewed as still confined in Plato's cave (Figure 27).

This chapter introduces Esalen, a pivotal hub of alternative religious streams and a catalyst for unconventional theories and concepts. Following a broad introduction to the Institute, this chapter examines what role kundalini played in seminars and workshops at Esalen. A notable outcome of this interest in kundalini was the Esalen-founded Spiritual Emergency Network (SEN), which discussed kundalini as a trigger of spiritual crises. This chapter aims to comprehensively introduce Christina and Stan Grof, the notion of "spiritual emergency", and the associated network.[742] Finally, this chapter explores the relationship between Esalen and Krishna's KRF.

23.1. The Esalen Institute

Jeff Kripal's work *Esalen. America and the Religion of No Religion* (2007) represents the primary and most comprehensive study of the history and context of the Esalen Institute.[743] With its little less than six hundred pages, the book conveys the significance and weight of the centre of the Human Potential Movement. Considering Kripal's attempt to introduce the Institute across hundreds of pages, this chapter only functions as a concise overview.

Murphy and Price established the Esalen Institute on the property of Murphy's family, which is perched on a cliffside in Big Sur.[744] This stretch of the Californian coast, nestled between San Luis Obispo in the South and Monterey in the North, and framed by the Santa Lucia

[742] Throughout this study, the term "spiritual emergency" will be used as understood by Christina and Stan Grof.

[743] Other volumes that address Esalen include Walter Truett Anderson's *The Upstart Spring: Esalen and the American Awakening* (1983), Jeff Kripal and Glenn Shuck's edited volume *On the Edge of the Future: Esalen and the Evolution of American Culture* (2005), and Marion Goldman's *The American Soul Rush: Esalen and the Rise of Spiritual Privilege* (2012).

[744] The designation "Esalen Institute" was first used in May 1964 (Esalen 1964, n.p.a.). The name "Esalen" is derived from the Esselen tribe, one of the numerous Amerindian tribes that inhabited the coastal stretch for at least three thousand years, as evidenced by the dating of burial sites in Big Sur. The indigenous inhabitants of Big Sur experienced significant reductions in their population due to the impact of missionary efforts in the eighteenth century. Today, only a relatively small number of their descendants remain (Kripal 2007, 30–31). Over the past five years, the Esalen Institute has actively participated in land acknowledgement efforts, recognising the Esselen Tribe as the "indigenous and traditional stewards of the land and coastal waters that the Esalen Institute resides upon" (Esalen 2023b). Additionally, Esalen has begun to include members of the Esselen tribe in many of its crucial decisions.

Mountains, is renowned for its breathtaking views, its redwood forests, and, more recently, for its standing as a counter- and subcultural hub (Figure 28).

Owing to this reputation, Kripal described Big Sur of the 1950s as "Outlaw Country" (Kripal 2007, 33). With this image, Kripal alludes to Big Sur's rugged and inaccessible landscape, which attracted a range of criminals and outlaws. Simultaneously, he evokes with this description the influence of the Beat Generation on Big Sur.[745] With their nature mysticism, experimental poetry, and erotic literature, members of this literary subcultural movement substantially shaped Big Sur's reputation. Henry Miller's book *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* (1956) and Jack Kerouac's *Big Sur* (1962) count among Big Sur's most pivotal early descriptions (*ibid*., 33–40).[746]

Figure 28: Big Sur coastline with the Esalen baths (photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Esalen Institute).

Given the cultural background of Big Sur, it is not surprising that Esalen attracted primarily white left-liberal middle-class individuals interested in religio-therapeutic reform movements. Many were affiliated with subcultural milieus and disseminated alternative or

[745] Chapter 20.2. introduces the Beat Generation and other groups that influenced US-American counterculture during the long Sixties.

[746] The US-American novelist Henry Miller (1891–1980), an inspiration for several Beat writers, owned a cabin in Big Sur, situated slightly north of what would later become the Esalen Institute. Miller's cabin served as a popular gathering spot for members of the Beat Generation and various subcultural writers and artists. After Miller's passing, the cabin was transformed into the Henry Miller Memorial Library, a cultural centre that sells Beat books, exhibits art, and hosts concerts (The Henry Miller Memorial Library, n.d.).

unorthodox theories and practices through experiential workshops and seminars. Therefore, at its essence, Esalen has served as an educational centre focusing on theories, concepts, and methods that challenge established conventions and accepted scientific norms (*ibid*., 28). In Esalen's words: "[Esalen is] a creative laboratory, an incubator of human potential asking the daring and curious questions that traditional university and religious institutions can't and/or won't" (Esalen 2023a).

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Esalen defined its activities and approach as an exploration of "those trends in the behavioral sciences, religion, and philosophy which emphasize the potentialities and values of human existence […]. In this area we have been a forum, and it is primarily this we hope to remain" (Esalen 1971a, 5). In alignment with this hope, the fundamental structures and principles at Esalen have largely remained consistent since the 1960s.[747] Accordingly, the Institute continues to host a variety of events, including seminars, workshops, conferences,[748] and cultural happenings, which are facilitated by a dynamic group of residents, conveners, and volunteers. Esalen's residents contribute to the community by taking on roles in the kitchen, the gardens, the farm, maintenance, housekeeping, or at the baths.[749] Early on, this staff community received support from "work-scholar residents", who worked, studied, and lived on the property for a defined period (*Esalen Catalogs*, n.d.).[750]

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[747] For several years during the 1960s and 1970s, Esalen also ran branches in San Francisco at the First Unitarian Church and Grace Cathedral, in Sonoma at the Westerbeke Ranch, and in Mill Valley, where many of Esalen's most prominent figures have resided – the Murphys (Michael, Dulce and their son MacKenzie) all live there as of today. Since the 1980s, Esalen's activities have been limited to its Big Sur property (Esalen 1977, 4; Kripal 2007, 181–201).

[748] The "Center of Theory and Research" (CTR) and "Track Two" have organised invitation-only conferences since 1965. In particular, CTR enjoys a good reputation as a format that addresses unconventional or "unpopular" questions. At Esalen, CTR attendees are often considered the "inner circle". Founded by Michael Murphy in collaboration with Ed Kelly, Adam Crabtree, and Jeff Kripal, CTR is "the research and development arm of Esalen" (Kripal 2007, 439; Esalen 2023c; Taves 2005).

[749] The legendary baths at Esalen significantly contributed to its semi-mythological reputation. According to local lore, the natural hot springs were already utilised by the Esselen tribe. In 1882, Thomas Benton Slate homesteaded the grounds, including the hot springs. Thenceforth, the hot springs were known as "Slate's Hot Springs". Even after Henry Murphy, Michael Murphy's grandfather, acquired the property in 1910, the baths retained the name "Slate's Hot Springs". Before the founding of Esalen, they gained popularity among (homosexual) bathers who would journey from Los Angeles or San Francisco to Big Sur. Owing to their far-reaching reputation, until 1964, Murphy and Price continued calling their recently established institute "Big Sur Hot Springs" (Kripal 2007, 29–32, 95; *Esalen Catalogs*, n.d.).

[750] Initiated by Julian Silverman, the residential work-scholar-programme has survived today through three-month REEP (Residential Extended Education Program) and one-month LEEP (Live Extended Education Program) cohorts. While individuals engaged with REEP and LEEP usually have housing on Esalen's main property, most permanent staff live at "South Coast". Built in 1971, the "South Coast Motel" was initially

The unifying theme across Esalen's extensive range of seminars and workshops was what Murphy and Price initially called "the human potentiality" (Esalen 1962, 1).[751] The origin of Esalen's commitment to exploring human potentialities can be traced back to Aldous Huxley, undeniably one of Esalen's most influential figures (Anderson 1983, 10–12).[752] This guiding principle has remained Esalen's essence until today, albeit with nuances. While Esalen initially embraced the Huxley-inspired "human potentialities", eventually, it supplanted the term with the phrase "human potential". This variation of the original maxim was coined by George Leonard in 1966 in his essay "Pursuit of the Human Potential Could Become a National Goal" (1966).[753] At times considered the unofficial "third founder" of Esalen, Leonard assumed a range of roles at the Institute, including vice-president, workshop convener, and "spiritual brother to Murphy", indicating his "exceptionally close relationship to Michael Murphy" (Kripal 2007, 202). Additionally, Leonard is recognised for originating the term "Human Potential Movement" and nurturing its development. In essence, the Human Potential movement has served as a synonym for the activities and perspectives of Esalen as related to its guiding principle of unleashing the human potential (Esalen 2010; Kripal 2007, 480).

The co-founders of Esalen, Murphy and Price, initially crossed paths in 1960 in San Francisco. Erickson underscores the numerous similarities they shared at that time:

> Both were 30 years old, handsome, young, Stanford graduates that hailed from prosperous families. In addition, both […] were athletes, had spent time in the military, were graduate school dropouts, and had been strongly shaped by the teachings of Eastern philosophic traditions and meditation practices. Common teachers they had studied with and were influenced by included Frederic Spiegelberg, Haridas Chaudhuri, and Alan Watts. Perhaps most important was the fact that they shared "breakout"

used for additional programmes. Today, however, it is exclusively designated as a housing complex for Esalen staff (Esalen 1971b, 11; Harper 2022).

[751] Anderson (1983) and Kripal (2007) offer thorough introductions to the development and key topoi of the Human Potential Movement. Humanistic psychologists, including Abraham Maslow, Anthony Sutich, and Carl Rogers, had a substantial influence on it, as Chapter 20.4.2. argues.

[752] In 1960, Price attended a lecture by Huxley titled "Human Potentialities" at UC San Francisco's Medical School. Huxley emphasised that humanity merely utilises about ten per cent of its neurological capacities, suggesting that our potential far exceeds what we currently tap into. Price and also Murphy were deeply impressed by Huxley's views. Michael Murphy even called him a "modern prophet" (Murphy, in Evans 2019), inspiring a generation of truth-seekers. Kripal points out that Huxley probably borrowed the term "human potentiality" from the (para)psychologist Gardner Murphy, who published a book called *Human Potentialities* (1958) (Kripal 2007, 85–86, 480).

[753] Leonard published this essay in *Look Magazine*, at which he was a senior editor from 1953 through 1970 (Esalen 2010).

> experiences that occurred in 1956, leading to a rejection of the expectations placed upon them by their families and by society. For Dick, the "breakout" ultimately led to his hospitalization […]. For Mike, the need to escape […] led to his leaving Stanford and going to India for a stay in Aurobindo's ashram. (Erickson 2003, 166)

The setting of their meeting was the Cultural Integration Fellowship (CIF) (see Chapter 24.1.2.). Founded by the Aurobindonian philosopher Haridas Chaudhuri, CIF was designed as a meditation place advocating integral philosophy, universal religion, and self-development. The notion of "self-development" and what Chaudhuri called "self-unfoldment" (CIF 1964), particularly aligned with Murphy and Price's views. It is likely that Chaudhuri's concepts were as influential in shaping the Human Potential movement as was Huxley's interpretation of "human potentialities".[754] In any case, CIF and Chaudhuri's integral approach was an important inspiration for Murphy and Price's vision of Esalen (Anderson 1983, 33–34).

At the time Murphy and Price met at CIF, Murphy's worldview had already become deeply imbued with Aurobindo's philosophy. This interest was initially sparked by Frederic Spiegelberg, Murphy's professor at Stanford.[755] In his class on comparative religion, Spiegelberg taught Hindu scriptures, Buddhist and Hindu religious thought, and the philosophy of Aurobindo. To this date, Murphy underscores Spiegelberg's class of 1950 as an initiatory event (M. Murphy 2023).[756]

Ultimately, in 1956, Spiegelberg's influence led to Murphy letting go of his Episcopalian faith (he had been a fraternity brother for some years) and travelling to South Asia to stay for sixteen months at Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, in Aurobindo's ashram (Aurobindo having passed away in 1950). There, Murphy encountered the challenges of communal life. Against that backdrop, Murphy emphasised that from Esalen's inception, he had underscored the

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[754] Further research is required to elucidate on Chaudhuri's impact on Esalen's conceptualisation.

[755] Spiegelberg also exerted influence over Dick Price, another student of his. While Murphy, who had been religious since his youth, was captivated by Spiegelberg's teachings on Aurobindo, Price showed interest in religion for the first time in his life. He followed Spiegelberg's suggestion to visit the Vedanta Society and attend classes by Alan Watts. Through Spiegelberg's initial inspiration, Price became involved with what would later be recognised as "Beat Zen Buddhism" and "countercultural Daoism". Owing to Price's fascination with Watts' distinctive translations of Zen Buddhism and Daoism in the context of US-American counterculture, these modern interpretations would play considerable roles at Esalen (Kripal 2007, 73). Spiegelberg and Watts will be introduced in Chapter 24.1.

[756] Both Murphy and Price held Spiegelberg in high esteem. Likewise, Spiegelberg cherished his two students who catalysed the establishing of one of the key laboratories in the United States for alternative views and practices. This is evident in a photograph of the two young men found among various pictures documenting Spiegelberg's life in the Frederic Spiegelberg archive at Stanford (*Murphy and Price Photograph*, n.d.).

singular importance of its institutional principles. Furthermore, it was evident to him that Esalen was not destined to become another institution dedicated primarily to Aurobindonian thought: "You know, I was so against cults. I didn't want to make this a Neo-Aurobindonia. Seriously" (*ibid*.). This is also reflected in Aurobindo's relatively limited role in seminars offered at Esalen. Between 1962 and 1990, only two courses exclusively focused on Aurobindo, both (co-)led by Chaudhuri in 1963.[757] Despite the lack of seminars on Aurobindo, his integral philosophy has played an essential role at Esalen until today (Kripal 2007, 47–60; M. Murphy 2023).

Moreover, Murphy's fascination with Aurobindo sparked his interest in South Asian subtle-body models. Consequently, topics related to subtle-body concepts became a thematic focus at Esalen, permeating its history (M. Murphy 2023).[758] Simultaneously, the physical body and somatics were central at Esalen.[759] A lasting manifestation of this emphasis is Esalen Massage. Kripal regards Esalen Massage as the Institute's primary body practice. Considering its unbroken tradition, enduring popularity, and the absence of any other overarching practice that unites guests and residents, Kripal may be correct (Kripal 2007, 244).

The distinct, contemplative style of Esalen Massage was developed during the 1960s, with German educator Charlotte Selver and her student Bernard Gunther laying much of its foundations. Selver's teachings centred on what she called sensory awareness, focusing on the direct experience through the senses.[760] Peggy Horan, a pioneer of Esalen massage who has been involved since 1969, underscored the pivotal importance of experiencing one's own

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[757] The first course was titled "The Vision of Sri Aurobindo", led by Haridas Chaudhuri, Richard Marsh, and Jim Fadiman (1963), and the second was "The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo", led by Haridas Chaudhuri (1963) (Esalen 1963b, n.p.a.; 1963a, n.p.a.).

[758] A large-scale research project on subtle-body models throughout cultural traditions has recently been launched at Esalen: In January 2023, a CTR conference was dedicated to the subtle body, and Esalen plans to award designated fellowships to scholars working on the history of subtle physiology. While kundalini is not a central focus of the project, Murphy emphasised that any component of the subtle body deserves attention as part of the project (Cox 2022; M. Murphy 2023).

[759] Somatics, or body practices, have constituted a key pillar at Esalen, and in turn, Esalen has significantly shaped the field (D. H. Johnson 2005). Johnson (and others) traces Esalen's focus on the body back to the German gymnastic movement (K. P. Johnson 1994, 251–253). Refer to Kripal (2007, 228–231) for a discussion of somatics at early Esalen and to Chapter 25.1. for further elaborations on somatics and the mind-body debate's link to kundalini.

[760] During the interwar era in Berlin, Selver studied with Elsa Gindler (1885–1961), an influential Gymnastics teacher and a pioneer of somatics. Upon arriving in the United States as a refugee in 1938, Selver imparted her teachings on sensory awareness to notable figures such as Fritz Perls, Alan Watts, and Erich Fromm. Her student Bernard Gunther developed the method of "sensory awakening" based on Selver's teachings. His method aimed to "awaken" the senses to enhance awareness and presence. Both Selver and Bernard played significant roles in shaping the Human Potential movement (Horan 2023; Kripal 2007, 244–245).

body, as well as experiencing the world through the body at Esalen. The body was further celebrated as a means to rebel against conventional societal norms. Specifically, nudity – common at the baths and during massage sessions – was, in the US-American context, a radical act attempting to liberate the body (Horan 2023).

Alongside Asian philosophy and perspectives on the body, the mind has served as a key emphasis of Esalen. Not only did Murphy and Price share an interest in psychology, but Huxley's lecture about untapped "human potentialities" and Chaudhuri's yoga psychology (see Chapter 24.2.) sparked their quest to unlock these hidden potentials of the mind. Psychedelic substances emerged as a prominent candidate, shaping the centre of human potential into a focal point of consciousness culture and a hub for those seeking to alter consciousness, whether through substances or experiential techniques (see Chapter 20.4.1.). Michael Pollan, a leading voice in contemporary psychedelic research, underscored how Esalen fostered the development of spiritual and therapeutic modalities, including those involving psychedelic substances. In the wake of the prohibition of LSD in 1966, some of Esalen's key figures ensured the sustained interest in mind-altering techniques by proposing alternatives, such as Stan and Christina Grof's holotropic breathwork therapy[761] or John Lilly's isolation tank[762] (Pollan 2018, 46–47).

However, altering the mind was as central as efforts to "decode" the mind. It was at Esalen that innovative psychotherapeutic forms, such as Gestalt therapy, integral theory, and transpersonal forms of psychotherapy, found their implementation. In the wake of these developments, numerous psychologists and psychotherapists established their fellowship. Prominent figures in that regard include the Gestalt therapist Fritz Perls, the psychiatrist Julian Silverman, and early advocates of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, including Abraham Maslow, Anthony Sutich, Stan Grof, Charles Tart, and Ken Wilber (Esalen 1980, 37–38; Kripal 2007, 151).[763]

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[761] Stan and Christina co-developed the method of holotropic breathwork in 1978. With the help of this psychotherapeutic procedure, they hoped to induce non-ordinary states of consciousness and support (self-)healing processes. A holotropic breathwork session combines accelerated breath (hyperventilation), music, bodywork, and artistic reflection, e.g., through the drawing of mandalas (S. Grof 1995, 34).

[762] John C. Lilly (1915–2001) was a pioneering neuroscientist and psychoanalyst known for his work on sensory deprivation and altered states of consciousness using an isolation tank – which he invented in 1954. An isolation tank, also known as a sensory deprivation tank, is a sealed environment filled with warm, buoyant saltwater designed to minimise sensory input and external distractions. The purpose of the tank is to facilitate mental and sensory experiences by creating a state of profound isolation. During the early years of Esalen, several isolation tanks were located on the property (M. Murphy 2023).

[763] While many of the prominent Esalen-affiliated psychologists, psychoanalysts, and psychiatrists were men, it is crucial to stress that women have played a central role in shaping Esalen's themes, structures, and

While celebrated as a unique place welcoming everyone who wishes to enhance their human potential, the picture is not as unspoiled as it might appear at first sight. Critics have pointed out that Esalen has struggled with topics such as race, inclusion, suicide, and its relation to the original native stewards of the lands (Kripal 2007, 198; Pridgen 2023). The Institute has reacted to this criticism by publishing official statements on its racial and inclusive policies, and tried to ease these issues by awarding scholarships, prioritising people of colour (POC) as employees, and apologising to members of the Esselen tribe, the native landowners (Esalen team 2020; Esalen 2023b). These efforts notwithstanding, Esalen has remained a playground for predominantly white, middle- to upper-class US-Americans, and thus a paramount example of a place based on spiritual privilege (Goldman 2012).[764] Economic resources, as Goldman stresses, have been an essential ingredient of the majority of Esalen's spiritual seekers' backgrounds. Murphy's and Price's family backgrounds allowed them to dedicate their time and energy to the realisation of their dreams. Corresponding to the founders' privilege, many of their guests lived according to bohemian principles:

> First, second, and even third generations of Esalen insiders identify themselves publicly and privately with artists, intellectuals, and poets, rather than with their affluent relatives and friends. This bohemian ethos allows them to think of themselves as cultural rebels and to downplay the entitlements of money or education that have made it emotionally and materially possible for them to reject conventional careers and pursue spiritual vocations. (*ibid*., 77)

perspectives from the very beginning. Seminal female figures include the aforementioned Christina Grof and Charlotte Selver, as well as the dancer Gabrielle Roth (1941–2012), who introduced the movement meditation "5Rhythms", the biochemist Ida Rolf (1896–1979), who established the system of structural integration or rolfing, the psychotherapist Virginia Sapir (1916–1988), known for her approach to family therapy, the dancer Anna Halprin (1920–2021), hailed as the "mother of Embodiment in the human potential movement" (Esalen 2021), and, of course, Dulce Murphy, wife to Michael Murphy and the catalyst behind the citizen diplomacy programme "Track Two" (*Esalen Catalogs*, n.d.). For an overview of gender at Esalen, see Goldman (2012, 120–138).

[764] The category of "spiritual privilege" is part of a larger identity discourse, which cannot be thoroughly discussed at this point. In recent years, mass movements addressing discrimination against protected classes, such as race, religion, sexual orientation, etc., have demanded compliance with anti-discrimination laws. Movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo have sparked reflections on uncontested norms. Refer to Goldman (2012) for a critical introduction to the concept of "spiritual privilege" and to Lucia (2020) for an up-to-date publication on the topic of race among alternative religious seekers.

While Esalen was initially intended for "ordinary" people rather than elitist circles, the exploration of human potential nevertheless proves easier with financial security (*ibid*., 79).[765]

Reflecting on a history spanning over sixty years, Michael Murphy stresses that Esalen's success mainly stemmed from its maxim "Nobody Captures the Flag" (M. Murphy 2023). This phrase points to the absence of a dominating theory or of an individual enjoying sole authority over the place.[766] Today, Murphy is clearly considered primus inter pares, without, however, aspiring to be the king of his castle.

23.2. Kundalini at Esalen

In the interview conducted for this study, Michael Murphy underscored kundalini's central role at Esalen during the 1970s and 1980s: "Oh God, everybody knew about kundalini. […] And then a lot of people had experiences of chakras, it was in the air" (M. Murphy 2023). Kundalini, however, was not simply "in the air". Workshops, conferences, and projects at Esalen significantly helped shape modern perceptions of kundalini. As this chapter argues, many strings of the modern project of kundalini research were pulled by individuals affiliated with Esalen. Therefore, one must acknowledge Esalen's contributions to international research endeavours related to kundalini. This claim will be supported by analysing course material from the *Esalen Catalogs* and examining the contributions of individuals who promoted kundalini research at Esalen and beyond.

The *Esalen Catalogs* document over sixty years of workshops, talks, conferences, and events.[767] Since 1962, they have been continuously published, serving as a valuable source for Esalen's impact on its cultural and social surroundings and the popularity of kundalini at that time. A thorough examination of the *Catalogs* revealed that between 1962 and 1985,

[765] Despite Aldous Huxley's advice to Murphy and Price to limit their programming to an elitist circle, they aimed at creating a place where everyone could unleash their human potential (Goldman 2012, 74–76). However, this vision was only partially achieved. Big Sur's remote location, all-inclusive packages, and, more recently, major renovations and restructures have led to ever-increasing rates, once again closing the door to the majority of the US-American public.

[766] The lack of a dominating theory also arises from the very nature of Esalen being a large enterprise, which is sustained by its ongoing seminars. Adhering strictly to a specific doctrine would be detrimental to business.

[767] The *Esalen Catalogs* have been published as leaflets or booklets. The smallest page count is four, and the largest is sixty-eight pages. For the present study, I examined a total of one hundred and two catalogues published between 1962 and 1993. When applicable, page numbers are provided. However, certain statements extend beyond singular issues, and in such cases, reference is made to the *Esalen Catalogs* as a whole.

sixteen issues of advertised kundalini-related[768] workshops and events (*Esalen Catalogs*, n.d.).[769] It is intriguing that most of these events occurred between 1979 and 1985 – a period when the initial hype revolving around kundalini already started to wane again. Some of these courses and events linked kundalini to South Asian teachers, including Gopi Krishna, Osho (Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh), and Swami Muktananda. Others, then again, aimed at interpreting kundalini through a mythological or psychological lens, as proposed by mythologist Joseph Campbell and somatic psychotherapist Stanley Keleman (*ibid*.).

In total, approximately thirty to forty people can be associated with kundalini-related courses and events at Esalen during its first decades of existence (*ibid*.). Of particular importance are Christina and Stan Grof, Joseph Campbell, and Dick Price. Other associates included Itzhak Bentov,[770] Gay Luce, and Elmer Green, who all worked at the interface of religion and technology (see Chapters 21 and 22), William I. Thompson, who visited Krishna in Germany and South Asia (see Chapter 15.3.1.), and Bonnie Greenwell, a renowned kundalini therapist, who initially went to Esalen to make sense of her own experience (Kripal 2007, 57).[771]

Only four workshops and two lectures exclusively centred on kundalini: Paul S. Kurtz's workshop "Generating and Directing the Kundalini Power" (1965), Campbell's lecture "Freud, Jung and Kundalini Yoga" (1967), Campbell, John Bleibtreu, and Edward Maupin's seminar discussion "The Lessons of Kundalini Yoga For Western Psychology" (1967), Lee Sannella and Harold Streitfeld's workshop "Kundalini Awakening" (1979),[772] Maureen

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[768] While many courses address associated topics, e.g., (bio-)energy, evolutionary consciousness, subtle physiology, etc., this study specifically focuses on those courses and events that distinctively mention the term "kundalini" in their course or event description. This does not necessarily mean that kundalini-related events exclusively revolved around kundalini, but that they nonetheless addressed it in some way. The designation "kundalini-related", therefore, narrows down the scope of the analysed data.

[769] The issues featuring kundalini-related courses and events include Vol. 4, No. 1 (1965), Vol. 6, No. 3 (1967), Vol. 8, No. 1 (1969), Vol. 8, No. 2 (1969), Vol. 10, No. 1 (1972), Vol. 10, No. 3 (1972), Vol. 10, No. 4 (1972), Vol. 12, No. 4 (1974), Vol. 17, No. 2 (1979), Vol. 17, No. 3 (1979), Vol. 19, No. 2 (1980), Vol. 19, No. 3 (1980), Vol. 20, No. 1 (1981), Vol. 20, No. 2 (1981), Vol. 21, No. 2 (1982), Vol. 22, No. 2 (1983), Vol. 23, No. 1 (1984), and Vol. 24, No. 2 (1985) (*Esalen Catalogs*, n.d.).

[770] Michael Murphy recalled that Bentov visited Esalen several times despite never properly gaining ground at the Institute. Moreover, he compared Bentov with Krishna regarding their what he perceived as their shared status as outsiders (M. Murphy 2023).

[771] After experiencing what she took to be a kundalini experience, Bonnie Greenwell went to Esalen to "meet people, who were personally familiar with the experience I was having […] many of whom had difficult and dramatic stories to tell" (Greenwell 2009, 22). Krishna's *Kundalini* (1967) played a crucial role in her search for meaning in the aftermath of the experience: "I had one book on the subject, the famous work in which Gopi Krishna describes his own experience. As far as I knew, he and I were the only people on the planet who had undergone kundalini awakening" (Greenwell 2009, 7). See Chapter 13.1.2. for further information on Greenwell.

[772] Sannella and Streitfeld's workshop revolved around the content of Sannella's book, i.e., the difference between classical and clinical kundalini experiences. Employing a set of theories and methods, the course

Lavender's workshop "Serpent Power and the Holy Spirit: An Energy Transformation Workshop" (1981), and Campbell's workshop "Symbolism of the Kundalini" (1983). I would like to briefly discuss Kurtz's, Campbell's, and Lavender's events in more detail.

"Generating and Directing the Kundalini Power", led by the California-based psychologist Paul S. Kurtz, was Esalen's first workshop addressing the topic of kundalini. The *Esalen Catalogs* advertised the three-day workshop with the following words: "Both Eastern philosophical and modern psychological evidence will be considered as to the meaning of 'The Kundalini', the Sleeping Serpent whose proper awakening is thought to be the goal of existence in various Indian Yoga systems. Emphasis however will be chiefly on experimentation and experience rather than discussion" (Esalen 1965, n.p.a.). From this description, it becomes evident that Kurtz employs the symbol of kundalini to synthesise Asian philosophy with "modern" (meaning "Western") psychology. While no literature is added to the workshop description, it makes sense to assume that Arthur Avalon's *The Serpent Power* (1918), then the foremost source for information on kundalini, served as Kurtz's central source.

An intriguing aspect concerns Kurtz's emphasis on experimentation and experience. As Kripal underscores, from 1963, an increasing number of workshops implemented an experimental aspect. Kurtz's 1963 workshop on "Leadership Training in Group Dynamics" was "perhaps the earliest instance of an Esalen encounter group experience" (Kripal 2007, 104). Therefore, the experiential aspect of Kurtz's kundalini course of 1965 must be understood against the backdrop of psychology rather than South Asian philosophy. In Esalen terminology, such experimental seminars were subsumed under "Dionysian events" and mainly focused on somatic experiences. "Apollonian events", in contrast, referred to intellectual gatherings. By the end of the 1960s, experimental events had greatly outnumbered intellectual events, with Kripal estimating the imbalance at approximately ninety to ten percent (*ibid.*).

Joseph Campbell (1904–1987) was an Esalen regular who taught extensively in Big Sur and San Francisco.[773] His first workshop took place in 1966 at the invitation of Michael Murphy.

aligns with the typical experimental approach of Esalen workshops. Chapter 22.2.3. discusses this course in more detail.

[773] Joseph Campbell was a prominent US-American mythologist and comparative religion scholar, best known for his influential work on the universal themes and archetypes found in myths. In particular his concept of the "monomyth" or "hero's journey", as outlined in his seminal book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), became influential. While Campbell's framework has profoundly impacted the study of mythology, psychology, and religious studies, critics argue that his approach oversimplifies cultural narratives and tends

Over the following two decades, until his passing in 1987, Campbell developed into a "perennial favorite" (*ibid*., 188) at the Institute. There, he has been cherished and remembered as a "myth-making hero" and a transmitter of tantra-related ideas, e.g., kundalini yoga, subtle physiology, and more. After his first workshop on "Mask, Myth and Dream" (1966), Campbell's second appearance in the *Esalen Catalogs* was in 1967, with a lecture and discussion in San Francisco and a seminar in Big Sur. His lecture "Freud, Jung and Kundalini Yoga" (1967) took place in the First Unitarian Church (San Francisco). It examined "the relevance of Kundalini Yoga for modern psychological theory and the modern quest for meaning" (Esalen 1967d, 8). Thus, the main objective of this lecture was the exploration of potential ties between kundalini and "modern" psychology. Considering the lecture's title, Campbell mainly addressed Freud's and Jung's contributions to "modern" psychology. Kripal emphasises that while Jung played a certain role at Esalen, many of Esalen's central figures were rather influenced by Freud, including Murphy, Perls, Maslow, and Campbell. Given Wilhelm Reich's overarching influence over Esalen's regulars, Kripal further speaks of Esalen as a centre for the Freudian Left – a term that Paul Robinson employed to frame the psychoanalytic schools of Reich, the Hungarian psychoanalyst Géza Róheim, and German-American philosopher Herbert Marcuse (Kripal 2007, 142–143; Robinson 1969; Urban 2015, 84–85). Accordingly, Campbell's "Freud, Jung and Kundalini Yoga" likely emphasised kundalini's relevance to Freudian theories – a suggestion supported by the fact that Jung's notes to the "Kundalini Seminar" were not widely available in 1967. Along with the author John Bleibtreu and the neuropsychiatrist Edward Maupin, then director of Esalen's Residential Program, Campbell discussed these matters in a follow-up seminar discussion titled "The Lessons of Kundalini Yoga for Western Psychology", this time at San Francisco's Grace Cathedral (Kripal 2007, 188–190; Esalen 1967d, 8; 1967e, 8). Campbell offered and participated in numerous other kundalini-related events at Esalen. As part of Campbell's residency in November 1983, he offered individual month-long study programmes and additional weekend workshops, including "Psyche and Symbol Archetypes", "Myth and the Body", and "Symbolism of the Kundalini". While the *Esalen Catalogs* do not offer additional information, Campbell likely presented his views of tantra and psychology, considering kundalini as "*essential spiritual energy*" (J. Campbell 1995, 74,

to universalise myths in a way that may obscure their unique cultural contexts and meanings (Hammer 2004, 161; Kripal 2007, 188–193).

original emphasis) and depicting its journey through the subtle body as a "psychophysiological exercise" (*ibid*.).

Maureen Lavender's "Serpent Power and the Holy Spirit" represents another experimental kundalini-related workshop. Its course description delineates the methods used: "We will […] release pelvic congestion and chakra blocks through spinal undulation, fire breath, and connective tissue work. Purification with pranayama, polarity, silence, primal dance, and symbolic rites of death and rebirth aid in directing the kundalini force to higher centers" (Esalen 1981b, 26).[774] This description suggests that Lavender's workshop employed a variety of experimental methods to impact kundalini's movement. While Kurtz's workshop focused on both "generating and directing", Lavender's course specifically concentrated on "directing" kundalini. Therefore, Lavender's approach might have catered to a more advanced audience with prior experience working with kundalini. Moreover, Lavender's 1981 workshop underscores the dominant pattern of rebirth associated with kundalini's modern interpretations (see Chapter 22.1.4.). Given the Esalen context, it is likely that Lavender used Stan Grof's *Realms of the Human Unconscious* (1976), which provided a comprehensive framework for understanding experiences of rebirth (see below). In Lavender's workshop, kundalini becomes the driving force behind a spirituality aimed at achieving a profound experience of spiritual death and rebirth through intensive and ecstatic body practices.

Several other events tangentially engaged with kundalini. These were particularly frequent during the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. This period aligned with the peak of international kundalini research initiatives and was bolstered by the establishment of the Spiritual Emergency Network (SEN) at Esalen in 1980. As outlined below, Christina Grof founded SEN and elaborated with her husband on the interpretation of kundalini awakening as a spiritual emergency.[775] Therefore, it is likely that Christina Grof's

[774] Unfortunately, no information on Lavender's background or her sources is available. The notion of "fire breath" indicates her association with Yogi Bhajan, who advocated fire breath as part of his Kundalini Yoga teachings (Bhajan 2003b). Primal dance was invented by the Argentinian transpersonal psychologist Daniel Taroppio (n.d.a.), who was trained at Esalen and studied with Stan Grof and Ken Wilber. Taroppio founded the Escuela De Psicología Transpersonal Integral in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he has instructed primal dance and other techniques to unlock human potential and facilitate shifts in consciousness (Escuela de Psicología Transpersonal Integral, n.d.).

[775] The Spiritual Emergency Network (SEN) was renamed Spiritual Emergence Network in 1986. SEN's explanation of its name change was the following: "SEN's name originally came from the Grof's [*sic*] observation of the connection between emergence and emergency in a sudden experience of consciousness transformation. In this name change, we are not negating the emergency, but affirming the emergence of spirit

conceptualisations of kundalini instigated the increase in kundalini-related workshops and events (*Esalen Catalogs*, n.d.).

Stan Grof had already addressed kundalini In *Realms of the Human Unconscious* (1976) within the context of LSD research. He noted that experiences during "LSD sessions bear a striking resemblance to phenomena described in various schools of Kundalini yoga" (S. Grof 1976, 202). Grof not only highlighted this resemblance but also suggested that "advanced", high-dose LSD sessions might activate kundalini:

> An extremely rare and extraordinary experience that can occur in advanced LSD sessions is that of the arousal of the Kundalini in the sacral part of the spinal cord and the upward flow of spiritual energy, with the sequential activation of all the chakras. In its complete form this process can result in a profound transcendental experience of an ecstatic and integrative nature related to the highest chakra, the thousand-petal lotus. (*ibid*., 202–203)[776]

Grof viewed South Asian subtle-body concepts as "very useful maps of consciousness that are of great help in understanding and conceptualizing many unusual experiences in LSD sessions" (*ibid*.). Accordingly, he considered kundalini to be "the best explanation of the highest transcendent experiences he has observed in his LSD psychotherapy" (White to Krishna, May 7, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5.).[777] However, while acknowledging the benefits of kundalini, Grof also issued a caution: "The phenomenology and consequences of mishandled or poorly integrated LSD sessions is very similar to the complications occurring in the course of unsupervised and amateurish Kundalini practices" (S. Grof 1976, 202). By emphasising both the transformative potential and the risks associated with kundalini, Grof's interpretation foreshadowed the concept of spiritual emergency that he and Christina would further explore in their later work.

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within all of us" (ITP 1986c, 7). Owing to this study's primary interest in SEN's early history, I will use the Network's initial name when referring to it.

[776] Gopi Krishna strongly opposed the opinion that LSD or other substances could lead to the activation of kundalini (Krishna 2009). See Chapter 10.2.3. for more information on this subject.

[777] In 1973, John White met Stan Grof at the Council Grove Conference, where they discussed kundalini. Intriguingly, even then, several years before publishing *Realms of the Human Unconscious* (1976), Grof had shown an interest in kundalini and had mentioned it in connection with his LSD research (White to Krishna, May 7, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5.). Grof also noted that he discussed kundalini's relationship with LSD research at the First International Conference for Scientific Yoga in New Delhi, India, in 1971 (S. Grof 1976, 203). He likely refers to the 1970 World Conference on Scientific Yoga, organised by Christopher Hills (Hills 1977, 488). This conference and the subsequent feedback from the audience likely reinforced Grof's views on the subject (S. Grof 1976, 203).

Seminars of the so-called "Grof groups" (K. Thompson 1988, 4) dominated the social and seminar life at Esalen in the waning 1970s and early 1980s.[778] These events featured teams of instructors that met at Esalen for several weeks, offering conferences, workshops, and lectures on topics that revolved around the Grofs' interests and frequently also covered kundalini-related topics (Kripal 2007, 265). Esalen's long-term faculty[779] member and author Keith Thompson describes such Grof-group events with the following words:

> During these month-long workshops, the Big House [at Esalen] would be transformed successively into an ashram, an experimental laboratory, a mystery school, and an intimate college classroom. Through exquisitely structured exercises not unlike those of ancient healing rituals and shamanic vision quests, group members would undertake subjective journeys into their depths. The "Grof groups" (as they became known) provided a secure environment for participants to contact and release blocked energies, thereby allowing emotional and psychosomatic symptoms to flow into dynamic, life-changing experiences. (K. Thompson 1988, 4)

Thompson's enthusiastic description of the Grofs and their work at Esalen aligns with the frequency and popularity of workshops led by the Grofs. Examples of their multi-week events include "Holistic Medicine & Health Practices" (May 6 through June 1, 1979), "Energy: Physical, Emotional and Spiritual" (September 30 through October 26, 1979), and "East and West: Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science" (October 4 through October 30, 1981). The outcomes of such meetings were either published in anthologies or disseminated through other workshops at Esalen. Owing to the reputation of their organisers and faculty members, the "Grof group" events attracted particular attention and created a stir even beyond Esalen. Moreover, the diverse techniques for exploring various states of consciousness, combined with the wide range of faculty in their workshops, underscored Esalen's exceptional role as an explorative locus of the interactions between the human mind and body (Esalen 1979b, 20; 1979a, 29; 1981a, 40; Kripal 2007, 265).

The success of kundalini-related events and projects cannot be solely attributed to the Grofs. A vital supporter was Dick Price. Esalen's co-founder had a particular interest in kundalini,

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[778] Christina and Stan Grof were respected at Esalen and assumed a unique role in its community, with Stan Grof even surpassing Christina's significance. Having lived at Esalen for about fifteen years, Murphy referred to Stan Grof as Esalen's "superstar" (The Way of the Psychonaut 2022), who shaped its thematic foci and programming for at least two decades. Considering their vital position for Esalen-related kundalini interpretations, actions, and events, the couple will be discussed in a separate chapter below.

[779] At Esalen, the designation "faculty" refers to the group of teachers who are involved with the Institute for a distinct period (*Esalen Catalogs*, n.d.).

tracing back to a psychotic episode he had endured in 1956, which he later framed as a "spiritual emergency" (see below). Price hardly taught at Esalen (neither did he write), but he fundamentally contributed to kundalini-related events and projects through financial and organisational support (Kripal 2007, 266). Let us take a closer look at two such "Grof group" events.

The workshop on "Holistic Medicine & Health Practices" (1979) involved thirty-one Esalen faculty members, including mythologist Joseph Campbell, (para)psychologist Stanley Krippner, neuropsychologist Karl Pribram, Esalen co-founder Dick Price, and psychiatrist Lee Sannella. As was to become the pattern of the "Grof group" events, the workshop had three thematic foci: "Ancient and Non-Western Systems Based on the Unity of Mind and Body", "Holistic Trends in Contemporary Medicine", and "Self-Exploration and Group Process" (Esalen 1979b, 20). Central questions during the workshop revolved around alternative and holistic healing methods, body transformations during practices such as "yogic disciplines" (*ibid.*), and modern kundalini research (*ibid.*). Given Sannella's participation in the workshop, the notion of "kundalini research" presumably referred to clinical studies carried out at the San Francisco-based Kundalini Clinic (see Chapter 22).

The workshop "Energy: Physical, Emotional and Spiritual" (1979) was scheduled a few months later and followed the same trajectory: A consistent group of Esalen intellectuals and practitioners addressed a range of "classic Grof themes" (Kripal 2007, 265). In this case, thirty-one faculty members (about half of them – sixteen – had already participated in "Holistic Medicine") examined "various manifestations of energy and […] techniques of channeling […] for the purpose of self-exploration and spiritual growth" (Esalen 1979a, 29). Prominent faculty members (who had not attended "Holistic Medicine") included physicist Fritjof Capra, author Ajit Mookerjee,[780] and Esalen co-founder Michael Murphy. The faculty explored themes such as "Ancient Spiritual Systems and Techniques of Dealing with Energy", "Consciousness Research and Modern Physics", and "Self-Exploration and Group Process" (*ibid.*). Of particular interest was the attempt to theoretically and practically explore "Tantric art and ritual, the Tibetan vajrayana, [and] kundalini yoga" (*ibid.*). Moreover, the

[780] Ajit Mookerjee (1915–1990) was an expert on South Asian art and an author on tantra. His publications include *Kundalini. The Arousal of the Inner Energy* (1982) and *The Tantric Way: Art, Science, Ritual* (1977, co-authored with Madhu Kanna). Each of his books addressed kundalini and referenced Gopi Krishna's work. Therefore, he may have mentioned Krishna in his talks at Esalen. Mookerjee is listed three times as a contributor to Esalen events. In 1978, he gave a talk on tantra art; in 1979, he was part of "Energy: Physical, Emotional and Spiritual"; and in 1983, Mookerjee returned to Big Sur for yet another "Grof group" event on "Journey to the East" (Esalen 1978, 15; 1979a, 29; 1983, 35).

faculty examined the "striking convergence between mysticism, consciousness research, and modern physics" (*ibid*.). Kundalini was mentioned in the course description as a "technique of dealing with energy". Considering the workshop's overall goal of addressing the interrelation between consciousness and energy, kundalini was likely associated with energy *and* consciousness – arguably two recurring themes of *kuṇḍalinī*'s modern transformation. Therefore, the "Grof group" workshops, whose participants often shared several ties with kundalini research, contributed to the reinforcement and past and novel perspectives on kundalini.

Besides the Esalen-based events, the "Transformation Project" represent another avenue for kundalini research at Esalen. Initiated by Michael Murphy and James (Jim) L. Hickman in 1976, the project eventually culminated in the publication of Murphy's *The Future of the Body* (1992). Funded by Rockefeller and Esalen, its objective was to compile an "archive of scientific studies concerned with exceptional psychophysical capacities that appear in sport, contemplative practice, the performing arts and other disciplines" (M. Murphy 1980, 101). The Transformation Project was by no means limited to kundalini or even the subtle body. This notwithstanding, of a total of two thousand key terms, Murphy and Hickman designated kundalini one of their high-priority terms for their weekly computer search, suggesting its central role in the Transformation Project (M. Murphy 1982, 1). Murphy highlighted that he considered Esalen a laboratory to disclose kundalini's true nature: "What we've tried to do here is to find out what's really going on. I mean, if there are so many systems [addressing kundalini], they all can't be right" (M. Murphy 2023).[781] The Transformation Project was thus another indicator demonstrating Esalen's interest in kundalini and its associated fields (Kripal 2007, 323; M. Murphy 1982).

This chapter explored Esalen's events and key figures contributing to conceptualising and disseminating perspectives on kundalini. From as early as 1965, Esalen offered kundalini-related workshops, which increased in frequency throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s. Most of the conveners emphasised kundalini more as a psychological force than as a component of the subtle body. Kundalini's psychologisation at Esalen aligned with similar developments at the Californian integral institutes (see Chapter 24) and the general tendency to psychologise religion during that period (see Chapter 26.1.). Moreover, the influence of Aurobindo's integral philosophy and Chaudhuri's yoga psychology perhaps reinforced kundalini's interpretation through a psychological framework. Christina and Stan Grof

[781] Michael Murphy explicitly stated that he never experienced kundalini (M. Murphy 2023).

represent the key figures to advance interest in kundalini at Esalen. Motivated by personal experiences and LSD research, respectively, they delved deeper into the subject and incorporated it as a cornerstone in their workshops. A seminal outcome of these examinations was the Spiritual Emergency Network. Due to its ties with kundalini research, the following chapters explore this ongoing programme in more detail.

23.3. Christina and Stan Grof and the Spiritual Emergency Network

Stan Grof (b. 1931) and Christina Grof (1941–2014) are best known for their holotropic breathwork therapy, their explorations of non-ordinary states of consciousness, and their contribution to the concept of spiritual emergency.[782] This chapter focuses on the third of these undertakings, examining its significance for kundalini's increasing psychologisation and pathologisation and considering the Spiritual Emergency Network (SEN). Owing to Stan's reputation, he is frequently credited with co-establishing or even chiefly establishing SEN. However, the driving force behind the network was, in fact, Christina.

23.3.1. The Origins of Christina and Stan Grof's Concept of Spiritual Emergency

Christina and Stan's therapeutic models were grounded in personal experiences, which had unsettled their views of reality and conventions. Stan's initial experience with LSD-25 in 1956 as part of a clinical research study not only "profoundly changed [his] professional and personal life" (S. Grof 1995, 27) but further "marked the beginning of [his] radical departure from traditional thinking in psychiatry" (*ibid*.). Stan's experience of the "God in the Laboratory" (*ibid*., 23) utterly changed the course of his life. Christina's experience, on the other hand, not only modified her perception and interpretation of life, but she also endured episodes of suffering, isolation, and confusion, which significantly influenced their conceptualisations of spiritual emergencies and thus warrants detailed exploration.

Before meeting Stan, Christina was a married mother of two living in Hawaii.[783] During her first childbirth in 1968, she experienced what she later identified as her initial kundalini

[782] For the sake of readability, in this chapter, I will use Christina and Stan Grof's names without including their surname. Additionally, when discussing the topic of spiritual emergency, I will mention Christina before Stan to emphasise her pivotal role.

[783] The following descriptions of Christina's experience primarily rely on her narration as outlined in "The Uninvited Guest" (1995) and Kripal's interpretations (Kripal 2007, 261–266).

experience, describing intense sensations and uncontrollable shaking during labour (C. Grof 1995, 12–13).

Despite fear and embarrassment, the experience led to what Christina considered a year-long, challenging awakening (*ibid*., 10). A similar experience occurred during the birth of her second child in 1970. In both cases, she was in a clinical setting and treated with tranquillisers. In 1974, Christina encountered these sensations again during a retreat with Swami Muktananda, where she received shaktipat and was encouraged to integrate the experience rather than repress it (*ibid*., 14). Although Muktananda's guidance left a significant impression, it did not alleviate her turmoil. It would take a few more years, however, before Christina would define these episodes as aspects of her kundalini awakening.

After her marriage ended and facing severe depression, in the summer of 1975, Christina sought help from Joseph Campbell, a befriended lecturer from the time when Christina was studying in New York. He introduced her to Stan, whom Campbell considered an expert on non-ordinary states of consciousness (C. Grof 1995, 16; Kripal 2007, 263). Consequently, Christina visited Esalen, where Stan then lived; she read his book *Realms of the Human Unconscious* (1975) and attended his workshop, "The Human Experience: Buddhism and Mind", co-led with Joan Halifax-Grof (then Stan's wife) and Jack Kornfield. The course centred on Buddhist practice and theory and on "Occidental Approaches to the Exploration of Consciousness":

> During the entire six week [*sic*] period non-drug technology for self-exploration will be available for supervised use by the participants. This laboratory equipment will include a sensory isolation tank, sonic driver, stroboscopic light, biofeedback system and a kinaesthetic device (lotus cradle). This will make it possible for participants to explore unusual states of consciousness induced by different techniques. (Esalen 1975, 35)

Stan encouraged her exploration into the "realms of the human unconscious" (S. Grof 1976), emphasising that if properly supported and integrated, it could be transformational and therapeutic. Nevertheless, her experiences intensified, leading to a psychosomatic crisis, which she described as "the dark night of [her] soul" (C. Grof 1995, 19). During this five-day experience, Stan continued to assure her of its quality:

> Because of [Stan's] work with LSD, he was familiar with the sometimes dramatic manifestations of the process of personal transformation, and he recognized my episode as such. […] With gentle enthusiasm, Stan told me he felt that this was not irreversible

> psychosis, but instead a very important step in my spiritual journey. We called it a "spiritual emergency". (C. Grof and Grof 1995, 18)

This quote is significant for several reasons. First, it shows how Christina and Stan's concept of spiritual emergencies originated in Christina's severe crisis at Esalen in 1975. Second, it anticipates their recognition of crisis as a critical, if not essential, aspect of one's spiritual evolution. Third, the pivotal difference between psychosis and spiritual emergency appears as a central pillar for Christina and Stan. Such views resonated with perspectives of the anti-psychiatry movement (see Chapter 20.4.3.), advocated by figures such as Ronald Laing and Lee Sannella.

Kripal described Christina's "dark night" with the following words: "Visions, past lives, and spontaneous bodily movements were 'all over the place'. The *kundalini* experiences also intensified" (Kripal 2007, 264, original emphasis). Initially, Christina did not associate her condition with kundalini. However, in the wake of what she would began calling her first spiritual emergency, she started exploring literature on kundalini, including Muktananda's *The Play of Consciousness* (1974) and Krishna's *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967) (C. Grof 1995, 20; Kripal 2007, 264). Although both were "classic reads within Californian counterculture" (Kripal 2007, 264), reading them turned out to be futile; she remained perplexed (*ibid*.).

It was Sannella's *Kundalini: Psychosis or Transcendence* (1976), that marked a turning point: "Eventually, […] I was able to recognize that I was involved in what in India is called a Kundalini awakening, a transformative process that was as profoundly healing in the long run as it was difficult to navigate at the time" (C. Grof, in K. Thompson 1988, 5; Kripal 2007, 264). According to Christina, this happened in 1977. It is striking, however, that she had not come across the book earlier. Sannella had already taught at Esalen twice (in November 1967 in Big Sur and in December 1973 in San Francisco), and in April 1976, he was part of the resident faculty at Westerbeke Ranch – along with Gay Luce and Jim Hickman (Esalen 1967c, 13; 1967b, 13; 1973, 9; 1976, 4). While there are no records of Christina meeting Sannella before his ultimate return to Big Sur in 1979, he was well-known at Esalen. Stan, in fact, had his Esalen debut only a few months before Sannella, in September 1967, and must have been aware of the latter's work at the Kundalini Clinic and his book (Esalen 1967a, 3). Perhaps Stan recommended Sannella's book to Christina after Muktananda and Krishna's books did not resonate with her.

In any case, Christina's "realisation" fostered a lifelong appreciation for the co-founder of the Kundalini Clinic, whom they credited with "bringing the Kundalini concept to the attention of Western professional circles" (C. Grof and Grof 1995, 97; S. Grof and Grof 1989a, xv; C. Grof and Grof 2017, 33). Moreover, Christina and Stan's framing of Christina's experience led to an increased focus on kundalini in "Grof group" seminars (*Esalen Catalogs*, n.d.).

Finally, it is essential to highlight the connection between Christina's crisis and the setting of Esalen. The Institute has always focused on embracing and integrating non-ordinary states of consciousness rather than stigmatising them. Additionally, alternative healing and therapy methods have been held in high regard. Dick Price, Esalen's co-founder, was a key advocate for these approaches.

Price experienced two major crises in his life: the first as a college student and the second as a resident at Esalen. While some viewed his crises as "psychotic breakdown[s]" (Kripal 2007, 82), others – including Christina and Stan – saw them as "mystical trauma" (*ibid*., 266) or spiritual emergencies. During his first crisis, Price was forcibly admitted to a hospital, where he underwent electroshock therapy and other aggressive treatments (S. Grof and Grof 1989a, ix; Kripal 2007, 78). Stemming from this experience, he envisioned Esalen as an alternative to psychiatric institutions, a place for healing rather than conventional treatment: "He had cofounded Esalen to help build a place and a space in which people who had been through similar experiences could come and be healed" (Kripal 2007, 266). Consequently, Christina endured her crisis at a place that, for Price, was particularly intended for experiences as such.

During his second crisis, Price lived at Esalen and was treated according to the Institute's principle that crises are "opportunities for growth, healing, and expansion" (S. Grof and Grof 1989a, ix).

However, Kripal interprets this episode differently. His narration draws from Barclay J. Erickson's PhD thesis, "A Psychobiography of Richard Price: Co-Founder of Esalen Institute" (2003). According to Kripal and Erickson, Price's psychotic episode in late 1968 was severe, lasted for several months, and led to his admission to Agnews Hospital in San José after intense hallucinations and physical violence (Erickson 2003; Kripal 2007, 170–171). According to Kripal, Price had been cognizant that another psychosis was imminent. Despite his preparations and arrangements with his local friends, "in the end Price's psychosis proved to be too much even for Esalen" (Kripal 2007, 171). Kripal's analysis

suggests that Christina's idealised view of Esalen as a therapeutic centre was more a reflection of her commitment rather than an accurate assessment of its actual effectiveness. Price's experiences influenced his strong support for the integration of spiritual emergencies into Esalen's curriculum. Christina and Stan dedicated their book, *The Stormy Search for the Self* (1995), to Price, acknowledging his inspiration and crucial support: "His commitment to these ideas [of spiritual emergency] was an inspiration to us, and his support during the creation of the Spiritual Emergence Network was essential to its existence" (S. Grof and Grof 1989a, ix).

In sum, Esalen's emphasis on alternative treatments of mental health issues and their interpretations as spiritual emergencies stemmed from the personal experiences of key Esalen figures. For Christina, in particular, kundalini became a central framework for understanding her experiences, establishing kundalini awakenings as a significant spiritual crisis.[784] This perspective influenced Christina and Stan's conceptualisations of spiritual emergencies and sparked increased interest in kundalini among transpersonal psychologists and psychiatrists.

23.3.2. Christina and Stan Grof's Interpretation of Spiritual Emergency

The Grofs viewed spiritual emergencies as a "personal transformation […] [that emerges] as a result of meditative practices and as signposts of the mythical path" (S. Grof and Grof 1989c, x).[785] They positioned these experiences at the intersection of crisis and opportunity, recognising both the distressing and challenging aspects of psychosomatic crises, as well as their potential for "evolutionary" growth and healing.[786] They aimed to deepen

[784] Present-day staff members at Esalen frequently interpret Price's psychotic experience at Esalen as the activation of kundalini. However, there is no archival material that supports such claims or indicates that Price interpreted his experience accordingly.

[785] There is a considerable body of literature dedicated to the exploration of spiritual emergencies. However, with the notable exception of Hofman and Heise's (German) handbook *Spiritualität und spirituelle Krisen* (2016), most publications adopt an emic and transpersonal perspective, including contributions to Stan and Christina Grof's edited volume *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis* (1989c), Emma Bragdon's *The Call of Spiritual Emergency* (1990), and David Lukoff's chapter "Kundalini Awakening" (2009).

[786] Christina and Stan used different terms for spiritually induced crises, including "spiritual emergency", "evolutionary crisis" (C. Grof and Grof 2017, 30), "transpersonal crisis" (*ibid*.), "transformational crisis" (S. Grof and Grof 1989b, 25), "existential crisis" (C. Grof and Grof 1995, 65), and "psychospiritual crisis" (C. Grof and Grof 2017, 43).

understanding, reduce misdiagnoses, and highlight the importance of integrating religion into mental health care.

According to Christina and Stan, a spiritual emergency ultimately facilitates a therapeutic effect. As Stan put it:

> There exist spontaneous non-ordinary states that would in the west be seen and treated as psychosis, treated mostly by suppressive medication. But if we use the observations from the study of non-ordinary states, and also from other spiritual traditions, they should really be treated as crises of transformation, or crises of spiritual opening. Something that should really be supported rather than suppressed. If properly understood and properly supported, they are actually conducive to healing and transformation. (S. Grof, in Lukoff 2009, 129)

The positive interpretation of crises as mechanisms for therapy and transformation resonates with Sannella's view of kundalini-induced crises as a "rebirth process". As previously mentioned, Sannella was instrumental in helping Christina identify her experience as the activation of kundalini. Therefore, his influence likely extended to their understanding of spiritual emergencies.[787] Specifically, his concept of kundalini-triggered rebirth processes that facilitate the purification of physical and mental "impurities" may have inspired their perception of spiritual emergencies as therapeutic means (see Chapter 22.1.4.).

While Sannella supported his argument with the specific concept of kundalini, Christina and Stan, in contrast, expanded their framework by including a variety of "experiential patterns" (C. Grof and Grof 2017, 31). Their list encompasses experiences such as past-life encounters, kundalini awakenings, UFO sightings, possession states, and peak experiences. However, this catalogue of "experiential patterns" lacks systematic categorisation and appears somewhat arbitrary.[788] Christina and Stan defined these patterns based on their "work with individuals in spiritual crisis" (*ibid*.) supplemented by "relevant literature" (*ibid*.) and discussions with colleagues (S. Grof and Grof 1989b, 13). Despite their claims that

[787] In addition to Sannella, the Canadian psychiatrist Richard Maurice Bucke, renowned for his book *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901), significantly influenced the Grofs' conceptualisation of spiritual emergencies. Bucke's advocacy for alternative treatments in mental health and his impact on transpersonal psychology and the anti-psychiatry movement provided valuable insights for Christina and Stan as they developed their theories on spiritual crises (Bucke 1905; C. Grof and Grof 2017, 40). Other sources they considered valuable for the study of spiritual emergencies included William James (1985), Robert Laing (1967), the author Marghanita Laski (1961), and Abraham Maslow (1964), to name but a few (C. Grof and Grof 2017, 40–41).

[788] The number of paradigmatic spiritual emergencies varied in different publications by the Grofs; sometimes, they speak of six and then on other occasions of ten "experiential patterns" (C. Grof and Grof 2017, 31; S. Grof and Grof 1989b, 13–14).

categorising spiritual emergencies helps to explain their frequency and the challenges they present, the framework offers limited heuristic value in advancing comprehension or providing practical guidance.

When critically assessing the category of spiritual emergency as popularised by Christina and Stan, it is evident that their concept drew from several prevalent themes in Californian alternative religion and therapy of that era (see Chapter 26). These themes include altered states of consciousness, anti-psychiatry, the notion of crisis as an element of healing, rebirth, evolution, the paranormal, and spirituality. Christina and Stan could have also advocated for a type of crisis resembling psychosis that promotes healing and transformation in affected individuals without labelling it as "spiritual". However, the religio-therapeutic context of Esalen, Stan's commitment to transpersonal psychology, and the broader trend towards the sacralisation of therapy likely influenced their choice to use the concept of "spirituality" in defining these "personal transformations".

Initially, kundalini represented the primary motivation behind Christina and Stan's exploration of spiritual emergencies. Although they defined various "experiential patterns", kundalini remained central and was extensively discussed throughout their publications on the subject.

Their edited volume *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis* (1989), which includes significant contributions on kundalini, is considered a seminal work in this field. The emphasis on kundalini in this book underscores its pivotal role in the recent history of spiritual emergency (S. Grof and Grof 1989c).

In their 2017 article "Spiritual Emergency: The Understanding and Treatment of Transpersonal Crises" (2017),[789] Christina and Stan describe kundalini awakening as "transpersonal (meaning spiritual) crisis". They reference "Indian sources" to outline what they consider paradigmatic signs and symptoms of a "kundalini awakening".[790] Some of these symptoms, such as experiencing oneself to be larger as usual or hearing internal sounds such as hissing, echo Sannella's descriptions (see Chapter 22.1.4.), while others, such as the vision of geometric patterns and travelling through space, differ from Sannella's list (C. Grof and Grof 2017, 32; Sannella 1976, 44–51).

Following their discussion of the "Indian perspective", they refer to Sannella's "pioneering book" (C. Grof and Grof 2017, 33) and suggest that "unmistakeable [*sic*] signs of Kundalini

[789] Originally published in 1986 by *ReVision: The Journal of Consciousness and Change*.

[790] The designation "Indian sources" refers to Ajit Mookerjee, Swami Muktananda, and John Woodroffe (C. Grof and Grof 2017, 32).

awakening can be observed these days in thousands of Westerners" (*ibid*., 32–33). Since kundalini may "simulate many psychiatric disorders and medical problems" (*ibid*., 33), they emphasise the need for a thorough analysis to avoid misdiagnoses, including conversion hysteria, Jacksonian epilepsy, a heart attack, pelvic inflammatory disease, or chronic lower back pain (*ibid*.). Aligning with their definition of spiritual emergencies as encompassing both crisis and therapeutic potential, they highlight that "although not without dangers and pitfalls, the arousal of Kundalini is seen, […] as potentially conducive to psychosomatic healing, positive restructuring of the personality and consciousness evolution" (*ibid*., 32).
For further understanding, they recommend consulting tantric literature for additional information – though they do not specify particular texts – and also suggest modern sources, such as Lee Sannella, John Woodroofe, Swami Muktananda, Gopi Krishna, John White, and Ajit Mookerjee. These figures represent some of Christina and Stan's key influences in their conceptualisation of kundalini as a spiritual emergency (*ibid*., 33, 41).

23.3.3. The Spiritual Emergency Network

In 1980, after five years of co-elaborating on the concept of spiritual emergencies with Stan, Christina decided to take further actions: "I felt there should be some kind of alternative understanding and care for those [experiencing a transformational crisis] […]. With this purpose in mind, I founded the Spiritual Emergency Network, an international resource-and-information network that offers support to those who are in crisis as well as to those around them" (C. Grof 1995, 21). Given kundalini's central role in SEN's activities and SEN's significance in the dissemination of kundalini, this chapter will provide a detailed exploration of the network.
With the help of Price and Stan, Christina established the network, which aimed to develop strategies for alternative treatment and promoting broader recognition of spiritual crises. Christina rented a house in Big Sur near Esalen and worked together with a small group of students. Their initial focus was elaborating training programmes for prospective facilitators and establishing an information and referral system. The latter evolved into SEN's most pivotal activity: the small group began compiling an expanding file of psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers, bodyworkers, physicians, clergy, and other persons who could offer assistance either through experience or expertise. These individuals were referred to as "helpers". Many who had benefited from the network's assistance chose to become

helpers themselves, highlighting the importance of community as a foundational element of the network (C. Grof and Grof 1995, 294–296; Prevatt and Park 1989, 227).

From the outset, Christina emphasised the distinction between SEN's services and its limitations:

> It is important to emphasize that the SEN center in Big Sur is an educational, training and information-providing facility. It is not equipped to actually handle spiritual emergencies, nor is it capable of making specific referrals. Decisions of this kind cannot be made on the basis of a letter or a telephone call and require a personal interview with a well-trained person in the region where the individual in crisis resides. As a special service, the SEN offers professionals lists of colleagues in their area who share the transpersonal perspective. (C. Grof and Grof 1984, 5)

Thus, the "helpers file" served as the foundation for SEN's referral strategy, linking individuals seeking assistance with helpers in their local areas. As the network grew, more helpers became available across various regions of California and eventually beyond. What began as a local network expanded significantly, first into a nationwide network and then an international one. By 1984, the network had already assisted six thousand individuals (C. Grof and Grof 1995, 296).

A central component of the information and referral strategy was SEN's hotline, which offered the service of "listening to and validating the experiences of people who reach us by telephone" (Prevatt and Park 1989, 227). Perhaps SEN's hotline was modelled on other crisis-intervention hotlines or pastoral advice services.[791] While following the same trajectory, allowing people to ask for help anonymously and without having to leave their homes, SEN's hotline differed as it refrained from offering explicit counselling services.[792] Instead, it elaborated a sophisticated international referral strategy. Depending on the belief

[791] Ted Esser, SEN's operational manager since 2003, could not confirm the assumption that crisis intervention hotlines served as SEN's role models but emphasised its high probability. One of the earliest examples of a crisis hotline is Edward Chad Varah's suicide prevention hotline, "Samaritans", which originated in the United Kingdom. Its US-American equivalent was Bernard Mayes' suicide hotline, initiated in San Francisco in 1961. The journalist and priest Mayes answered calls for over ten years voluntarily, inspiring similar crisis-counselling hotlines all over the United States and eventually worldwide (Esser 2023; Whiting 2012).

[792] During the 1970s, several graduate-level education programmes included transpersonal or integral counselling degrees. Notable examples include the Institute for Mystical and Parapsychological Studies at John F. Kennedy University (Orinda, California) and the California Institute of Asian Studies (San Francisco). Institutions, as such, carried significant weight for the transpersonal community during the 1970s. Therefore, it is likely that SEN's hotline, while not offering transpersonal or integral counselling, was inspired by these programmes (CIAS 1979c). See Chapter 24.1.3. for a thorough introduction to the integral counselling psychology program at CIAS.

system articulated by the caller, SEN's hotline staff identified up to three helpers in the caller's local area who shared similar beliefs or religious backgrounds and had proficiency in the caller's diagnosed crisis.[793]

For instance, if a person called who believed themselves to be suffering from a kundalini experience, a "helper" who had previously undergone a similar experience or had acquired knowledge about kundalini would be assigned to assist the caller. Additionally, a caller would be provided with resources and information either tailored to their specific crisis or covering a broader spectrum of spiritual emergencies. This service was also available to helpers and third parties interested in the types and treatments of spiritual emergencies. For this specific purpose, SEN collected books for its library,[794] composed information sheets, assembled newsletters, and acquired a video recorder to enhance their educational collection with videotapes (C. Grof and Grof 1984, 5; 1995, 296; Prevatt and Park 1989, 227–228).

A 1989 survey conducted by Prevatt and Park, the leading SEN coordinators at the time, highlights the frequent occurrence of the category of "kundalini awakening" as part of SEN's hotline. By then, the network had evolved into an international organisation with approximately ten thousand contacts on its mailing list and one thousand one hundred helpers. It received around one hundred and fifty calls per month, and of those, forty-six per cent required reference to a local therapist. Prevatt and Park analysed "501 calls and 117 letters, from November 1986 through July 1987, [which] revealed that a 'typical caller' was a forty-year-old female (69 percent) experiencing some form of Kundalini awakening (24 percent)" (Prevatt and Park 1989, 227). Prevatt and Park's article does not explain whether the callers used "kundalini awakening" for self-description or if the advising experts made the diagnostic categorisation. The former would be a clear indicator that even two decades after Krishna's initial description of his malady, kundalini was still widely associated with spiritual crises. In the case of the helpers diagnosing "kundalini awakening", it would be interesting to know according to which criteria or symptoms they assumed a crisis to be associated with kundalini – no information is available on this matter. Ted Esser, who has been involved with SEN since 2003, emphasised that throughout his involvement, those

[793] The range of spiritual crises acknowledged by SEN adhered to the catalogue developed by Christina and Stan (see above).

[794] The library was initiated at SEN's Big Sur Centre and primarily comprised literature on transpersonal psychology, mythology, religion, consciousness, and art. Sympathetic authors frequently donated books, complemented by videotapes and audio recordings (C. Grof and Grof 1995, 303; Prevatt and Park 1989, 231).

experiencing kundalini as a type of spiritual emergency accounted for about a quarter of all callers (Esser 2023).

Beyond the information and referral service, SEN provided educational and training programmes for professionals and laypeople interested in actively supporting others during spiritual emergencies. A particular emphasis was placed on the training of facilitators through dedicated workshops held at Esalen.[795] Notable examples of these educational events include "Transpersonal Psychology" (October 26 through November 21, 1980), "East and West: Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science" (October 4 through October 30, 1981), "Journey to the East" (September 4 through September 30, 1983), and "Spiritual Emergency: Understanding and Treatment of Transpersonal Crises" (February 26 through March 23, 1984) (Prevatt and Park 1989, 227; *Esalen Catalogs*, n.d.).[796]

Although thematically distinct, most of these workshops followed a similar structure: they began with a theoretical introduction, followed by a focused exploration of a specific theme, corresponding methods, and practical implementation through self-exploration or group exercises. Each training programme referenced kundalini, either as a paradigmatic example of a spiritual emergency or as a research area offering insights into spiritual emergencies more broadly. One such workshop will be examined in detail.

The workshop "Transpersonal Psychology" was designed as an interdisciplinary training programme for professionals and students in psychiatry, psychology, anthropology, religion, and philosophy. Co-organised with the Association of Transpersonal Psychology (ATP), Christina and Stan, along with twenty-four Esalen faculty members, led the workshop. Several faculty members were affiliated with transpersonal psychology, including the philosopher and psychologist Richard Tarnas (b. 1950) and Ken Wilber. The workshop focused on four distinct areas: (1) "Foundations of Transpersonal Psychology and Psychotherapy", (2) "Psychosis: Disease or Transpersonal Crisis?", (3) "Techniques of Transpersonal Psychotherapy", and (4) "Self-Exploration and Group Process". In true Grofian fashion, the workshop featured pioneers in the field, employed eclectic techniques, such as pranayama, Gestalt therapy, and astrology, and fused what they considered "Eastern

[795] Educational programmes and lectures were later also offered in other locations, including ITP (Menlo Park, California) and Omega Institute (Rhinebeck, New York). This was particularly the case after 1984, when SEN moved its location to ITP (ITP 1986a, 4).

[796] Most of these workshops included a note in their description indicating that their programmes were "part of a systematic effort to create an international network of individuals trained to facilitate the process of evolution and to assist in spiritual emergencies" (Esalen 1983, 35). Earlier descriptions employed "personal transformation" instead of "evolution".

wisdom" with "Western science". Notably, Christina and Stan emphasised kundalini research as a unique perspective for understanding psychosis (Esalen 1980, 37–38).

Another seminar that suggests the prevalence of the category "kundalini awakening" in SEN's educational programmes was a 1986 in-housing training seminar, which exclusively focused on kundalini. Unfortunately, besides a note that SEN was collecting material and resources, no additional information is available on the precise date, location, or attendees (St. Julian to Kieffer, November 11, 1986, LGK, box 6).

It makes sense to assume that Stan and Christina's publications, along with Sannella's *Kundalini. Psychosis or Transcendence?* (1978) was in use – both for the referral service and the training seminars. The archival material, while being very scarce, offers another hint about the literature used. Samantha St. Julian, then SEN coordinator, sent a request for literature and information to Gene Kieffer, who, as it turns out, was listed as a SEN helper (*ibid*.). Accordingly, Gopi Krishna's publications might have been in use too.

Due to SEN's rapid growth and limited resources, the network first relocated to the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (ITP) in Menlo Park, California, in 1984 and then to the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in San Francisco in 1989.[797] The Kundalini Clinic also agreed to take on administrative roles and, for some years during the early 1980s, it bore responsibility for the hotline. Harold Streitfeld and his assistant, Stuart Sovatsky, then oversaw the Clinic. Sovatsky eventually operated the hotline and faced challenges securing funding, recruiting volunteers, and relocating the service when the Clinic moved (Sovatsky 2023). Later, the hotline was attached to ITP and CIIS.[798] Despite these changes, SEN's services – such as its referral service, library, publications, training programmes, and global network – remained consistent. By 1986, SEN coordinated forty regional centres worldwide (Esalen 1985, 8; ITP 1986b).

At CIIS, SEN enjoyed some of its most successful periods. In addition to Esalen, CIIS offered SEN-related educational courses and training programmes for therapists.[799] To

[797] Another reason for SEN's change of location was the unexpected passing of Dick Price in 1984. As argued earlier, Price was SEN's primary supporter at Esalen. Additionally, Christina and Stan's schedule became too demanding for them to stay actively involved. They continued to serve as advisors to SEN, contributed to its written material, and participated in its annual conferences. However, starting from 1984, their direct involvement diminished significantly (C. Grof and Grof 1995, 296; Esser 2023).

[798] In 2003, when CIIS oversaw the hotline, the transpersonal psychotherapist Ted Esser became the new head first of the hotline and eventually also of SEN (Esser 2023).

[799] To reflect SEN's expanded vision and services, the network was called the "Center for Psychological and Spiritual Health" (CPSH) under CIIS's supervision. However, after a brief period, the network was renamed SEN (Esser 2023; SEN, n.d.).

further SEN's mission and gather more data about spiritual emergencies, CIIS funded the opening of a clinic attached to SEN. Operated by Alan Kübler-Ross (n.d.a.), nephew of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, the clinic enabled SEN's interns to see and treat clients with spiritual emergencies. However, CIIS withdrew funding after a few years, leading to the clinic's closure (Esser 2023; SEN, n.d.).[800]

Besides referral, informational, and educational endeavours, SEN also offered residential and research centres. In 1981, SEN opened the "Aurora House for Spiritual Emergencies". This retreat centre was situated in a rural area northeast of San Francisco with the aim of assisting individuals experiencing spiritual emergencies. Furthermore, it was intended as an environment to cultivate favourable conditions for personal growth. Several years later, another centre was opened, the "Passages In". This residential retreat was located in the San Francisco Bay area and could accommodate up to three residents (Esalen 1982, 44; ITP 1986a, 7).

John W. Perry's San Francisco Diabasis house programme served as the prototype for these residential centres. Perry suggested alternative, non-invasive treatment of patients, and radically redefined schizophrenia as a transformational crisis and self-healing process.[801] Aligning with Christina and Stan's typology of spiritual emergencies and referring to Jung's concept of "psychic energy" (Jung 1970), Perry characterised psychotic episodes as triggering a "renewal process" (Perry 1974, 21). The potential outcome of Perry's renewal process was a total transformation of the self: "This whole archetypal process becomes the vehicle in the individual psyche for a fundamental reorganization of the self" (*ibid*.). As Christina and Stan underscore, Perry's archetypal renewal process leans towards Jung's concept of the process of "individuation", which they interpret as reaching "a fuller expression of one's deeper potential" (C. Grof and Grof 1995, 105–108; Esser 2023; Perry 1974, 20–21).[802] Perry's concept of "renewal processes" further echoes Sannella's views of kundalini. While Sannella considered kundalini as a therapeutic force, Perry on the other hand believed that the renewal process, which he considered an undercurrent of psychotic

[800] CIIS continued to fund SEN's hotline for another year, with Ted Esser being its sole volunteer. Eventually, with the assistance of ATP, Esser created an online database, reducing calls by about seventy-five per cent. Today, most information is available on SEN's webpage, where clients can access a self-referral service (Esser 2023).

[801] Before starting Diabasis, Perry was involved in the Agnews Project, which will be discussed below. Considering Price and Silverman's central roles, the Agnews Project links Perry to Esalen. Perry's residential projects, in turn, inspired SEN's efforts in residential facilities, creating a renewed connection between Esalen and Perry (Cornwall 2013; Kripal 2007, 170; Perry 1974, 152).

[802] Refer to Stein (1998), Baier (2024; forthcoming), and Coward (1985) for further discussions on Jung.

episodes, would result in a self-healing procedure. Despite parallels in their approach and Diabasis accepting people undergoing what they considered a kundalini-induced spiritual crisis, the Kundalini Clinic and Diabasis did not collaborate (Esser 2023; Sovatsky 2023). Established around the same time as the Kundalini Clinic, Diabasis reflects the era's growing interest in distinguishing non-ordinary states of consciousness from schizophrenia and other mental health issues. SEN further explored this interest in the following years, broadening its reach and impact. A key point in discussing and comparing these institutes is their shared view that kundalini experiences exemplify a significant transformational crisis.

23.4. The Relation Between Esalen and KRF

Krishna was an insignificant figure at Esalen. He never visited the Institute, and his work, unlike kundalini, was scarcely referenced in Esalen's workshops, let alone the research institutes affiliated with his work. For these reasons, the relationship between the Esalen Institute and Krishna's KRF was mostly uneasy or never even gained traction.

In my interview with Michael Murphy, he expressed clear reasons behind Krishna's lack of significance at Esalen: "In the early years, I did the programming. And [Krishna's theories and work] were just not interesting enough. I didn't believe it" (M. Murphy 2023). Given Esalen's reputation and fame, then and now, a plethora of individuals showed and continue to show an interest in teaching at Esalen. Owing to this interest, Murphy and Price had to exclude many of them as part of a selection process: "Well, there were hundreds you could say. I mean, we couldn't have everybody here. We had a lot of stars here. But we couldn't have everybody" (*ibid*.). Krishna, then, fell victim to Esalen's stringent selection procedure. Although Murphy's assessment was that Krishna "was never […] a big star here. Either in person or by reputation" (*ibid*.), at the same time, he underscored the value of his book. Questioned as to whether *Kundalini. The Evolutionary Energy in Man* was read among staff and guests at Esalen, Murphy responded: "Oh god, yes. […] A lot of people knew about his book" (*ibid*.).

Dick Price shared a similar opinion of Krishna's *Kundalini*, appreciating its significance for the current (spiritual) crisis of humanity. In the booklet *The Importance of Kundalini Research* (c. 1975), a collection of various voices of support compiled by KRF, Price was featured with the following statement: "There is a very important book about the physical correlates of individual spiritual evolution, Gopi Krishna's Kundalini: The Evolutionary

Energy in Man" (KRF 1975, 15, original emphasis). His agreement to be featured in the small booklet indicates that his support extended beyond a mere appreciation of Krishna's views as presented in *Kundalini*.

In essence, Murphy and Price appreciated Krishna's book and were sympathetic to topics related to the subtle body and spiritual evolution, respectively. While Price, in addition to his respect for *Kundalini*, endorsed Krishna's research efforts, Murphy, on the contrary, considered Krishna an "outsider" (M. Murphy 2023) and considered his experience report implausible. Consequently, Murphy's decision not to invite Krishna kept the latter from gaining ground at Esalen and, perhaps, from reaching a broader audience in the United States (M. Murphy 2023; KRF 1975).

The Grofs shared Murphy's reservations about Krishna. Stan Grof discussed Krishna in his *Realms of the Human Unconscious* (1976) – just as he and Christina Grof did in many of their other works (e.g., 1995; 1989c). However, Stan Grof portrayed Krishna unfavourably, describing him as a "naïve individual" (S. Grof 1976, 202) and suggesting that Krishna's experience illustrated "the adverse side effects of naïve experimentation of this sort" (*ibid*.). Christina Grof, on the other hand, first encountered Krishna's book while staying at Esalen. Unlike Murphy, she did not question the authenticity of Krishna's experience but noted that it did not resonate with her own situation. Christina Grof's focus on Muktananda's significant role in her spiritual journey may have overshadowed Krishna's perspectives. Additionally, while downplaying Krishna's influence, she highlighted Sannella's role instead – as Kripal put it, "she needed 'to hear it from a Westerner'" (Kripal 2007, 264).

Nevertheless, Krishna and the Grofs shared many conceptual ties. This is particularly evident when comparing the category of spiritual emergency with Krishna's detailed description of his own crisis and his distinct perspective on kundalini as a potential cause of psychosomatic suffering. Moreover, the Grofs frequently refer to spiritual emergencies as "evolutionary crises" or mechanisms that trigger the "evolution of consciousness". Krishna, while not originating the idea, was a key proponent of associating kundalini with evolution (Krishna 1967). Moreover, as this study purports, Krishna's experience report and interpretative model had a significant impact on subsequent publications, including Sannella's *Kundalini: Psychosis or Transcendence?* (1976), thus potentially influencing the Grofs's concept of spiritual emergencies (C. Grof and Grof 1995).

In 1983, there was a notable shift in the attitude of the Grofs, who now actively expressed interest in Krishna. They not only invited him to the annual ITA conference in Davos,

Switzerland,[803] but also proclaimed a desire to interview him.[804] Lasting for three hours, their encounter was rather a discourse than an interview, as Krishna delivered an introductory talk before Grof and Grof asked their questions. The primary interviewer was Christina Grof. Krishna seemed content with the outcome, underlining the shared friendly atmosphere: "Dr. Stanislav Grof with his wife and two other psychologists met me the day before yesterday. […] Mrs. Grof put the largest number of questions and related her own experiences. A very friendly atmosphere was created between us. They have promised to meet me again" (Krishna to Koops, May 14, 1983, LGK, box 6.1.2.). Given Grof and Grof's initial reservations and, according to Kieffer, Grof's disregard for Krishna's work, a positive outcome of their meeting was not guaranteed (Kieffer to Krishna, October 29, 1972, LGK, box 6.3.2.).

The clinical psychiatrist Julian Silverman (1933–2001) assumed a different attitude from Murphy and the Grofs. Involved at Esalen from 1965 (or 1967), Silverman played various roles, such as workshop convener, programming manager, general manager, and president, shaping Esalen's activities, programming, and thematic foci throughout the 1970s and beyond (Kripal 2007, 169–170; M. Murphy 2001). Murphy considered Silverman "one of Esalen's brightest and most prolific spirits" (Murphy 2001), illustrating his significance and good reputation among his Esalen fellows. During the summer of 1968, Esalen hosted several seminars initiated by Silverman and supported by Price on the "value of psychotic experience" and related topics (Esalen 1968, 8; Kripal 2007, 170). Besides his involvement at Esalen, he continued working as a clinical psychologist – first at Bethesda University in Anaheim, California, and then at Agnews Hospital in San Jose (Kripal 2007, 170). Both Silverman and Price shaped Esalen in numerous ways, and were "like brothers" (M. Murphy 2001).

They both shared an interest in mental health – Silverman by profession, Price through personal experience. Consequently, in 1968, they initiated the Agnews Project on alternative schizophrenia treatments. As part of the project, psychotic clients were double-blindly treated with and without medication, with the aim of analysing distinct outcomes of these varied approaches to mental illness. The Agnews Project was based on anti-psychiatry

[803] The "Grof Legacy Project" lists Krishna as a special guest of the ITA Davos conference, emphasising the Grofs's shift in attitude (Grof Legacy Project, n.d.). A letter written by Stan Grof and a request from the SEN coordinator, both directed to Kieffer in 1986, testify to the enduring shift in the Grofs's attitude (St. Julian to Kieffer, November 11, 1986, LGK, box 6; Kieffer to Kobelt, November 16, 1986, box 6).

[804] Unfortunately, I was not able to secure a transcript of the interview, and to my knowledge, no publication by Grof and Grof addressed their encounter with Krishna.

perspectives and Esalen-inspired treatments of schizophrenia, emphasising the value of therapy without medication or institutionalisation. Accordingly, Silverman and Price unsurprisingly emphasised that the project's results suggest the benefits of medication-free treatments (Cornwall 2013; Kripal 2007, 170; Perry 1974, 152).[805]

In a way, Silverman and Price thus pioneered at Esalen what the Grofs would later elaborate and popularise as spiritual emergencies. However, unlike their successors, Silverman and Price actively expressed their interest in Krishna's work and research endeavours. Kieffer was introduced to Silverman through William Pennell Rock, a research fellow at "The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions" (Santa Barbara). Rock suggested Kieffer contact Silverman, who might be interested in Krishna's work:

> Personally, […] I feel that you should get in touch with Esalen Institute in San Francisco. Esalen is designed to help all prophets on the theory that the false ones soon make themselves obvious. The President [*sic*] is a personal friend of mine, but as he is in Europe for several months, I suggest that you send a letter to Julian Silverman who is director of research at Esalen. I think he may be very interested. (Rock to Kieffer, April 12, 1971, LGK, box 6.2.3.)

In his letter, Rock also mentions Krishna's book *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* (1971), which he received from some colleagues at the Center (*ibid*.). Considering the date of the letter, Rock must have referred to the N.C. Press version of Krishna's *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius*, which was published by Kieffer and still lacked Weizsäcker's introduction. Most likely, one of Rock's colleagues in question had received the book through Kieffer's promotional strategy (see Chapter 15.3.2.).[806]

Several months later, in May or June of 1971, Kieffer received a letter from Silverman (perhaps a response to an earlier letter by Kieffer). In this letter, Silverman conveyed his keen interest and extended an invitation to Krishna to visit Esalen.[807] Besides this initial invitation, no information is available regarding Krishna's reaction, whether he decided to

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[805] Ironically, it was during the early stages of the Agnews Project that Price underwent his second psychotic episode (Kripal 2007, 170).

[806] Nevertheless, it is striking that Weizsäcker – who was not well known beyond German-speaking scientific and philosophical circles – was listed as an affiliated scholar at the Center in Santa Barbara ("Guide to the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions Collection", n.d.).

[807] Kieffer highlights Silverman's invitation in two letters dated June 4, 1971 – one addressed to Carl Friedrich Basedow and the other to Gopi Krishna. In his letter to Basedow, Kieffer refers to the attached invitation from Silverman (Kieffer to Basedow, June 4, 1971, LGK, box 6.2.2.). Unfortunately, the archival material did not include the referenced invitation, leaving the exact wording and additional context uncertain. Furthermore, the archival material does not contain any follow-up communication.

reject the invitation or if Esalen withdrew it. The latter is rather unlikely, given that Silverman continued to show interest in Krishna's work and reiterated the invitation. This is documented in a statement by Silverman on Krishna's work, which was printed as an appendix in Krishna's *Higher Consciousness: The Evolutionary Thrust of Kundalini* (1974):

> I am most interested in Mr. Krishna's formulations. Recent biophysiological researches [*sic*] in altered states of consciousness being conducted in our laboratory [at Agnews State Hospital] and others fit very well with his views. I believe that his work contributes in a significant way to the eventual rapproachment between traditional science and the various mystical schools. I would like very much to invite him to Esalen Institute for discussions. (Silverman, in Krishna 1974, 202)[808]

This quote (along with the one by Price mentioned earlier) underscores the interest of Esalen-affiliated psychologists and psychotherapists in Krishna's theories. This observation is further affirmed by Krishna's invitation to Duke extended by the parapsychologist Edward F. Kelly (see Chapter 12.6.), who later collaborated with Esalen's CTR (Esalen 2023c).

George Leonard, another key player at Esalen, was equally interested in Krishna's theories and particularly intrigued by his ideas on evolution. John White – a loyal collaborator of Krishna – met George Leonard at the Council Grove Conference in May 1973.[809] During the conference, White distributed copies of Krishna's 1973 essay "The True Aim of Yoga" (published in White's co-edited journal *Psychic Magazine*) and Kieffer's 1973 interview with Krishna (printed in *Changes Magazine*). According to White, he provided Leonard, who demonstrated curiosity, with additional material on Krishna's work (White to Krishna, May 7, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5.; Kieffer and Krishna 1973). Michael Murphy, in contrast, who had received the *Changes Magazine* interview from Kieffer in April 1973, acknowledged its receipt but did not express any further interest in collaboration. This confirms Murphy's statements expressed during the interview (Murphy to Kieffer, March 1, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.6.).

Details about Krishna's views on Esalen are scarce. A notable exception was Krishna's interest in Murphy and Hickman's Transformation Project. In a letter to Kieffer, Krishna mentioned the project, emphasising the role he could potentially play in it. Despite his

[808] Silverman's evaluation of Krishna's perspectives was also included in the aforementioned KRF booklet *The Importance of Kundalini Research* (KRF 1975, 15).

[809] Chapters 16.1.1. and 21.3.2. already discussed certain elements of the 1973 Council Grove Conference and White's efforts during the event.

willingness, he did not contribute to the project in any way (Krishna to Kiffer, September 25, 1979, LGK, box 6.6.1.; M. Murphy 1982).

Kieffer, on the other hand, expressed his stance on several occasions. Silverman and Price's welcoming approach garnered Kieffer's appreciation for the two and, to some extent, for Esalen. Overall, however, Kieffer held a predominantly negative opinion of Esalen, viewing it as one of their primary adversaries: "There is definitely a conspiracy among a segment of the intellectual world to avoid any mention of Kundalini, […] I feel strongly (though I am uncertain about it) that the main opposition stems from Esalen Institute and those who were most actively behind it" (Kieffer to Krishna, December 30, 1977, LGK, box 6.6.1). In a previous letter, Kieffer even predicted the imminent demise of Esalen, seemingly attempting to diminish its impact (Kieffer to Krishna, November 14, 1976, LGK, box 6.5.4.).

Stan Grof and Michael Murphy emerged as Kieffer's least favoured figures associated with the Institute. He frequently voiced dissatisfaction with the two, particularly regarding what he perceived as their avoidance of kundalini and the omission of reference to Krishna in their works. As previously argued, Stan and Christina Grof did mention kundalini and Krishna in their writings; they even recommended his works as one of "the best modern sources" (C. Grof and Grof 2017, 41) in terms of kundalini-induced crises. Kieffer nonetheless sharply criticised them for crediting Sannella with introducing kundalini to the United States (Kieffer to Kobelt, July 14, 1986, LGK, box 6).[810]

Kieffer's criticism of Murphy likely stemmed from his *The Future of the Body* (1992). As previously mentioned, Murphy's explorations of the subtle body also translated into an interest in kundalini. Consequently, in his *The Future of the Body* (1992), he frequently refers to kundalini as an integral (and potentially dangerous) component of the subtle body. References to Krishna, in contrast, are relatively scarce (M. Murphy 1992). Murphy vaguely recalled that Kieffer reviewed one of his books, evaluating that "in writing this book [*The Future of the Body*], Murphy evidently blew out and destroyed his own kundalini" (M. Murphy 2023). While I was not able to find the review Murphy was referring to, Kieffer's antipathy towards Murphy can also be found in other publications, where Kieffer, e.g., argues that

> the publicity attending the publication of Michael Murphy's *The Evolution of the Body*[811] (1992) is only a murmur compared to the uproar that will deafen our ears once

[810] Kieffer also accused Lee Sannella of being involved in a "conspiracy" against Krishna and KRF, as outlined in Chapter 22.3.

[811] Kieffer evidently refers here to Murphy's *The Future of the Body*, which was published in 1992.

> kundalini is properly presented to the media; […] writers like Murphy who have ignored kundalini will be of no help whatsoever. (Kieffer 1994, 165–166, original emphasis)

In this article, Kieffer associated Murphy with what he termed the "New Aquarian Conspiracy" (*ibid*., 165), a label he used for those he identified as opponents of Krishna. What Kieffer perceived as a "conspiracy" appeared to have begun in 1973 following the Council Grove meeting, when doubts about the authenticity of Krishna started to emerge:

> We began in 1970 with a fair amount of interest. […] Then came 1973, and the bottom dropped out. California turned cold torwards [*sic*] us, and we were more or less boycotted or ostracized. […] I can see that Gay [Luce] was turned off because of your attitude toward the methods and techniques being advocated by all her close friends, such as Dr. Stanislaw [*sic*] Grof, who is the leading LSD authority. Stan is very powerful in the "new age" movement and is a key figure at Esalen Institute. His wife, Christina, is a strong disciple of Swami Muktananda. Together they engineered the Big [*sic*] Bombay Conference held last January. We were not invited. This group is still at the forefront. (Kieffer to Krishna, July 6, 1982, LGK, box 6.9.2.)

This quote reveals that not only did the "conspiracy", as Kieffer framed it, commence in 1973, but Kieffer's opposition to Esalen also started then, when individuals affiliated with Esalen began expressing suspicions about Krishna's views and authenticity. This is further supported by John White's exhaustive report from the Council Grove meeting. In his letter, White encourages Krishna to cooperate with scientists, essentially recommending that Krishna submit himself to scientific examinations to prove his transformation of consciousness. He warned that

> refusal to participate, can only raise suspicions in the minds of the scientific community – and such suspicions would be tantamount to damning you personally and to declaring you guilty of fraud. It would also, of course, place a very dark cloud over the kundalini concept and delay research for some time. (White to Krishna, May 7, 1973, LGK, box 6.3.5.)

Kieffer attributed Esalen's lack of interest from 1973 onwards to an elusive "conspiracy". However, a more plausible explanation, following White's argument, suggests that the absence of cooperation between Esalen and KRF stemmed from Krishna's refusal to participate as a test subject in scientific experiments. This resulted in a gradual loss of interest from scientists associated with Esalen and beyond.

In sum, despite sharing an interest in kundalini and open attempts to cooperate in kundalini research, no actual collaborations were ever realised between Esalen and KRF. Especially among Krishna's supporters, frustration and dissociation overshadowed the desire to pull on the same string. At Esalen, on the other hand, Krishna and his work were known and partially valued; however, they did not play a major role in seminars, conferences, and research projects. Having said that, Krishna's publications nonetheless influenced Esalen-affiliated protagonists. This study therefore posits that Krishna's emphasis on the importance of kundalini research stimulated a loose research network. The numerous strings of this network were mainly pulled by protagonists associated with Esalen. Despite Krishna's peripheral position at Esalen, his theories thus shaped Esalen's standpoint on kundalini.

23.5. Summary

As a central hub for consciousness culture, scientistic claims, and body practices, the Californian Esalen Institute has been instrumental in shaping the alternative religious and therapeutic landscape of the United States. This chapter analysed Esalen's exploration of kundalini, focusing particularly on Stan and Christina Grof, who directed Esalen's thematic agenda for nearly a decade and established with SEN a network to disseminate their interpretation of kundalini awakening as a spiritual emergency.

The integration of kundalini into Christina and Stan Grof's concept of spiritual emergency reflects the views of its potential for nourishment and healing, as well as the dangers associated with its release. The belief in kundalini's therapeutic capacities was also evident at the Kundalini Clinic, where Sannella promoted kundalini as a therapeutic source of well-being. SEN became a hub for those undergoing what they deemed a spiritual emergency. Within this supportive framework, the experience of kundalini was highlighted as a personal transformation.

This chapter also scrutinised the presence of kundalini in Esalen's extensive course materials. Kundalini emerged in seminars and workshops as early as 1965 and gained prominence in the late 1970s and early 1980s. At Esalen, kundalini was celebrated as a catalyst for altered states of consciousness and the unfolding of human potential, intertwining it with psychological and philosophical explorations of the mind. This association was notably pronounced at Esalen and was also carried forward by the Californian integral institutes. The similarities between Esalen's and the Californian integral

institutes' interpretative frameworks are rooted in Esalen's influence from Frederic Spiegelberg and Haridas Chaudhuri – key figures in the history of the Californian integral institutes – reflecting a broader trend towards the psychologisation of religion.

24. The Californian Integral Institutes

Since 1951, four interconnected Californian institutes have built on Aurobindo's vision of an integral educational approach that extends beyond mere intellectual merit, integrating religious and social dimensions. The institutes in question encompass the American Academy of Asian Studies (AAAS, founded in 1951), the Cultural Integration Fellowship (CIF, founded in 1951), and the California Institute of Asian Studies (CIAS, founded in 1968), which, in 1980, was renamed as the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS).[812] These four institutes will be discussed under the heading of Californian integral institutes.

The term "integral" has remained a central pillar at these institutes. Alongside its translation as "full", "complete", or "constituting a necessary part of a whole", Paul Herman, a key figure at CIAS, associated integral with Aurobindo's use of the Sanskrit term "*purna*". Herman asserted that Aurobindo's interpretation of *purna* is best translated as "holistic" (Herman 2018). This understanding of integral is reinforced and expanded upon in an entry in a CIIS course catalogue from 1986.[813] This entry offers an encyclopaedic-styled definition of the adjective "integral" while also providing an overview of thematic foci and principles at CIIS: "Whole; entire: complete; as in (1) multicultural and cross-disciplinary studies; (2) bridging Eastern and Western traditions of knowledge; (3) incorporating analytical, experiential and practical ways of knowing; (4) joining the transpersonal and spiritual dimensions of life with community service" (CIIS 1986, 3).

Looking back over a fifty-five-year history, the Californian integral institutes played a vital role in disseminating Asian philosophical and religious thoughts in the United States. Notable affiliates include Frederic Spiegelberg, Haridas Chaudhuri, Alan Watts, Michael Murphy, Dick Price, Ralph Metzner, Joseph Campbell, Stan Grof, and Huston Smith. These individuals influenced California's "integral environment" and advanced integral perspectives on Asian philosophy and psychology (McDermott 2017; Subbiondo 2011).

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[812] In this chapter, I will use both CIAS and CIIS to specifically distinguish between the Institute's initial phase (1968–1980), and its current form. Throughout the broader study, CIIS will serve as an umbrella term encompassing its institutional progenitor unless otherwise remarked.

[813] The Californian integral institutes published catalogues similar to those of Esalen. CIAS issued a comprehensive catalogue every or every other academic year, along with a detailed schedule of classes each term. The catalogues provided extensive information on CIAS's philosophy, faculty, admission requirements, courses, ongoing research, and events. In contrast, the class schedules were more concise, offering specific details about each course, including its date, title, instructor, credits, and location. This practice continued seamlessly with the transition from CIAS to CIIS.

However, alternative higher-education institutes, such as the Californian integral institutes, often faced difficulties obtaining WASC accreditation[814] due to their unconventional approaches, which frequently did not align with traditional accreditation standards (WASC 2024). These institutes operated on the fringes of mainstream education, integrating Asian philosophies, holistic practices, and interdisciplinary studies. Unlike traditional universities that emphasised empirical research and established disciplines, schools like the Californian integral institutes promoted alternative approaches to knowledge often dismissed or overlooked by mainstream academia.

After introducing the central protagonists and outlining the institutional histories of the Californian integral institutes, this chapter will explore the role of kundalini in their course material and discuss the relationship between Chaudhuri's CIA and Krishna's KRF.

24.1. The Lineage of the Californian Integral Institutes

When narrating the story of the Californian integral institutes, their history began in 1950.[815] Two men shared the vision of establishing an Academy to introduce Asian art, philosophy, and religion to an interested US-American audience. These two individuals were Louis P. Gainsborough (n.d.a.), a US-American businessman, and Frederic Spiegelberg, a German-born Stanford professor of comparative religion. They initiated what was to become "the first graduate school in the United States exclusively devoted to a study of Asia – the American Academy of Asian Studies" (Subbiondo 2011, 12). While Gainsborough had the initial idea and funds to establish the Academy, Spiegelberg brought along the expertise and the networks. Before discussing the Academy, it is imperative to briefly introduce Spiegelberg, mentioned several times throughout this study.

Frederic Spiegelberg (1897–1994) was born into a wealthy liberal German family, spending his youth in Hamburg. After receiving his theology doctorate from the University of Tubingen, Spiegelberg started teaching at the University of Dresden, where he met C. G.

[814] The Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) is a regional accrediting body responsible for evaluating and accrediting higher-education institutions in the Western United States (WASC 2024).

[815] Archival material from the early years of AAAS and CIF is limited. However, with the founding of CIAS, the availability of source material significantly increased. Due to the study's time frame, I scrutinised catalogues and programmes spanning from 1951 to 1990 at three Californian archives: Stanford, San Francisco, and Santa Barbara. This encompassed two programme announcements of AAAS (1951–1952 and 1957–1959), three programmes at CIF (1964 and 1973–1974), seven catalogues and eleven schedules of classes of CIAS (1968–1980), along with five catalogues and five schedules of classes of CIIS (1980–1990).

Jung. Other early influences for Spiegelberg include his teachers Martin Heidegger and Paul Tillich – with the latter playing a key role at Esalen. In 1937, in the wake of his termination from his post at Dresden and at the urging of his colleague Tillich, Spiegelberg fled Nazi Germany to London (Kabil 2012, 46–47; Kripal 2007, 48).

Spiegelberg delivered a lecture titled "Religion of No Religion" at the London Buddhist Lodge, where he also encountered the young Alan Watts.[816] This 1938 lecture (and its 1948 eponymous monograph) was fundamentally rooted in Heidegger's existentialism, Jungian psychology, and Spiegelberg's interpretations of Asian religions and subtle physiology.[817] Accordingly, for Spiegelberg, the "religion of no-religion" primarily found expression in Heidegger's ideas on *Dasein* (being), Zen Buddhism, and psychoanalysis.[818] This became the "theological foundation of Esalen" (Kripal 2007, 51) and laid the groundwork for Spiegelberg's pivotal role as a translator of Asian thought on US-American soil (Kabil 2012, 47–48; Spiegelberg 1953, 29).

After teaching at Columbia University and the Union Theological Seminary for some years, Spiegelberg's next notable step was his position at Stanford University, where he would remain employed for three decades. Tillich, who initially advised Spiegelberg to escape from Germany and had himself fled several years earlier, arranged Spiegelberg's prestigious position. In his role as professor of South Asian studies and comparative religion, Spiegelberg not only influenced a host of young college students – such as Michael Murphy and Dick Price – but also popularised the writings and views of Aurobindo.[819] His interest in Aurobindo traced back to a Rockefeller-funded research trip to South Asia in 1949. During his stay, Spiegelberg spent two weeks at Aurobindo's ashram and received initiation from Aurobindo (Kripal 2007, 48, 55; Watts 1972, 110). However, his experiences in South Asia not only ingrained his university courses with Aurobindian philosophy but also impacted his role at AAAS.

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[816] As discussed below, this first encounter between Spiegelberg and Watts would lead to their collaboration at AAAS.

[817] Alan Watts published Spiegelberg's lecture "Religion of No Religion" in the journal of the Buddhist Lodge and later helped with the publication of its expanded version (Watts 1972, 110).

[818] Kripal (2007, 8–11, 48–53) and Cox (2022, 193–199) thoroughly analyse Spiegelberg's "religion of no-religion."

[819] According to Kripal, Spiegelberg's popularity among his students matched the hostility of their parents, who accused Spiegelberg of tempting or even converting their children. Spiegelberg's colleagues shared these sentiments, underscoring that "parents want their children to learn about these things, not become excited about them" (Kripal 2007, 58).

24.1.1. The American Academy of Asian Studies

The American Academy of Asian Studies (AAAS) was initiated in 1951 with Gainsborough as its president and Spiegelberg as Director of Studies. Prior to its inception, Gainsborough "asked around who would be a good man [to direct the studies] […] and people said, 'Well, the best man would be Professor Spiegelberg'" (Gainsborough, in Ulansey 2001). By then, Spiegelberg had already earned a notable reputation as a prolific professor of South Asian and religious studies, making him a reasonable choice for Gainsborough's project.

Spiegelberg was charged with the selection of the Academy's faculty. According to its principles, the scholars' origins played as pivotal a role as did their scholarly proficiency: "The first principle of selection is that a major part of the Faculty be scholars of Asian origin, acting in the capacity of 'original sources' of knowledge. To these is added a smaller number of American scholars, acting in the capacity of interpreters" (AAAS 1951c).[820] Taking this first principle into consideration, Spiegelberg invited two "original sources", the South Asian professor of philosophy Haridas Chaudhuri and the Japanese expert on Tibet Lama Tokwan Tada, and two "interpreters", the Sanskritist Judith Tyberg and the writer on Asian philosophies Alan Watts.[821] Given Chaudhuri's seminal position at the Academy and further developments, he deserves a closer examination.

At the time of his appointment, Haridas Chaudhuri (1913–1975) was the head of the Philosophy Department at Krishnagar College (West Bengal, India). His PhD dissertation focused on Aurobindo's integral philosophy, establishing him as the leading authority on Aurobindo's writings and thought. This opinion was seemingly also shared at Aurobindo's ashram, as evidenced by their recommendation of Chaudhuri upon Spiegelberg's request:

[820] The categories "original sources" and "interpreters" exhibit a problematic leaning reminiscent of the orientalist dichotomy between a mysterious, intuitive "East" and a rational, active "West" (see Chapter 5.1.2.). Such attributions were not uncommon at the time, with Edward Said not having published his book *Orientalism* until 1978. However, AAAS had a specific aim: to overcome these stereotypes, considering "the peoples and cultures of Asia as equals, having as much to contribute to the West as the West to them" (AAAS 1957b, 3). Despite assuming and promoting an appreciative stance towards Asia, the Academy nonetheless did not fully escape the perpetuating of stereotypes. Watts' observation that the education of Chaudhuri had a distinct colonial colouring that dismissed Hindu tradition takes these categories ad absurdum. Accordingly, Watts assumed that "Chaudhuri […] seemed in some ways to have learned his Indian philosophy through a Western approach" (Watts 1972, 235; AAAS 1957b).

[821] Other notable members who joined the faculty in the Fall of 1951 included the South Asian artist Dilip Kumar Roy, the South Asian lawyer and author C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, and Princess Poon Pismai Diskul of Thailand, among others (AAAS 1951c).

> After quite a bit of correspondence with the Ashram, one suggested Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri […] to come to join me in this venture in the Academy of Asian Studies. The question was brought to Sri Aurobindo himself, who approved of Chaudhuri's coming to us with the word "Acha" (of course!). (Spiegelberg, in Ulansey 2001)

With Aurobindo passing two months after his approval, Spiegelberg considered Chaudhuri's participation at the Academy as carrying even greater weight, framing it as a "call of destiny" (McDermott 2017; Subbiondo 2011, 13).

Chaudhuri was not only an inspired scholar of Aurobindo's philosophy but also his devoted follower. Throughout his life, he authored numerous books, which were predominantly rooted in Aurobindo's integral philosophy. Moreover, Chaudhuri created his own synthesis, best reflected in his *Integral Yoga: The Concept of Harmonious and Creative Living* (1965), where he fuses yoga, integral philosophy, psychology, comparative religion, and spiritual evolutionism. According to Pitirim A. Sorokin, a professor of sociology who wrote a foreword to Chaudhuri's book, "Western psychologists, psychiatrists, educators and moral leaders" (Sorokin, in Chaudhuri 1965, n.p.a.) would benefit from reading *Integral Yoga*. He further assessed the "methods and techniques of the integral yoga" (*ibid*.) as useful "for the transformation of human personality". Sorokin's statements not only indicate Chaudhuri's own conviction that "spirituality would return to the West not through philosophy or religion, but through psychology" (Subbiondo 2011, 14) but also suggest the overall interest of US-American psychologists in integral philosophy as outlined by Chaudhuri. This, of course, is particularly accurate for proponents of transpersonal psychology and the Human Potential movement (Chaudhuri 1965; Kripal 2007, 480).

Initially invited as a faculty member and consultant to the project, Chaudhuri achieved much more during his time in the United States. Convinced of the urgency to connect "the cultural traditions of the East and the West" (Subbiondo 2011, 14), Chaudhuri dedicated the rest of his life to promoting integral education. Even after the initial project of AAAS collapsed, he, along with his wife, Bina Chaudhuri, remained in the United States and established CIF and CIAS – both of which will be discussed below.

Corresponding to the specialities of its faculty, the foundational pillars of AAAS included comparative religion, psychology, Hindu religions and language, and Aurobindo's integral philosophy.[822] The course catalogue of AAAS's pilot semester in Spring 1951 offered

[822] As Spiegelberg assumed the role of Director of Studies, he likely played a significant part in deciding on AAAS's thematic foci. This observation corresponds to Watts' statement that "Frederic Spiegelberg, as Director of Studies, was the *de facto* mastermind of the project" (Watts 1972, 233, original emphasis).

general courses, e.g., "Comparative Religion" (Spiegelberg), "Psychology of Religion" (Watts), "Comparative Psychology, and East and West" (Watts); courses on South Asia, e.g., "Indian Literature" (Spiegelberg), "Modern Revival of Ancient Hinduism" (Tyberg), "Contemporary Indian Philosophy" (Chaudhuri), and "The Application of Asian Psychology to Modern Psychiatry" (Watts and Chaudhuri); courses on South Asian languages (Sanskrit, Hindustani, and Bengali); and courses on Tibet (AAAS 1951b).[823]

Additionally, the Academy offered a "Colloquium on Life-problems", conducted by Chaudhuri, Watts, and Spiegelberg.[824] These "Friday Night Colloquia" gained widespread popularity – particularly among San Francisco-based artists, writers, psychotherapists, and intellectuals. Spiegelberg even called them "a society event in San Francisco" (Spiegelberg, in Ulansey 2001; AAAS 1951b; Subbiondo 2011, 12). Michael Murphy, a regular attendee of these weekly colloquia, describes their atmosphere and cultural impact with the following words:

> One of the great events of those early days was a colloquium held every Friday Night that was chaired by Frederick Spiegelberg, Alan Watts, and Haridas Chaudhuri. You had to get there about an hour early […] to sit in on those first meetings. And the electricity then was really enormous. […] Gary Snyder used to come to those colloquia, and occasionally Allen Ginsberg. Most people forget this, but a considerable amount of the inspiration for the poetry of the Beat Generation came right through that Academy of Asian Studies. (Murphy, in Ulansey 2001)

While neither the archival material nor other primary sources on the topic provide additional details, it is discernible from Murphy's report that the reputation of the colloquia surpassed that of AAAS. Owing to their popularity, the colloquia were perhaps open to the public, attracting more interested parties.

Information on the content of these meetings is equally scarce. According to Watts, recurring topics revolved around the "practical transformation of consciousness, […] Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist ways of life at the level of high mysticism […] [and] the problem of self" (Watts

[823] The Fall 1951 semester witnessed a significant expansion of the faculty and the course catalogue. In addition to South Asia and Tibet, courses covered Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Malaya, Philippines, Indonesia, and several Islamic countries. However, due to AAAS's financial difficulties, this extended schedule endured only until the Spring or Summer term of 1952 (AAAS 1951a).

[824] In the Fall 1951 semester, AAAS renamed the colloquium as the "Colloquium on Interconnections of Asian Cultures". Corresponding to the extension of its faculty, the conveners of the colloquium seemed to grow in number, now including Aiyar and guest speakers like the Japanese writer D.T. Suzuki (AAAS 1951a; Subbiondo 2011, 12; Watts 1972, 234).

1972, 234–235). These issues were addressed through vivid discussions among the panellists in interaction with the audience and through practices such as meditation. Chaudhuri, in particular, would "recommend methods of yoga-meditation involving intense concentration and effort" (*ibid*., 235).

Discussing these topics not only influenced those in the audience, some of whom would play vital roles in the Californian counterculture, but also contributed to the development of humanistic and transpersonal psychology. Watts' seminal book *Psychotherapy East and West* (1961) synthesised many of the emerging themes of AAAS and its colloquia (Subbiondo 2011, 13).

Despite its historical value as the first US-American graduate school addressing Asian studies, Gainsborough's "unprecedented experiment" (Ulansey 2001) would last only about a year. By 1952, Gainsborough was unable to finance the project any longer and faced difficulties in securing additional funding. These challenges were rooted in the prevalent anti-Asian sentiments and stereotypes in the United States at that time (see Chapter 6). Watts administered AAAS for an additional four years until 1956. After his departure, AAAS continued offering classes from 1957 through 1968 as an off-campus graduate school of the College of the Pacific (Stockton, California) (Subbiondo 2011, 12; Watts 1972, 252).

After the closure of AAAS, numerous students chose to follow Chaudhuri and continue their studies at the educational wing of CIF, then known as the California Institute of Asian Studies (CIAS), which was ultimately renamed the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS).

24.1.2. The Cultural Integration Fellowship

Shortly after arriving in the United States in 1951, Haridas Chaudhuri expanded his activities beyond lecturing at AAAS and established, together with his wife, Bina Chaudhuri, the Cultural Integration Fellowship (CIF). Situated on Fulton Street, San Francisco, CIF offered Sunday lectures and regular meditation classes and hosted a guest lecture every Thursday.[825] The lectures at CIF revolved around integral and comparative philosophy, yoga, and spiritual counselling (McDermott 2017).

[825] Other activities included Sunday services, art events, tai chi and yoga classes, and weekly bazaars, selling food, spiritual goods, and Asian artefacts. Moreover, CIF offered a Children's Sunday School teaching "the basic ethico-religious principles of all world religions" (CIF 1974; 1973).

Moreover, CIF implemented a residential programme "for those [members and friends] who are interested in living in a spiritual atmosphere such as is conducive to self-development" (CIF 1964).[826] Consequently, the Fellowship adopted a suitable second name: "The San Francisco Ashram. The Center of Universal Religion" (*ibid.*). In addition to its worship and lecture space, CIF owned a research centre at a different location, which housed an office and a library (CIF 1964; Peruman 1989, 18).[827]

Aligned with the aims of AAAS, at CIF, Chaudhuri promoted intercultural understanding between the United States and Asia, universal religion, and self-development. A folder distributed by CIF in 1964 describes Chaudhuris' organisation with the following words: "A non-profit and non-sectarian religious and educational corporation devoted to the concepts of universal religion, cultural harmony and creative self-unfoldment" (CIF 1964).[828] This description not only aptly characterises CIF and other Californian integral institutes but also extends to alternative religious institutes in the context of Californian counterculture at large.

24.1.3. The California Institute of Asian Studies

In April 1968, following the closure of AAAS, Chaudhuri established the California Institute of Asian Studies (CIAS), succeeding CIF's research centre.[829] In Watts' words: "And then Haridas Chaudhuri went off on his own and replaced it [AAAS] with the California Academy [*sic*] of Asian Studies, which is where something of the original tradition of the work is now alive and kicking quite interestingly" (Watts 1972, 262). Accordingly, Asian philosophies and religions, psychology, and comparative studies remained key thematic pillars at CIAS.

In its initial years, a typical curriculum covered four primary fields: three area studies – Far and Middle East and South Asian approaches to religion, philosophy, language, and

[826] Notable residents include Michael Murphy and Dick Price. According to Anderson, Murphy and Price's friendship and the idea of co-founding Esalen were rooted in the time they spent together at Chaudhuri's San Francisco Ashram in 1960 (Anderson 1983, 33–34).

[827] The library was intended to facilitate research in comparative philosophy. While there are no catalogues available, its selection potentially offered books by Aurobindo, Chaudhuri, Watts, and Spiegelberg. Additionally, Chaudhuri's recommended reading lists suggest that the library also featured a series of three volumes dealing with the philosophy of South Asia, Japan, and China, all published by the CIF's research centre: Charles A. Moore's edited volumes *The Japanese Mind* (1967) and *The Chinese Mind* (1978), along with his and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's co-edited volume *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* (1957) (CIAS 1973a).

[828] In a 1973 folder, the term "cultural harmony" was replaced by "cultural understanding", perhaps indicating an effort to appeal to a broader audience of interested individuals (CIF 1973).

[829] CIAS was not incorporated separately from CIF until 1974 (CIIS 1981a, 9).

psychology – and comparative studies, including comparative psychology, philosophy, religion, and psychotherapy (CIAS 1968).[830] While the course offers had significantly expanded, the fundamental topics corresponded to those at AAAS.

In addition to the thematic parallels, many of AAAR's former teachers, students, and steadfast supporters remained dedicated to Chaudhuri's new venture. Those maintaining their allegiance included Murphy, Spiegelberg, and Watts, all contributing as advisory board members.[831] In terms of faculty, alongside core members such as Chaudhuri, Paul E. Herman (from 1970), Richard P. Marsh (from 1968), and Kim McKell (from 1968), each semester featured visiting professors and lecturers, some from Asian universities and others from US-American institutions. Chaudhuri thus adhered to AAAS's principle of employing Asian professors to teach Asian subjects, complemented by US-American professors who interpreted and culturally translated these subjects (CIAS 1968; 1970).

In its 1968 mission statement, CIAS underscored the importance of mutual cultural understanding between Asia and the United States.[832] While AAAS's primary intention for such increased dialogue had been the hope of overcoming the imminent threat of another world war, CIAS intended to contribute to a spiritually and morally superior humankind:

> It is being increasingly realized that a serious and fruitful dialogue between America and Asia is essential for the emergence of a new human race, the race of world citizens whose loyalty to the total human welfare would transcend all geographical, national and narrow ethnic boundaries. […] The Institute aims to explore deeper avenues to this inter-cultural [*sic*] understanding. (CIAS 1968)

This objective resonated with Chaudhuri's interest in "self-development" and spiritual evolutionism. In his Founding Message, Chaudhuri portrayed intercultural perspectives as "essential for the fulfillment of man's destiny as the vanguard of evolution" (Chaudhuri, in CIAS 1968, 17).[833] Grounded in Aurobindo's theory of evolution, Chaudhuri's emphasis on

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[830] The fourfold division of the curriculum was significantly expanded by 1975. A total of nine Departments offered additional courses in areas such as "Arts and Literature", "Psychology East and West", and "Integral Counseling and Psychotherapy" (CIAS 1975, 25–26).

[831] Watts continued until he died in 1973. Murphy and Spiegelberg served until 1976 when they became members of the board of governors (CIAS 1968; 1977).

[832] Representatives from the United States and Asia praised CIAS's efforts to increase cultural understanding. The Indian Ambassador to the United States in 1972, Laksmi K. Jha, acclaimed that CIAS "is performing a significant role in spreading a new light from Asia in its universal significance" (Jha, in CIAS 1972a, 2). San Francisco's Mayor of 1977, Hon. Joseph L. Alioto, lauded CIAS as "an outstanding addition to the intellectual world in San Francisco" (Alioto, in CIAS 1977, 21).

[833] Intriguingly, in 1970, Chaudhuri revised his Founding Message, re-emphasising that a shared "peace, freedom, and justice can emerge only from the cooperation of East and West on the basis of a new global

humanity's potential shaped the thematic direction of his newly established Institute and laid the foundation for key areas of transpersonal psychology and the Human Potential Movement. This study argues that spiritual evolutionism has served as the underlying and unifying concept across Chaudhuri's organisations, including CIIS.

After several years of steady growth and success, CIAS experienced notable educational advancements. In 1972, alongside its four existing departments – South Asian, Far Eastern, Middle Eastern, and Comparative Studies – CIAS introduced special research programmes. These programmes were designed as CIAS's response to contemporary crises and to address perceived "fundamental needs" (CIAS 1972a, 7) of society. They aimed to "build new bridges of understanding, to open new perspectives in world thought, and to devise new techniques for full actualisation of the human potential" (*ibid.*). Programmes such as "Integral Psychology", "Mind-Uplifting Alternatives to Mind-Changing Drugs", "Psychophysiology and Eastern Self-Disciplines", "International Relations and World Peace", "Psychosomatology and the Human Potential", and "Humanistic Psychology and the Superconscious" exemplify this initiative (*ibid.*, 9).[834] Additionally, in 1973, CIAS established a new degree programme in "Integral Counseling Psychology", a development that warrants further examination due to its ongoing relevance.

For several years, Chaudhuri had a particular interest in spiritual counselling and its integration with the evolving field of counselling psychology. In the early years at CIF, he incorporated spiritual counselling into the curriculum and continued to lecture on related topics, such as in his presentation on "Spiritual Cure for Drug Abuse" (1974) (CIF 1974; McDermott 2017). This emphasis on spiritual counselling persisted at CIAS, where Chaudhuri, in collaboration with Paul Herman, sought to merge counselling psychology with Aurobindo's integral theory.[835] The outcome of this synthesis was integral counselling psychology, which has remained "central to the educational mission of CIIS because it blends what Chaudhuri considered the best in the East with the best in the West" (Subbiondo 2011).[836]

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vision of humankind's common destiny" (Chaudhuri, in CIAS 1970, 1). As argued below, Chaudhuri's distinct fusion of spiritual evolutionism and futurology corresponded with Krishna's perspectives.

[834] An adapted and extended list of 1975 further introduced the research programme "Parapsychology and Kundalini Research" (CIAS 1975, 15).

[835] CIAS's emphasis on spiritual counselling may have influenced the Kundalini Clinic under the leadership of Sovatsky, who was educated at CIAS (Sovatsky 2023).

[836] CIAS and CIIS have offered a programme in counselling psychology with a holistic and integral approach since the programme's inception in 1973, and CIIS continues to do so today (CIIS 2024a).

With Chaudhuri's explicit support, Paul Herman developed an independent degree in "Integral Counseling Psychology" in 1973. Hermann, a Professor of psychology and President of the "Bay Area Counselors Association", began teaching at CIAS in 1970. In his initial course, titled "Integral Psychology", he framed the subject matter according to his later articulated definition of integral psychology:

> Integral Psychology is an emergent East-West study of the human psyche. It draws upon the findings of both Western depth psychology, and ancient Eastern teachings and yogas, to express a whole, unfragmented view of human nature which does not remain merely theoretical, but also functions to resolve human conflicts and open the way toward activating high levels of potential. (Herman 2018, 245)

The term "integral psychology" was initially coined by psychologist Indra Sen (1903–1994) during one of his seminar papers delivered at Aurobindo's ashram in the first half of the twentieth century. Sen later gathered the views expressed in these seminar papers in the book *Integral Psychology. The Psychological System of Sri Aurobindo* (1986). An earlier publication addressing integral psychology was Sen's contribution to Chaudhuri and Spiegelberg's edited volume *The Integral Philosophy Of Sri Aurobindo. A Commemorative Symposium* (1960). In his article "The Indian Approach to Psychology", Sen defines and juxtaposes "Indian psychology" with "Western psychology", underscoring the superiority of the former over the latter. Moreover, he associates "Indian psychology" with "Yogic psychology", yet another concept that was to become increasingly common at CIAS (I. Sen 1960, 187–191; 1986).

Considering Sen's contribution to Chaudhuri's co-edited volume and his role as an eminent scholar of Aurobindo's integral philosophy, Sen likely influenced Chaudhuri's perspective of integral psychology (Chaudhuri 1965).[837] Along these lines, Sen's psychological reading of Aurobindo's integral theory contributed to the development of integral counselling psychology. In addition, integral counselling psychology was anticipated by two courses that happened in 1951 and 1952 at AAAS: Watts' "Comparative Psychology, East and West", as well as Watts and Chaudhuri's "The Application of Asian Psychology to Modern Psychiatry" (AAAS 1951b; 1951a).[838]

[837] Another proponent of integral psychology is Ken Wilber, who reframed it under the designation integral theory (Wilber 2000). See Chapter 20.4.2.2. for an introduction to Wilber.

[838] Watts' subsequent publication, *Psychotherapy East and West* (1961), represents another influential example. While Watts did not primarily focus on Aurobindo's integral theory, his book summarises his thoughts on

Despite Sen's, Chaudhuri's, and Watts' contributions to the development and dissemination of integral psychology, Herman emphasised his role in introducing this subject matter to the United States. According to Herman, when he used the term "integral psychology" in his 1970 class at CIAS, he was unaware of Sen's examination of the topic several decades previously. Moreover, he claimed that "following my introduction of the term in my class, Haridas Chaudhuri […] adopted it and wrote a preliminary paper on the subject" (Herman 2018, 245). However, as demonstrated, Chaudhuri had already engaged with the topic before Herman's class (Herman 2018, 245; Chaudhuri 1965). Integral counselling psychology evolved into one of CIAS's central tenets, representing a core example of CIAS's mission to bridge Asian and Euro-American theories.

In 1975, Chaudhuri passed away. In a letter to Spiegelberg, Bina Chaudhuri asked if he would consider taking on the role of head of CIAS (B. Chaudhuri to Spiegelberg, August 5, 1975, "Frederic Spiegelberg Papers (FSP)," n.d. box 2, folder 2). Spiegelberg agreed and held the position until 1978. Bina Chaudhuri, supported by the committed boards and faculty, continued to advance her husband's vision of integral education.

By the end of the 1970s, integrative education was not limited to CIAS any longer. An article in CIAS's newly established journal, *An Integral View: Emerging Currents in Modern Times*, emphasises that "education within the United States is undergoing profound shifts" (CIAS 1979c, 44). The article then provides a list of six Californian institutions offering graduate programmes "in the study of human consciousness from historic, futuristic, philosophical, psychological, and socio-cultural perspectives" (*ibid*.). Besides CIAS, this list includes the California Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (Menlo Park, California), the Graduate Theological Union (Berkley), the Humanistic Psychology Institute (San Francisco), John F. Kennedy University (Orinda), and Sonoma State University (Rohnert Park). While some of these institutions incorporated integral approaches within specific departments or research groups, others were entirely dedicated to integral education. Notably, the California Institute of Transpersonal Psychology and the Humanistic Psychology Institute fall into the latter category. CIAS kept pace with these developments and responded with significant changes of its own.

"Eastern" and "Western" contributions to the concept of psychotherapy. Therefore, it paved the way for integral psychology and, consequently, CIAS's degree in "Integral Counseling Psychology" (Watts 1961).

24.1.4. The California Institute of Integral Studies

In 1980, the board of governors of CIAS decided to rename the Institute to the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) to better reflect its "commitment to research and teaching which integrate the Eastern and Western traditions for personal, interpersonal, social, and global applications" (CIIS 1981a, 9). Despite officially incorporating "integral" into its name, Aurobindo's integral philosophy – originally a central foundation for CIIS's progenitors – seemed to have become somewhat peripheral. Although cross-cultural and comparative courses, as well as Chaudhuri's vision of integrated knowledge, continued to influence the curriculum, the initial emphasis on Aurobindo had diminished (*ibid*., 39).
This impression is reinforced by Theodore M. Vestal's inaugural message as president. In the President's Message, he drew upon Ralph Waldo Emerson's speech, "The American Scholar" (1837), linking Emerson's concept of ideal education with the Institute's integral approach. In Emmerson's celebrated address to the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard College, he examined how nature, books, and action contribute to the education of scholars (Emerson 1837). Vestal extends Emerson's framework by adding "knowledge of the self" to characterise the "integral education of mind, body, and spirit" (Vestal, in CIIS 1981a, 8) embraced at CIIS.[839] In other words, the underlying meaning of integral education at CIIS was no longer confined solely to the philosophical teachings of Aurobindo and Chaudhuri. Instead, it additionally aimed to be reflected in the context of a distinct US-American culture.
With the name change, various other transitions came along. In 1981, the Institute attained full accreditation from the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. This accomplishment marked a significant turning point that the Institute had been working towards since the formation of CIAS in 1968 (CIIS 1981a, 9). Another notable modification was the introduction of a requirement for CIIS students to undertake internships, possibly but not necessarily at the CIIS's own counselling centre. The "Integral Counseling Center" served as a community mental health facility, primarily designed for interns to hone their acquired skills, benefitting both the interns and the local community. The newly established internship system played a crucial role in disseminating integral perspectives and values to other institutes in the Bay Area. Stuart Sovatsky's internship at the Kundalini Clinic poses a pivotal example (*ibid*., 34).

[839] The association of integral education with a US-American philosopher did not endure long. Following Vestal's presidency, Aurobindo's central role was reinstated, and Chaudhuri, the Institute's founder, was honoured as having offered a paradigmatic example of an integral approach to education and life.

Educated at CIAS, Sovatsky became the director of the Kundalini Clinic and later returned as part of CIIS's teaching faculty. His experiences at the Clinic served as the foundation for his teachings at CIIS, linking the Clinic's orientation and CIIS's curriculum (Sovatsky 2023). By the end of the 1990s, CIIS had experienced significant expansion. A newspaper article in *Hinduism Today* reported over three hundred cross-cultural courses, five hundred students, and a well-educated administrative and faculty team of about one hundred and sixty, including visiting scholars. The article depicted CIIS as an "elite, Asia-biased mind bank […] [that] really does have East and West meeting under one roof" (Peruman 1989, 18). Despite these observations, orientalist stereotypes persisted even after nearly four decades, as indicated by an interview with Bina Chaudhuri, then vice-president, in *Hinduism Today*: "That was Dr. Chaudhuri's vision […] that thoroughly integrated value systems could be established, a program synthesizing Western technology and scientific methodology with Eastern intuition and spiritual traditions" (B. Chaudhuri, in Peruman 1989, 18).

CIIS has remained an active graduate institution to date, with an ongoing aim to "set students, scholars, and other knowledge seekers on the path to transformation of themselves, others, and the world" (CIIS 2024b). The next chapter will detail the role of kundalini in the Californian integral institutes since AAAS's inception in 1951.

24.2. Kundalini at the Californian Integral Institutes

Aurobindo's integral yoga and Chaudhuri's yoga psychology constitute the theoretical bedrock for the Californian integral institutes.[840] Consequently, these systems likely shaped the approach to kundalini at the Californian integral institutes. While Aurobindo's views on kundalini were introduced in Chapter 5.3.2., it is pertinent to explore Chaudhuri's perspectives on kundalini.

Chaudhuri's concept of yoga psychology – which he also called the psychology of integral yoga – is rooted in Aurobindo's integral approach. From 1968 onwards, Chaudhuri increasingly emphasised psychology's primacy over philosophy, which dictated CIAS's psychological orientation. He believed that philosophical insights could only be fully

[840] Refer to Chaudhuri and Spiegelberg's edited volume *The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo* (1960) for an introduction to Aurobindo's Integral Yoga. In addition, Chapter 5.3.2. explores Aurobindo and certain aspects of his extensive body of work. Chaudhuri comprehensively introduces his understanding of Yoga Psychology in his eponymous contribution to Charles Tart's edited volume *Transpersonal Psychologies* (1975).

understood through a psychological framework. According to Chaudhuri, true comprehension of the cosmos requires a deep knowledge of one's psyche, which encompasses various forms of consciousness. He posited that this understanding could be achieved through the "psychophysical disciplines" (Chaudhuri 1975, 236) of South Asia, specifically its diverse yoga systems. Chaudhuri argued that yoga offers a means to uncover the mysteries of the psyche and, by extension, the cosmos (*ibid*., 234–239).[841]

Emphasising the evolving nature of the psyche, Chaudhuri defines yoga psychology as "the science of the human psyche as a growth process" (*ibid*., 236). Within this framework, he conceptualises kundalini as an evolutionary and psychological energy instrumental in self-realisation. To elucidate his understanding of kundalini, Chaudhuri employs various metaphors for it, which underscore its nature as energy, its link with the psyche and consciousness, and its relation to ultimate reality. These include terms such as "psychonuclear energy" (*ibid*., 237), "superconscious energy" (*ibid*., 241), "creative energy of Being"[842] (*ibid*., 263), "transpersonal Being-energy" (*ibid*., 279), and the "yoga of being-energy" (*ibid*., 236).

Chaudhuri's conceptualisation of kundalini can be categorised into two interrelated perspectives. The first perspective aligns with South Asian subtle-body models, suggesting that kundalini is a subtle component and faciliates liberation: "When it [kundalini] reaches the highest brain center (known as *sahasrara*) the yogi is fully liberated, and he experiences immortality and supreme bliss; he is totally united with the timeless Being" (*ibid*., 242, original emphasis). The terms "creative energy of Being", "transpersonal Being-energy", and the "yoga of being-energy" (*ibid*., 236) reflect this view.

The second perspective, which resonates with Chaudhuri's yoga psychology, depicts kundalini as a psychological force, catalysing the evolution of consciousness. Here, metaphors such as "superconscious energy" and "psychonuclear energy" illustrate kundalini's role in psychological evolution.

Chaudhuri defined kundalini as a "superconscious energy", associating it with "cosmic consciousness" (*ibid*., 247)[843] and the transcendence of the object-subject dichotomy. This

[841] Blavatsky, Vivekananda, and other interpreters already advocated the idea of yoga as superior psychology before Chaudhuri (Baier 2009a, 1:299; 2009b, 2:467).

[842] Chaudhuri uses "Being" as a synonym for *Brahman*, which some Hindu schools depict as ultimate reality (Chaudhuri 1975, 233).

[843] Chaudhuri's contribution "Yoga Psychology" was published in Charles Tart's edited volume *Transpersonal Psychologies* (1975). While in the volume's "References and Bibliography" section Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901) is mentioned (Tart 1975, 476), Chaudhuri did not refer to Bucke when employing the notion of "cosmic consciousness" (Chaudhuri 1975, 247, 268, 276, 278).

emphasis on kundalini's capacity to realise non-duality as "superconscious energy" illustrates the interplay between the first and second perspectives. within Chaudhuri's framework, where psychology is viewed as foundational to philosophical and religious understanding, the second perspective holds greater significance (*ibid*., 237–247).

Chaudhuri's notion of kundalini as "psychonuclear energy" aims to illuminate its evolutionary and creative potential within a psychological context.[844] He describes this psychologised kundalini as a force that fosters "growth processes" such as "self-realization" (*ibid*., 236) and "psychosomatic self-energising" (*ibid*., 237).

Chaudhuri's use of language reflects a broader trend within California's alternative religious and psychological milieus during the long Sixties, where "metaphysical language", meaning "religious discourse", was reinterpreted through psychological terminology. He stressed the need for scholars at CIAS to reformulate "the basic yoga insights in nonmetaphysical language" (*ibid*., 239), employing terms like "growth process" or "psychonuclear energy" to meet this need (*ibid*., 238–239).[845] The psychologisation of kundalini in Chaudhuri's yoga psychology underscores broader developments of the psychologisation of religion, a theme explored in greater depth in Chapter 26.1.

Aurobindo and Chaudhuri's psychological and evolutionary interpretations of kundalini were integral to the lectures, seminars, and research initiatives at the Californian integral institutes. Between 1970 and 1977, eight distinct courses and research programmes at CIAS featured the term "kundalini" in their titles or descriptions, with most displaying a psychological orientation.[846] Although AAAS did not address kundalini, it expressed a

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[844] Chaudhuri's term "psychonuclear energy" inspired similar expressions in other works. For example, Ajit Mookerjee adopted the term "physio-nuclear energy" in his book *Kundalini. The Arousal of the Inner Energy* (1982), paralleling Chaudhuri's concept: "The arousal of Kundalini is not unique to tantric practice, but forms the basis of all yogic disciplines, and every genuine spiritual experience may be considered a flowering of this physio-nuclear energy" (Mookerjee 1982, 10). In 1979, Mookerjee delivered a guest lecture at CIAS on "Tantra Art and Ritual" (CIAS 1979b).

[845] "Nonmetaphysical" terms such as "growth process" or "psychonuclear energy" found expression in CIAS's catalogues and course descriptions. In 1979, for instance, yoga, tai chi, zen, and vipassana were presented as "Eastern growth processes" (CIAS 1979a, 32).

[846] "Traditional Yoga Systems of India" (1970, recurring), "Psychophysiology of the Kundalini" (1972), "Science of Vibration and Kundalini Yoga" (1972), "Techniques of Meditation" (1974), "Psychonuclear Dynamics" (postdoctoral research programme, 1975, recurring), "Parapsychology and Kundalini Research" (1975, recurring), "Freud, Reich and the First Chakra in Tantric Yoga" (1976), and "Dimensions of Healing: Kundalini Yoga and Philosophy of Acupuncture" (1977) (CIAS, n.d.-b). Numerous other courses referred to kundalini without explicit reference. A notable example includes the 1972 course "The Psychophysiology of Mysticism and Peak Experiences", which addressed the "transformation of libido into brain energy [and] physio-nuclear energy generation" (CIAS 1970, 23). The first phrase presumably describes kundalini's ascent in the body, indicating the accompanying transformation of energy. The second phrase is reminiscent of Chaudhuri's definition of kundalini as "psycho-nuclear" energy.

distinct interest in tantra and its presumed link to psychology.[847] This focus on psychology continued at CIAS and CIIS. For instance, the first course to reference kundalini, "Traditional Yoga Systems of India" (1970), described its content with the following words: "A survey of such ancient systems of psycho-physical training and spiritual discipline as Hatha, Raja, Tantric or Kundalina [*sic*], Karma, Bhakti and Jnana" (CIAS 1970, 17).

Aside from Chaudhuri, the individual most closely associated with kundalini at CIAS was Rammurti S. Mishra (1923–1993), who led a multifaceted career. Originally from South Asia, Mishra pursued medical studies in the United States, founded the renowned Ananda Ashram in Monroe, New York, and established the Yoga Society of New York and San Francisco (Ananda Ashram 2022). He authored several books and served as a faculty member at CIAS from 1971 to 1979. CIAS catalogues list him as a Professor of Psychophysiology and Eastern Self-Disciplines, a title later revised to Psychophysiology and Yoga Disciplines. Notably, as a trained physicist, these designations seem to be self-assigned (CIAS 1972a, 26; 1975, 49).

Mishra introduced CIAS's inaugural course exclusively focused on kundalini, titled "Psychophysiology of the Kundalini" (Fall 1972). This course offered "a scientific approach to the secrets of kundalini and an advanced meditation workshop" (CIAS 1972b), placing kundalini at the intersection between science and religion.[848] In essence, Mishra's exploration centred on kundalini's role in the interplay between body and mind, approached through the lenses of yoga psychology and psychophysiology.[849] Unlike Chaudhuri, who emphasised kundalini's psychologisation, Mishra viewed it as both a psychological and physical force.

Mishra's perspective on kundalini as a psycho-physiological force is further elucidated in his book *The Textbook of Yoga Psychology* (1963):

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[847] In 1957, an AAAS programme announcement described a course on tantra with the following words: "An introduction to the literature and doctrines of the Tantric movement in India with special reference to its contributions in Psychology" (AAAS 1957a, 9). At CIAS, it became commonplace to identify tantra with the "main psychological schools in Asia" (CIAS 1970, 20).

[848] Mishra offered the same course under a different title in 1973: "Science of Vibration and Kundalini Yoga" (CIAS 1972c). By "Science of Vibration", he refers to the concept of *nādam*, which he understands as supreme music. According to Mishra, at the *nāda bandha*, located behind the eyes, "physiological and psychological forces [kundalini] are united with the all-vibrating *nādam*" (Mishra 1963, 386, original emphasis).

[849] Elmer and Alyce Green also employed the designation psychophysiology to describe their biofeedback-aided investigations into the link between consciousness and self-regulation of body functions. One of their research institutes at the Menninger Foundation was the "Menninger Biofeedback and Psychophysiology Center" (A. M. Green 1984, 227). Chapter 21.2. discusses this matter in detail.

> Psychological exercises begin with physical and physiological exercises […]. He who practices regularly, faithfully […] experiences cosmic expansion of the mind. All of this will surely take place when and only when the coiled power of kundalini is unfolded through wise and prudent development of body powers and of the energies of mind. (Mishra 1963, 98)

Mishra argued that the "cosmic expansion of the mind" is facilitated by kundalini, which manifests through both physical ("body powers") and psychological ("energies of the mind") dimensions.

As mentioned earlier, in 1972, CIAS launched special research programmes that aimed to address pressing societal needs. Reflecting its mission statement and commitment to integral education, CIAS sought to expand its impact through these initiatives. By 1975, CIAS had published an extensive list of fifteen such programmes. Among these, three are particularly relevant to the present study: "Psychophysiology and Eastern Self-Disciplines", which mirrored Mishra's courses; "New Dimensions of Psychodynamics", focusing on human potential and the role of kundalini in "modern brain research";[850] and "Parapsychology and Kundalini", the latter being especially intriguing.

Although "Parapsychology and Kundalini" was never established as an individual degree programme at CIAS, in 1975, it held significant importance in 1975 as a core component of MA and PhD programmes across four departments (CIAS 1975, 15).[851] This prominence reflects a substantial interest in kundalini and its connections with parapsychology, resonating with the broader US-American interest in parapsychology during that period (Melton 2001a). Moreover, several individuals affiliated with CIAS were interested in parapsychology, reinforcing its presence within the institute's curriculum.

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[850] In 1975, CIAS offered two related programmes: "Nuclear Psychodynamics and Modern Brain Research" and "Psychonuclear Dynamics". The former was addressed as part of the focus on South Asian Philosophy by the Department of South Asian studies (other departments that addressed the topic included the Department of Philosophy and Religion and the Department of Psychology East and West). "Psychonuclear Dynamics" was described with the following words: "Research into the hidden human potentials, into man's energy centers, spiral energy (Kundalini), ESP, meditation techniques, group encounter, multi-dimensional dialogue" (CIAS 1975, 24, 32). This course description, along with terms such as "human potential" and "group encounter", points to Esalen's influence on the course (*ibid*., 8).

[851] "Parapsychology and Kundalini" was offered as a core course at the Department of South Asia Studies with a focus on "Growth Disciplines of India" (PhD level); at the Department of Philosophy and Religion, with a focus on "Comparative Mysticism" (MA level); at the Department of Psychology East and West, with focus on "Asian Psychology" (PhD level), in "Yoga Psychology" (PhD level), and "Integral Psychology" (PhD level); and at the Department of Integral Methodology (PhD level) (CIAS 1975, 32, 36–38, 41).

Chaudhuri, in particular, viewed parapsychology as a valuable tool for exploring the relationships between psychic phenomena, altered states of consciousness, and personal growth. His courses frequently addressed parapsychology, including "Parapsychology and Theory of Chakras" (1974), which examined the "role of energy centers in personality growth" (CIAS 1974) and likely included discussions on kundalini, and "New Techniques of Meditation and Creativity" (1974), which explored "supramental and neo-tantric meditation [and] evolutionary participation" (CIF 1974). Considering Chaudhuri's deep engagement with the topic, it is plausible that he invited scholars who shared his fascination to contribute to CIAS's programmes. Noteworthy among these were biofeedback pioneers Elmer and Alyce Green and the parapsychologist Hiroshi Motoyama.

Elmer Green joined CIAS's advisory board in 1972, serving until 1979. In 1973, he and Alyce Green delivered a guest lecture at CIAS on recent advances in biofeedback research. At that time, they had recently returned from South Asia, where they measured the brain-wave activities and autonomic functions of yogis using a portable biofeedback machine (see Chapter 21.3.1.). Consequently, their lecture likely included references to psycho-physiological phenomena from South Asia, including kundalini (CIAS 1974).[852]

In 1978, Motoyama was a visiting scholar at CIAS. He was described in the CIAS's catalogue as a "spiritual teacher, healer, and research parapsychologist" (CIAS 1978) with expertise in "the technological apparatus to measure subtle energy flows of the meridians and chakras" (*ibid.*).[853] During his visit, he led a weekend workshop titled "Human Energy, Superconsciousness and Psi-Energy", focusing on "the energic and physiological dimensions of superconsciousness" (*ibid.*). While the workshop emphasised meridians rather than chakras, making it unlikely that kundalini was a central topic, Motoyama's visit highlights CIAS's ongoing interest in parapsychological approaches to subtle energies. This suggests that "kundalini and parapsychology" remained a significant focus at CIAS.

[852] Whether the Greens mentioned Gopi Krishna in their lecture at CIAS is uncertain. While plans were made to meet Krishna during their research stay in South Asia in 1973, the meeting did not materialise (see Chapter 21.3.1.). However, Kieffer had been in contact with Green, sending him Krishna's books (Kieffer to Krishna, October 15, 1973, LGK, box 6.10.2.). Moreover, as discussed below, Krishna was a well-known figure at CIAS. Nevertheless, no information is available on this matter.

[853] This description fits both Motoyama's AMI and CI. Refer to Chapter 3 of the excursus on Motoyama for further information.

Another noteworthy kundalini-centred course is Kim McKell's "Freud, Reich and the First Chakra in Tantric Yoga" (1976).[854] As an assistant professor of comparative psychology who began teaching at CIAS in 1968, McKell often positioned his courses at the intersection of "psychologies" in the "East" and "West".[855] The course description for "Freud, Reich and the First Chakra in Tantric Yoga" underscores the view of kundalini as a psychological force. The term "first chakra consciousness" (CIAS 1976b) implies that kundalini is associated with a specific level of awareness localised in the first chakra. This conceptualisation led McKell to connect kundalini with human growth processes and spiritual self-development (*ibid*.).

In earlier classes, McKell had explored parallels between Jungian psychology and tantra and applied Freudian psychology to kundalini (CIAS 1973c). With his 1976 course, he introduced Wilhelm Reich to the discussion. As previously mentioned, Reich's theories influenced thematic foci and therapeutic practises at the Kundalini Clinic and Esalen. The Californian integral institutes, in contrast, generally did not integrate Reichian theories into their curriculum, possibly due to Reich's controversial status or a lack of interest. Consequently, McKell's efforts to link kundalini yoga with Reichian therapy did not gain traction at CIAS, and subsequent courses did not pursue this topic further. Nevertheless, the course highlights the connection between kundalini and Reichian bioenergetics during that period (CIAS 1976b).

After CIAS's reorientation in 1980, the heyday of kundalini was over.[856] Between 1980 and 1990, only two classes at CIIS explicitly addressed kundalini: "Chakra Psychology and Inner Tuning" (1981) and "Chakra Psychologies" (recurring, 1986 through 1988). Both classes were centred on "chakra psychology", as developed by Shyam Bhatnagar (n.d.a.), who convened "Chakra Psychology and Inner Tuning".[857] In the class, he adopted an experiential approach with a specific emphasis on consciousness:

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[854] McKell offered a similar course in 1973, titled "Freudian Psychology and First Chakra". While this earlier course did not explicitly reference kundalini, the phrase "the first chakra of Tantra – earth or root consciousness" (CIAS 1973c), presumably encapsulated a psychological perspective on kundalini.

[855] Examples of McKell's intercultural psychology courses include "Tantra and Depth Psychology" (1973), which juxtaposed the "psychological school" of tantra with Jungian psychology, and "Mandalas and Psychological Centering" (1973), integrating Jungian symbol analysis with Campbell's hero journey and psychic awareness (CIAS 1973b; 1973c).

[856] Sovatsky points out that in the early 2000s, he resumed offering classes on kundalini, which he co-led with Jorge Ferrar at the Departments "Psychology East and West" and "Integral Counseling Psychology" (Sovatsky 2023).

[857] In CIIS's catalogues, Shyam Bhatnagar was listed as a workshop facilitator, providing no specific details about his education and affiliation. Information gathered from an online interview reveals his particular

> This workshop will explore the function of the seven chakras in the evolution of consciousness, using the model of Chakra Psychology. The psychological nature of higher states of consciousness will be experienced through the use of selected sounds and tones. The role of kundalini, diet, exercise and individual preferences for spiritual paths will be discussed in terms of chakra energies. (CIIS 1981b)

In Bhatnagar's workshop, kundalini facilitates the evolution of consciousness. Moreover, he associated kundalini with distinct sounds, which resonates with Mishra's 1973 course on the "Science of Vibration and Kundalini Yoga" (CIAS 1972c).[858]

No seminar leader is mentioned for "Chakra Psychology", and since Bhatnagar was not listed as a faculty member in 1986, another individual must have offered the class (CIIS 1986, 63). Unlike Bhatnagar's experimental approach, "Chakra Psychologies" assumed a hermeneutical approach, investigating kundalini's link with theories of theosophy, tantra, and Sri Aurobindo's integral philosophy (*ibid*.).

Besides the chakra psychology courses, other events occurred at CIIS between 1980 and 1990 that must be seen in the light of kundalini research, even if they did not explicitly refer to kundalini. This includes a class by Christina and Stan Grof on spiritual crises (1981), a guest lecture by Karan Singh on the life and philosophy of Aurobindo (1985), and a course addressing the relationship between spiritual emergency and schizophrenia (1988).[859]

In sum, kundalini was primarily addressed through alternative psychological frameworks within the Californian integral institutes. Although it did not occupy a central role, archival and course materials demonstrated that kundalini received significant attention between 1972 and 1977. The founder of CIAS, Haridas Chaudhuri, was instrumental in advancing kundalini research, utilising yoga psychology and parapsychology as his frameworks of choice. Owing to Chaudhuri's pivotal influence, the peripheral role of kundalini after 1977 could be linked to his death in 1975, initiating a period of reorientation for the Californian integral institutes. This study posits that the initial fascination with kundalini at these institutes can be partly attributed to Chaudhuri's interest in Gopi Krishna's work, as will be further explored in the following chapter.

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interest in chanting and his belief in the therapeutic effects of so-called "microchakras". He claims the development of "microchakra psychology" and "inner tuning therapy" (Welsh 2022).

[858] David Gordon White's *Kiss of the Yogini* (2003) discusses kundalini's tie with sounds (D. G. White 2003, 219–257).

[859] The significance of the Grofs for modern kundalini research has been detailed in Chapter 23.3. Karan Singh represented Gopi Krishna's most important collaborator in South Asia (see Chapter 17). Singh's acquaintance with Haridas Chaudhuri (see below) established his ties with the Californian integral institutes.

24.3. The Relation Between CIAS and KRF

This chapter primarily explores Krishna's relationship with Chaudhuri and the association between KRF and CIAS. None of the other integral institutes played a significant role in kundalini research.[860] Krishna's initial connection with CIAS, however, was established through Frederic Spiegelberg's introduction to his book *Kundalini. The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967). At the time of publication, Krishna was relatively unknown outside of Kashmir. James Hillman's search for a European or US-American scholar to contribute to the book ultimately led to Spiegelberg's involvement (see Chapter 11.2.).[861]

Spiegelberg's contribution to Krishna's book served as Krishna's gateway to CIAS. Two key sections in Spiegelberg's introduction play a crucial role in understanding the growing interest of the California-based integral community. First, Spiegelberg positions Krishna's experience report at the crossroads of "East" and "West", aligning Krishna with a core tenet of CIAS: "Gopi Krishna is of unusual interest, […] as an example of a most thorough-going mixture of East and West" (Spiegelberg, in Krishna 1967, 2). Second, Spiegelberg draws a comparison between Krishna and Aurobindo. By highlighting that Krishna's thoughts on evolution are "strangely parallel to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy" (*ibid*., 6), Spiegelberg attributes sophisticated philosophical merit to Krishna's report.[862] Alongside Spiegelberg's assessment, Hillman's psychological interpretation of Krishna's experience added another layer of fascination for the integral community. While Spiegelberg dissociated Krishna's experience from biology and psychology as explanatory patterns, Hillman's comments counterbalanced this judgment.[863] Consequently, Krishna's report maintained its allure for those captivated by psychology. In essence, it seemed a perfect fit for CIAS, "a school of psychology with a spiritual and transpersonal East-West orientation" (McDermott 2017).

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[860] By the time Krishna gained international prominence, AAAS had already ceased operations, and despite Krishna's international recognition during the last years of his life, CIAS's initial interest in his ideas did not endure through its transition to CIIS.

[861] The continued relationship between Hillman and Spiegelberg led to the latter extending an invitation to the former for a guest lecture at CIAS in 1976 during Spiegelberg's presidency (Spiegelberg to Hillman, December 2, 1975, "Frederic Spiegelberg Papers (FSP)," n.d., box 4, folder 24). Hillman lectured on "Jung's Daemonology and Our Daemons" (CIAS 1976a).

[862] As mentioned above, Spiegelberg held Aurobindo in high esteem. Thus, by comparing Krishna with Aurobindo, Spiegelberg expressed his respect for Krishna's ideas.

[863] Krishna's supporter, Teri Degler, interpreted Spiegelberg's assessment differently. In her biography of Gopi Krishna, she states: "Spiegelberg grasped to a great extent the important implications of Gopi Krishna's proposed scientifically based explorations of kundalini" (Degler 2023, 105).

Intriguingly, despite Spiegelberg's contributions to *Kundalini*, it was the publication of Krishna's *Kundalini: The Secret of Yoga* (1972) that caught Haridas Chaudhuri's interest. In a letter to Gene Kieffer, Chaudhuri refers to Krishna's book, emphasising that he "certainly enjoyed reading the book very much […] with due appreciation of its unique value and admirable features" (Chaudhuri to Kieffer, May 29, 1972, LGK, box 6.2.7.). *Kundalini: The Secret of Yoga* revolves around Krishna's conviction that kundalini represents the hidden mechanism engendering altered states of consciousness as part of religious experience, with yoga serving as his primary example. *Kundalini: The Secret of Yoga* differs only slightly from Krishna's initial book in terms of his hypotheses and interpretations. Having said that, it approaches the topic in a more systematic manner, omitting Krishna's personal experience (Krishna 1972a). In a sense, this might be the book that Krishna initially intended to write before Hopman and Hillman convinced him to narrate kundalini's story against the backdrop of his own biography (see Chapter 11.2.).

Consequently, in 1972, Chaudhuri officially extended an invitation to Krishna and expressed his wish to meet Krishna while visiting South Asia in December 1972 (Pani to Kieffer, April 17, 1972, LGK, box 6.3.3.; Kieffer to Krishna, October 29, 1972, box 6.3.2.). Between April 1972 and July 1974, several letters were exchanged between Chaudhuri and Kieffer, demonstrating Chaudhuri's interest in Krishna's work and expressing the desire to collaborate.[864] Chaudhuri's perspective on Krishna is best articulated in a letter to Kieffer, where CIAS's secretary, Bina Pani, quotes Chaudhuri's assessment: "Gopi Krishna's scientific, psycho-biological approach to the mystery of Kundalini is certainly a breakthrough in modern man's understanding of the spiritual dimension of existence" (Pani to Kieffer, April 17, 1972, LGK, box 6.3.3.).

In Chaudhuri's writings four reasons can be found for his interest. First, he shared Krishna's fascination with kundalini: "In the light of my sustained research and personal experience over many years, I can confidently testify that the Kundalini represents man's profoundest spiritual potential" (*ibid.*).[865]

[864] From the archival material, it appears that letters were exchanged only between Chaudhuri and Kieffer, and not between Chaudhuri and Krishna. This seems rather peculiar, especially considering Krishna's active correspondence with his collaborators. Possible explanations could be that letters between Chaudhuri and Krishna were not preserved in the archive or that Krishna's growing fame made it challenging for him to correspond with everyone interested in his work. However, neither of these explanations is entirely satisfying.

[865] Refer to the previous chapter for a discussion of Chaudhuri's viewpoints on kundalini.

Second, Chaudhuri voiced concerns about kundalini's downsides and potential dangers, a perspective that resonated with Krishna's experience.[866] In a letter to Kieffer, Chaudhuri stressed that approaching kundalini "is like playing with fire and therefore has to be handled very cautiously. Without good training in balanced personality growth, Kundalini awakening may cause either onesided [*sic*] mystical development or harmful abuse of mystic power" (Chaudhuri to Kieffer, July 2, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.1.). Following this letter, he expounds on these thoughts in an article, where he warns of the "false feeling of omnipotence or I-am-God-ness resulting from […] artificially triggered premature kundalini-awakening" (Chaudhuri 1975, 261).

Third, Chaudhuri's integral worldview and belief in spiritual evolutionism resonated with Krishna's notion of kundalini as an evolutionary energy. In his article "Yoga Psychology", he underscored Krishna's role in this regard: "Gopi Krishna […] [has] given a new form and an evolutionary orientation to the psychosomatic self-energizing process of kundalini yoga. Thus a whole new field of fascinating research relating to the psychonuclear energy has been opened" (*ibid*., 237).

Finally, Chaudhuri's interest in Krishna was sparked by Krishna's promotion of kundalini research. Chaudhuri saw kundalini research as a valuable means to deepen understanding of "psychonuclear energy" (*ibid*.) in man and shared Krishna's sense of urgency regarding world peace and future events. He viewed Krishna's research endeavours as complementary to CIAS's mission for world peace. Both Krishna's books and Chaudhuri's integral institutes frequently addressed themes such as global political developments, world peace, and futurology (Krishna 1979c; CIAS 1970, 1). Louis Gainsborough, who initially founded AAAS, envisioned that integral education would cultivate leaders "who it is hoped will promote World Peace" (AAAS 1963). Chaudhuri continued this focus at CIAS, exemplified by offering a postdoctoral research project titled "Planning for World Peace in the Nuclear Age" (CIAS 1975, 24). In essence, both Chaudhuri and Krishna believed that research into human evolutionary mechanisms was crucial for advancing world peace.

Chaudhuri's interest was reinforced by his participation in an "international seminar on human unity and world peace" to be held in New Delhi in December 1972. This event was

[866] Jung equally warned about the potential threat of practising (kundalini) yoga – an "Eastern" discipline – for "Westerners". It might result in a psychological disorder (Jung, in Shamdasani 2012, xxx). However, considering the unavailability of Jung's "Kundalini Seminar" during the early 1970s, Chaudhuri's considerations about kundalini's potential dangers likely originated in Krishna's *Kundalini* (1967), which was the number one reference for *kuṇḍalinī*'s pathologisation during the 1970s.

organised by the National Committee of the Sri Aurobindo Centenary, commemorating the hundredth anniversary of Aurobindo's birth (CIF 1973). The seminar convener was Karan Singh, a Cabinet minister under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who would become a staunch supporter of Krishna (see Chapter 17). It was not the first meeting between Chaudhuri and Singh. In the early 1960s, when Singh completed his doctoral dissertation at the University of Delhi, Chaudhuri served as one of his examiners. According to Chaudhuri, during their meeting in New Delhi, he "had an opportunity to discuss many things with Dr. Karan Singh. He [Karan Singh] was appreciative of the good work that Gopi Krishna was doing" (Chaudhuri to Kieffer, July 2, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.1.).

Driven by both his high regard for Krishna and his academic community's esteem for him, as well as his urgency concerning kundalini research, Chaudhuri expressed a strong desire to collaborate:

> In consideration of the close spiritual kinship I feel with Gopi Krishna, I shall look forward to a period of friendly cooperation with him in a research field of common interest. It will be my pleasure to arrange lectures for him at our Institute when he comes to San Francisco. Should he be interested to stay here for one quarter and teach some courses at our Institute, we shall be delighted to make arrangements accordingly. (Chaudhuri to Kieffer, May 29, 1972, LGK, box 6.2.7.)

A notable outcome of Chaudhuri's offer of "friendly cooperation" was Krishna's appointment as a member of CIAS's advisory board from 1972 through 1974.[867] The correspondence between Chaudhuri and Kieffer was particularly active during Krishna's tenure as a "research consultant for the Institute" (Kieffer to Lapolla, February 27, 1974, LGK, box 6.10.3.). However, no activities that involved Krishna's advice or similair services are documented (CIAS 1972a). Moreover, Chaudhuri extended an invitation to Krishna for a residency or, at the very least, guest lectures should he ever visit the United States.[868] However, Krishna did not travel to the United States until 1978, by which time Chaudhuri had already passed away, so he could not accept this promising offer.

Kieffer was equally eager to collaborate with CIAS, which he considered a higher-educational institute performing kundalini research. In a letter, he even claimed that CIAS

[867] Alongside Krishna, Elmer Green, Michael Murphy, Frederic Spiegelberg, and Alan Watts served as members of CIAS's advisory board during that period (CIAS 1972a).

[868] Chaudhuri also invited Krishna to present two lectures at CIAS's celebrations in honour of the centenary of Aurobindo's birthday in 1972 (Pani to Kieffer, April 17, 1972, LGK, box 6.3.3.). No response is available; however, Krishna evidently did not follow the invitation as he remained in South Asia that year.

was “the only education institution offering a Ph.D. program in Kundalini research” (Kieffer to Lapolla, February 27, 1974, LGK, box 6.10.3.). This statement is inaccurate; although CIAS offered MA and PhD programmes that *included* research into kundalini, it did not provide a dedicated degree in kundalini research. The only kundalini-related course at CIAS was “Parapsychology and Kundalini”, which was offered for several years as part of the MA and PhD programmes in the late 1970s. However, this course never constituted a separate programme in its own right (see above).

Perhaps Kieffer exaggerated the significance of kundalini at CIAS to emphasise the importance of kundalini research within US-American higher education. Alternatively, Kieffer’s statement might reflect a misunderstanding of information he received from CIAS. In a 1972 correspondence, Bina Pani mentioned developing a research program titled “Psychosomatology and Kundalini Research”, intended to lead to MA and PhD degrees (Pani to Kieffer, April 17, 1972, LGK, box 6.3.3.). Additionally, Chaudhuri informed Kieffer of a new graduate programme at CIAS called “Global Humanism and Kundalini Research”. This letter was dated several months after Kieffer’s statement about CIAS’s kundalini-related PhD programme. It is unlikely that Kieffer was aware of this new program before receiving Chaudhuri’s letter (Chaudhuri to Kieffer, April 22, 1974, LGK, box 6.2.7.).[869] Thus, while Kieffer’s claim about a PhD programme in kundalini research at CIAS was incorrect, it underscores his view of CIAS as a significant partner in advancing kundalini research.

A planned undertaking, although never realised, was a conference on kundalini to be jointly organised by KRF and CIAS.[870] Kieffer’s idea was enthusiastically embraced by Chaudhuri, who suggested an extended scope to increase its appeal.[871] Along the lines of his understanding of kundalini as “psychonuclear energy”, Chaudhuri proposed “Kundalini or

[869] The 1975 CIAS catalogue indicates that neither “Psychosomatology and Kundalini Research” nor “Global Humanism and Kundalini Research” were implemented in CIAS’s curriculum (CIAS 1975).

[870] Kieffer also corresponded with John White on the possibility of a conference exclusively addressing the topic of kundalini. When discussing potential participants, White and Kieffer oscillated between inviting well-regarded and open-minded scientists who had not previously heard of kundalini, or “friendly enemies”. The latter pertained to those individuals who, in Kieffer’s mind, had largely renounced Krishna’s theories or downgraded the significance of research into kundalini. Potential invitees included Charles Tart, Stanley Krippner, Gay Luce, and Jean Houston. Krippner seemed to have maintained steady contact with Krishna and Kieffer in that period, as evidenced by his willingness to collaborate with KRF and his visit to Krishna in South Asia in 1974 (Kieffer to Krishna, July 17, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.1.).

[871] Despite Chaudhuri’s enthusiasm, the idea must have been abandoned shortly after it was initially proposed. While CIAS’s Catalog of 1975 mentioned a conference on integral philosophy, there is no reference to a conference on kundalini (CIAS 1975).

Psychonuclear Energy" as a potential title for the event (Chaudhuri to Kieffer, July 2, 1974, LGK, box 6.4.1.). The goal of the conference was twofold. First, to promote kundalini research and enhance the general knowledge of kundalini. Both parties equally supported this objective. Second, the conference should contribute to Chaudhuri's ongoing fundraising campaign, intended to assist in fulfilling the final requirements for CIAS's national accreditation process. While primarily an interesting goal for CIAS, this also entailed opportunities for KRF. Over and above this, Chaudhuri assured, KRF's support would reinforce the link between the two institutes: "Whatever suggestions you may have and whatever plan you might be able to develop to help us in this matter would probably become a milestone in our cooperation toward a new spiritual awakening in this country" (Chaudhuri to Kieffer, April 22, 1974, LGK, box 6.2.7.).

Owing to Kieffer's efforts, CIAS organised a seminar to be led by Krishna, scheduled to coincide with his first visit to the United States in 1978 (Kieffer to Krishna, April 11, 1978, LGK, box 6.6.1.). Unfortunately, as detailed in Chapter 12.6., Krishna's trip was postponed due to a severe health issue, and he ultimately did not make it to the West Coast. This unfortunate sequence of events marked the end of KRF's collaboration with CIAS.

24.4. Summary

This chapter has explored four interconnected institutes dedicated to integral philosophy, intercultural exchange, and psychology, collectively known as the Californian integral institutes. Their primary focus was to cultivate a specific form of intellectual, religious, and psychological engagement with Asian teachings aimed at the moderately educated middle class. What could be called a psychologised New Age religion is evident in their curricula, which integrated courses on the intersection of psychology and Asian philosophy, contributing to kundalini's psychologisation (see Chapter 26.1.).

Although kundalini remained a peripheral topic within the Californian integral institutes, it was approached from innovative perspectives, advancing its modern transformation. A common theme, especially at CIAS, was viewing kundalini as a psycho-physiological entity or "mind force", blending its subtle essence with physical and psychological aspects. This view was particularly reflected in Haridas Chaudhuri's notion of "psychonuclear energy".

Krishna's connections with the Californian integral institutes were extensive, including Spiegelberg's introduction to *Kundalini* (1967), Krishna's role as a research consultant for

CIAS's kundalini courses, and (unrealised) plans for collaborations to foster knowledge about kundalini. Despite mutual efforts, the fruits of CIAS and KRF's collaboration were limited. Nevertheless, CIAS was unique in its serious engagement with Krishna's research. Chaudhuri's respect for Krishna's theories and his acknowledgement of KRF's "herculean efforts […] in popularizing Kundalini research" (Chaudhuri to Kieffer, April 22, 1974, LGK, box 6.2.7.) fostered a positive relationship between KRF and CIAS – a contrast to the Kundalini Clinic and Esalen, which were viewed as less favourable. In addition, Chaudhuri incorporated Krishna's theories into his classes, and Bina Pani assured Kieffer that she was "calling the attention of our degree students to these books and also emphasizing their importance as the key to a whole new fascinating field of research" (Pani to Kieffer, April 17, 1972, LGK, box 6.3.3.). CIAS and KRF thus shared a mutual commitment, despite the brief nature of their collaboration.

PART VI

Kundalini: The Symbol of an Era

The present study centred on modern kundalini concepts and their transcultural production, dissemination, and scientistic framings. Throughout the chapters of this thesis, I have explored the perspectives of kundalini enthusiasts and sceptics and illustrated the development of innovative interpretations that have furthered kundalini's transformation. Of particular interest were kundalini research endeavours that proliferated from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s. Although most of these research projects never got underway or were short-lived, they nonetheless contributed to an international discourse that acted upon overlapping fields. This kundalini discourse amalgamated popular ideas, macro trends, and thematic complexes of twentieth-century alternative religious history, especially those relevant in the web of interrelationships between South Asia, Europe and the USA. These entangled contexts account for kundalini's relevance and facilitate a deeper understanding of the cultural landscape of the 1970s and 80s. I therefore argue that the popularity of kundalini stems from the fact that it became a unifying symbol of the era.

To show this, the final part of the present study situates kundalini within the broader contexts of late twentieth-century religious history and emphasises some of its key interpretative frameworks. It is not so much a conclusive portrayal of the insights gained throughout this thesis but rather an attempt to place its findings within the broader horizons of twentieth-century religious history. I chose four thematic areas that are instructive to contextualise kundalini's impact: body-mind, the psychologisation and therapeutisation of religion, transculturation, and scientism. By discussing kundalini's role in these contexts, I will demonstrate its overarching relevance for religious narratives in the late twentieth century.

25. Bodily Experience and Alterations of Consciousness: Kundalini as Integrative Tie

An important factor within European and US-American alternative religious milieus of the late twentieth century was the widespread Anti-Cartesianism.[872] New Age authors such as Fritjof Capra and Marilyn Ferguson associated the mind-body dualism with modern "Western" thought and openly condemned the Cartesian paradigm as an outdated worldview (Capra 1975, 22–23; Ferguson 1980, 377). Consequently, representatives of alternative religion and New Age science propagated the integration of the mind, consciousness, and the physical body. In this context, the terms "psychosomatic" and "holistic" became key concepts reflecting the aspired union of the mind and body (Eitler 2007, 125). With the increasing integration of South and East Asian ideas into alternative religious contexts, the "quasi-material level" (Samuel and Johnston 2013, xiii) of South and East Asian versions of the subtle body was discussed as a potential intermediary between the body and the mind (Barcan 2013, 224–226).[873] As part of these late twentieth-century considerations, kundalini entered the debate.

As a subtle energy notion, kundalini does not belong exclusively to either the body or the mind. Nevertheless, South Asian teachers such as Gopi Krishna, Swami Muktananda, and Yogi Bhajan emphasised that kundalini exceeded a mere intermediate level and linked kundalini to both consciousness (and its alterations) and body-centred practices and ideas. Consequently, many alternative religious virtuosi and practitioners maintained that kundalini was the integrative tie between body and mind, emphasising the unity and connection between these two aspects. According to such ideas, kundalini would demonstrate and ultimately overcome the perceived limitations of Cartesian dualism.

[872] Cartesianism refers to the philosophical and scientific traditions derived from the work of René Descartes (1596–1650), particularly his dualistic separation of mind (*res cogitans*, i.e., thinking substance) and body (*res extensa*, i.e., extended substance). While Descartes posited that these substances are fundamentally different, he nonetheless underscored their interactions (Berman 1981, 35). His philosophy has influenced European philosophers, scientists, psychologists, and theologians for centuries, prompting extensive debates on the relationship between the mind, consciousness, and the physical body (Samuel and Johnston 2013, xiii).

[873] As mentioned in Chapter 4.1., ideas of "quasi-material" and "quasi-immaterial" layers of the human body prevailed in various religious and philosophical traditions throughout the different parts of the world and epochs of human history. However, owing to the popularity of Asian religions during the latter half of the twentieth century, individuals engaged in discussions on mind-body dualism often favoured subtle-body models deriving from East and South Asia over those from Europe.

Ken Dychtwald's classic work *Bodymind* (1977) exemplifies how proponents of (mainly Californian) somatics[874] and consciousness research employed kundalini to reinforce ideas of non-duality. In *Bodymind*, Dychtwald writes:

> The Kundalini chakra relationships are so similar to the ones that I have discovered in my own research [the bodymind regions], as well as those that have been proposed by Westerners such as Reich and Lowen […]. Whether or not you are interested in the esoteric or astral dimensions of the Kundalini system is not relevant […]. What is important is that you listen to the descriptions of psychosomatic unity and structure that are offered by this many-thousand-year-old discipline and compare them with the recently uncovered and popularized notions of modern-day humanistic psychology and holistic medicine. I think that you'll be surprised at the similarities. (Dychtwald 1977, 85–86)

Dychtwald's message is simple: Kundalini is an ancient concept that unifies body and mind. Its "rediscovery" in the twentieth century underpins his own holistic perspective on the human body and mind. However, the crucial point is that Dychtwald's perspective was not an individual opinion. Instead, his statement is an expression of the (Californian) zeitgeist, situating kundalini at the core of debates about the body and the mind.

Weizsäcker addressed these considerations in his introductory chapters to Gopi Krishna's *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* (1972). Therein, he argues that the South Asian concepts of prana and kundalini are not comprehensible with a dualistic mindset. Moreover, speaking from the perspective of a physicist, he argues that insights from scientific theories, including quantum and cybernetic theories, equally challenged a strict "Cartesian separation of matter from consciousness" (Weizsäcker 1972, 23). Consequently, he suggests that mind-body dualism "is a relic of a way of thinking" (*ibid*., 24) that has become untenable. Weizsäcker's comment demonstrates the presence of debates about mind-body dualism beyond the alternative religious and fringe scientific context (ibid., 23–26).

Several developments facilitated kundalini's position as the integrative tie between the body and the mind. In this chapter, I would like to highlight two: the primacy of bodily experience and the enthusiasm about "altered states of consciousness". The former is largely discussed

[874] Somatics in the context of Californian counterculture refers to a range of body practices that developed during the latter half of the twentieth century in response to processes of religious individualisation along with the therapeutisation and somatisation of the religious (Hero 2016; Klinkhammer and Tolksdorf 2015). Driving forces behind the development of "Californian somatics" were humanistic and transpersonal psychology (see Chapter 20.4.2.) and the formation of the Human Potential movement (see Chapter 23.1.) (D. H. Johnson 2005).

through the lens of somatics, while consciousness research and transpersonal psychology have prominently addressed the latter. This distinction notwithstanding, both contexts and their associated research fields are intertwined, with kundalini representing a bridge.

25.1. Bodily Experience

Vivekananda was among the first South Asians to talk about kundalini in the United States. He conveyed his message in the light of "experiential religiosity" (Baier 2019, 244), situating religious experience at the core of his teachings.[875] While such an "experiential orientation of the religiously interested" (*ibid*., 245) already commenced around 1800, bodyworkers, movement practitioners, and other representatives of (Californian) somatics revived this interest during the 1970s and 80s. California played a decisive role in this development, frequently influencing other US-American states and European countries (D. H. Johnson 2005; Kripal 2007). Aligning with kundalini's increasing popularity during this period, it developed into a central topic within somatics.

I consider three aspects central when analysing kundalini's integration into body-centred perspectives. First, post-war modernisation processes led to increasing religious individualisation and subjectification (Bellah et al. 1985; Hero 2010; Luckmann 1991). What is sometimes called the "subjective turn" (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 79) was particularly embraced by alternative religious currents of that period, emphasising individualism and self-optimisation (Hanegraaff 1996, 288). Grounded in opposition to a perceived mind-body duality, the religious individualisation and subjectification resulted in a revival of the body as the most genuine expression of "being human" (Alter 2011, xv). This affirmative approach led to its central role in identity formation and self-realisation (Dziuban 2007, 483, 488). Moreover, the body and "bodywork" became means which potentially enabled the experience of the divine (Cattoi and McDaniel 2011; Hero 2016). The idea of the goddess kundalini, who resides in each person's body, appealed to many as it encompassed individualism and divinisation of the body. Second, the enthusiasm for yoga has significantly increased since the 1960s (Jain 2015, 161).[876] Kundalini, which was then vaguely associated

[875] Refer to Hammer (2004, 331–453), for an analysis of "religious experience" as a discursive strategy in emic epistemologies of modern alternative religious groups.

[876] Stefanie Syman (2010), Robert Love (2010), and Philip Deslippe (2018) showed that despite yoga's growing popularity from the 1960s on, yoga was already popular in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century.

with South Asian yoga practices, benefitted from yoga's successful dissemination in the United States and was addressed in many popular yoga manuals. Simultaneously, kundalini increased yoga's attractiveness to previously uninvolved groups. Third, ecstatic body practices and technologies enjoyed great popularity. This was particularly the case with Esalen-styled bodywork, such as holotropic breathwork and 5Rhythms dancing, but it further involved psychedelic journeys and sexual intercourse (Greer forthcoming; Kripal 2008). Experience reports by South Asian teachers, e.g., Gopi Krishna and Swami Muktananda, and testimonials of US-American practitioners significantly contributed to kundalini's reputation as a paradigmatic ecstatic and body-related experience. Moreover, due to its tantric origins and neo-tantric assessments, kundalini was associated with orgasmic excitement (Urban forthcoming). In sum, the interpretation of kundalini as a body-centred concept entails the key characteristics of the "experiential orientation" of Californian somatics.

25.2. Alteration of Consciousness and the Future of Mankind

Related to kundalini's link to ecstatic body practises and associated experiences is its association with non-ordinary states of consciousness. The modern interpretation of consciousness in the US-American alternative religious context was largely shaped by what Charles Tart popularised as "altered states of consciousness" (Tart 1972). However, transpersonal psychologists such as Abraham Maslow with his "peak experience" (Maslow 1964) and Stan Grof with his "realms of the human unconscious" (S. Grof 1976) equally contributed to the popularity of consciousness and its presumed typology of lower and higher states. John White, an active contributor to kundalini research, edited several volumes aiming to map US-American consciousness research (J. W. White 1972b; 1974a). What becomes evident in these volumes – comprising key voices of US-American consciousness research – is the belief in individual and global implications of the change of consciousness: On an individual scale, consciousness researchers expressed an interest in paranormal accomplishments, and on a global scale, they reflected upon the evolution of humanity through the change of consciousness. Modern interpretations of kundalini, as this study has demonstrated, encapsulate both of these beliefs.

In the Californian context of the 1970s, the increased interest in paranormal powers is best understood through the notion of "human potential" (Taves 2005).[877] This Huxley-inspired notion was claimed by the Human Potential movement as its key maxim and describes one's hidden powers that need to be activated to reach one's full potential (Anderson 1983, 10–11). In South Asian texts, the movement of *kuṇḍalinī* has been discussed as giving rise to special powers (*siddhis*) (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 178). Along these lines, modern popularisers of the concept suggested that kundalini facilitated "miracles" (Krishna 1976b, 57). In several publications, Gopi Krishna reports "miraculous" skills that allowed him to compose poems in languages such as German, French, Italian, and Persian – all of which he claimed to be unfamiliar with (Krishna 1952; 1997, 211–212). According to Krishna, the activation of kundalini in his body gave access to an "inexpressible fount of all knowledge" (Krishna 1997, 212). Kundalini's ability to trigger the rise of paranormal powers was equally discussed by other South Asian teachers and US-American practitioners (Muktananda 2000, 76; Scudder 1990, 191).

Considerations of the collective and global implications of the change of consciousness were warmly embraced by proponents of New Age religion, who expected the inauguration of a new era accompanied by an overarching change of consciousness (Hanegraaff 1996, 348–349), and by the psychedelic movement, which promoted the collective use of psychedelics (Partridge 2018, 234).[878] Ideas about the entanglement of consciousness with global developments were also promoted by several US-American Institutes involved in kundalini research, including the California Institute of Asian Studies (CIAS), the Institute of Noetic Science (IONS), and Esalen. The modern interpretation of kundalini's evolutionary potential, as disseminated by Gopi Krishna, John White, Yogi Bhajan, and others, offered a perspective depicting the evolution of humanity on a global scale through the transformation of consciousness. In its role as an evolutionary facilitator, kundalini enabled the change of consciousness in individuals throughout the globe (Wolfe 1978). It was thought that this

[877] Typically, paranormal accomplishments further included "enlightenment", liberating ecstatic or visionary experiences of the divine, and the associated transcendence of egocentricity. Individuals who advocated for consciousness expansion as a collective necessity for world peace (and similar ends) usually did not intend to spread telepathy or fortune-telling. Nevertheless, as the case of Weizsäcker demonstrates, they did not generally rule these "paranormal powers" out as side effects of the change of consciousness (Weizsäcker 1972).

[878] Aurobindo Ghose (1919) and Teilhard de Chardin (1959) considered the evolution of consciousness on a collective scale from two different religious perspectives. As Chapter 10.2.2. demonstrated, Aurobindo and Chardin influenced Gopi Krishna's ideas on kundalini's evolutionary potential to alter collective consciousness (Krishna 1976a, 83).

would trigger the next step in the evolution of mankind. Kundalini thus represented an impetus for change, shaping and advancing a prospective new era. Other topics attached to the narrative of collective change of consciousness were the aspiration for world peace, the nuclear threat, and environmental concerns. Religious teachers, scientists, scholars, and activists from Asia, Europe, and the United States largely agreed on the urgency of these topics and frequently recommended changes in consciousness and insights drawn from religion and spirituality as potential solutions. Popular books, such as Charles A. Reich's *The Greening of America* (1970) and Fritjof Capra's *The Turning Point* (1982), echoed the zeitgeist and prevailing concerns during this period. Carl Friedrich Freiherr von Weizsäcker and Sinai represent two key examples demonstrating kundalini's tie with these issues.[879] Both expressed their hope that kundalini's alleged evolutionary potential might avert a nuclear disaster and lead to world peace.

[879] Gopi Krishna's later publications are particularly saturated with topics such as peace, war, nuclear threat, etc. (Krishna 1977; 1981).

26. Psychologisation and Therapeutisation: Kundalini at the Intersection of Pathology and Personal Growth

Jeff Wilson demonstrates in his study of the mindfulness movement how US-American adaptions to Asian religious practices benefitted from medical, psychological, and scientific frameworks. He underscored how protagonists reconceptualised "mindfulness as a biomedical or psychological technique" (Wilson 2014, 103), legitimising it "through the gatekeeping authority of science and institutionalized medicine" (*ibid*.). Wilson's observations about the mindfulness movement are not isolated but share in the processes of psychologisation and therapeutisation of society and religion that emerged in Europe and the United States after the Second World War.[880] These entangled processes apply psychological and therapeutic frameworks and ideas to interpret social, cultural, religious, and personal phenomena (Hero 2016, 605). As this study argues, kundalini's modern interpretations correspond to this development, shedding light on the "psychologization of the sacred and the sacralization of the psyche" (Stuckrad 2014, 144) and the "therapeutic ethos" of individualised religion (Hero 2016). In both cases, kundalini is situated at the intersection of religion and medicine, healing and personal growth, crisis and transformation.[881]

26.1. Psychologisation

Olav Hammer identifies four trends that contributed to the twentieth-century psychologisation of religion: late New Thought, Jungianism, humanistic psychology, and transpersonal psychology (Hammer 2004, 67). Among these, Jungianism and transpersonal psychology are directly linked to kundalini's modern interpretations. While transpersonal psychology will be addressed below as part of my discussion of therapeutisation, here I will sketch out the trend of Jungianism and how kundalini's psychologisation reflects broader developments.

While C. G. Jung's intellectual roots and his own religious positioning are contested (Noll 1994; Shamdasani 1998), there is no doubt about the incorporation of Jung's ideas into

[880] Scholarly opinions about the relationship between the processes of psychologisation and therapeutisation differ. Some use them interchangeably (Hero 2016), some emphasise psychologisation (Hammer 2004, 67–73), and others argue for therapeutisation as an analytical reference point for related processes, including psychologisation, pathologisation, and medicalisation (Anhorn and Balzereit 2016, 16–17).

[881] Lüddeckens and Schrimpf (2018, 9–21) generally discuss the differentiation between religion and medicine.

alternative religious discourse (Baier 2024; Hammer 2004).[882] According to von Stuckrad, Jung's "importance for esoteric discourse in the twentieth century lies in the religious charging of the soul, which sacralized the psychological and at the same time psychologized the sacred" (Stuckrad 2014, 50).

In 1932, Jung and the Indologist Jacob Wilhelm Hauer held the seminar "The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga".[883] It was mainly based on Arthur Avalon's *The Serpent Power* and analysed yoga, tantra, and South Asian concepts such as kundalini and the chakras through a psychological lens (Okropiridze 2017, 127–133; Shamdasani 2012).[884] According to Jung, "cakras are symbols for human levels of consciousness in general" (Jung, in Shamdasani 2012, 85), with the lower chakras denoting primitive forms and the higher ones corresponding to evolved states of consciousness.[885] Aligning with the psychological framing of the chakras, Jung considered kundalini's movement through the subtle body a psychological process, mapping the "totality of the psyche" (*ibid*., 61).[886] Consequently, he associated the "process which tantric yoga calls the awakening of Kundalini" (*ibid*., 93) with key concepts of Analytical Psychology, including the "process of individuation" (Shamdasani 2012, xl), the "collective unconscious" (*ibid*. xxix), and the "anima archetype" (Jung, in Shamdasani 2012, 22).[887] The most essential idea of the seminar refers to Jung's understanding of kundalini as representing the intrinsic urge that drives human beings towards individuation and self-realisation: "You see, the Kundalini in psychological terms

[882] Hammer (2004, 68–69) discusses Jung's intellectual roots and the problems associated with critical scholarship in his work. For a detailed analysis of Jung's orientalism and his position in twentieth-century religious history, refer to Baier (2024).

[883] Sonu Shamdasani (2012) edited a critical edition of Jung and Hauer's "Kundalini Seminar", prepending an extensive introduction to Jung and Hauer's edited seminar notes. Dimitry Okropiridze discussed the seminar in his article "'East' and 'West' in the Kaleidoscope of Transculturality" (2017). Harold G. Coward dedicated a chapter of his book *Jung and Eastern Thought* (1985) to kundalini, titled "Jung and Kundalini" (109–124). I mainly rely on Shamdasani and Okropiridze when referring to the seminar.

[884] Jung had already purchased Avalon's *The Serpent Power* in 1920. His version contains many annotations, so he likely studied the book thoroughly (Shamdasani 2012, xxvi). Jung's seminars on kundalini and chakra that predated the "Kundalini Seminar" (held between 1930 and 1932) mainly rested on *The Serpent Power* and Heinrich Zimmer's *Kunstform und Yoga im indischen Kultbild (Artistic Form and Yoga in the Sacred Images of India, 1926)* (*ibid*., 71).

[885] Arthur Avalon presented the chakras in *The Serpent Power* as "the chief centres of consciousness […] to be found in […] the cerebro-spinal system and in the upper brain" (Woodroffe 1950, 4). Joseph Campbell also adopted this idea in his article "Kundalini Yoga: Seven Levels of Consciousness" (1975), where he employed Jung's psychological perspective to underscore his mythological view of the chakras (J. Campbell 1975). Chapter 10.2.3. discusses Krishna's criticism of Jung and Campbell's views on the chakras.

[886] Jung illustrated the kundalini process by analogy with the evolution of the human mind. "Primitive" men focused on "belly-consciousness", ancient Greeks laid primal stress on emotions and their heart, and only "the modern Western person" focuses on the head and thus the intellect (Jung, in Shamdasani 2012, 86).

[887] Stein's *Jung's Map of the Soul* (1998) comprehensively introduces Jung's key concepts.

is that which makes you go on the greatest adventures. […] It is this quest that makes life livable, and this is Kundalini; this is the divine urge" (*ibid*., 21) that "naturally pushes man to be himself" (*ibid*., 4).

Okropiridze claims that "the seminar and its reception might very well be the most influential contribution to the Orientalist construction of the Kuṇḍalinī, due to Jung's impact on a variety of religious and therapeutic discourses" (Okropiridze 2017, 129). However, contrary to Okropiridze's observation, it is challenging to assess the actual impact of the "Kundalini Seminar" on kundalini's modern interpretations. On the one hand, Jung's commentaries on Asian sources indeed yielded a significant impact on "religious and therapeutic discourses" and the psychologisation of Asian theories and practises (Baier 2024). This development was supported by the Jung-inspired "tendency to identify 'occult' practices with psychological processes" (Hammer 2004, 69). On the other hand, before 1975, Jung's seminar notes were only published privately and at the disposal of only a few people.[888] Thus, with a few exceptions, Jung's seminar played no role in kundalini's transmission before 1975.[889]

The most notable exception was James Hillman's psychological comment in Gopi Krishna's autobiography. Therein, the Jungian psychologist states that "for psychological background material I read Jung's 'Seminar on Kundalini Yoga' and his 'Lectures on the Process of Individuation,' both unpublished and privately circulated" (Hillman, in Krishna 1997, 252). This quote demonstrates precisely the nature of the impact of Jung's seminar on kundalini's psychologisation: Hillman mentions it as a source for his psychological comments while emphasising its limited availability. Throughout his comments, he employs Jungian concepts to interpret Gopi Krishna's experience. For instance, when relating kundalini to the Jungian anima (*ibid*. 157) and when defining its movement as the "instinct of individuation" (*ibid*. 177). Gopi Krishna had access to the published notes of the "Kundalini Seminar" (Krishna 1972c, 93); however, he barely used their contents and largely dismissed Jung's psychological views of kundalini (see Chapter 10.2.3.).

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[888] Mary Foote published the first edition in 1933 under the title *The Kundalini Yoga: Notes on the Lecture Given by Prof. Dr. J. W. Hauer with Psychological Commentary by Dr. C. G. Jung*. The same year saw the publication of Linda Fierz and Toni Wolff's German edition, entitled *Bericht über das Lecture von Prof. Dr. J. W. Hauer* (*Report about the Lecture of Prof. Dr. J. W. Hauer*). Jung's abridged lectures were published as "Psychological Commentary on Kundalini Yoga" in two parts (1975 and 1976) in *Spring: Journal of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought* (Shamdasani 2012, xi).

[889] In 1967, Joseph Campbell lectured in San Francisco about "Freud, Jung & Kundalini" (Esalen 1967d, 8) and in 1973, Kim McKell linked Depth Psychology and kundalini yoga in a course taught at CIAS (CIAS 1973c).

In sum, despite Jung's largely unquestioned authority on the psychologisation of Asian religion and occult phenomena, Jungianism scarcely impacted the psychologisation of kundalini. Consequently, I argue that kundalini's interpretation as a psychological process emerged independently of Jung's "Kundalini Seminar" and was prompted by the publication of Gopi Krishna's autobiography. Kundalini's psychologisation, while propelled by the popularity of Jungian ideas, epitomises the broader late twentieth-century trend of integrating psychological concepts into the interpretation of Asian religions.

Haridas Chaudhuri's efforts to "translate" religious language into psychological terms were a great example of this trend. As outlined in Chapter 24.2., Chaudhuri's concept of Yoga Psychology prominently featured kundalini, which he defined as a psychological force (Chaudhuri 1975). Accordingly, Chaudhuri's "translation" of kundalini as "psychonuclear energy" (*ibid*., 237) that may foster "growth processes" (*ibid*., 236) reflects the tendency to reshape religious concepts in a psychological light, especially with regard to personal development and notions of basic psychic energy that drives this development.

Other trends that advanced the psychologisation of religion were the establishment of humanistic and transpersonal psychology in the latter half of the twentieth century. However, as Hammer underscored, "both the humanistic and transpersonal psychologies were not only psycho-religious doctrines, but also the philosophical underpinning of a vast variety of therapeutic methods" (Hammer 2004, 72). Their focus on health, self-realisation, and the fulfilment of human potential provides insights into the "therapeutic turn" of religion and the broadening of "therapy", which is no longer exclusively limited to medical and psychopathological issues (Madsen 2014). Kundalini developed into a key topic within the context of alternative healing and personal growth, illuminating the therapeutisation of the religious field.

26.2. Therapeutisation

The therapeutisation of religion refers to the process by which religious practices and beliefs increasingly integrate elements understood as therapeutic, focusing on physical, psychological, and emotional healing, personal well-being, and self-improvement.[890] The

[890] The process of therapeutisation received much attention in German-speaking scholarship, where it is discussed as "Therapeutisierung". Key studies include Jens Eberfeld's *Anleitung zur Selbstregulation: Eine Wissensgeschichte der Therapeutisierung im 20. Jahrhundert (Guidance for Self-Regulation: A History of Knowledge of Therapeutisation in the 20th Century,* 2020), Anhorn and Balzereit's edited volume *Handbuch*

transformation of religion, the sacralisation of the self, and alternative healing approaches are attendant circumstances of the therapeutisation of religion (Hero 2016, 605; Höllinger and Tripold 2014, 26–27; Knoblauch 2009, 31). In alternative religious settings, these processes have often resulted in a "democratisation" of therapy, with the roles of the therapist and client gradually dedifferentiating. This implies that the self-healing capacities of the subject are emphasised (Illouz 2008; Klinkhammer and Tolksdorf 2015, 7–8).

At the same time, therapeutic methods and theories have increasingly adopted religious characteristics. Transpersonal psychology is a valuable example of the "religious ethos" of alternative psychotherapies. The discipline comprises "holistic, multicultural, integrative, or integral approaches" (Hartelius, Rothe, and Roy 2013, 5), emphasises the therapeutic potential of consciousness changes (Rodrigues and Friedman 2013, 580), and incorporates religious concepts and practices into its understandings of crisis and transformation (C. Grof and Grof 2017). Associated individuals, such as Christina and Stan Grof, David Luckoff, and Bonnie Greenwell, entrenched kundalini into their research agendas, situating the concept at the intersection between pathology, healing, and transformation. The topic of kundalini was thus integrated into the transpersonal religo-therapeutic discourse.

Christina and Stan Grof's concept of spiritual emergency and its significance for the dissemination of kundalini has been thoroughly discussed in Chapter 23.3. Regarding the broader process of therapeutisation, the concept of spiritual emergency illustrates the reinterpretation of the boundaries between pathological and healthy conditions. In alignment with the anti-psychiatry movement and widespread research into schizophrenia, the Grofs and other transpersonal psychologists pled for the re-evaluation of at least some kind of psychotic episodes as potentially beneficial processes (C. Grof and Grof 2017, 30; Laing 1967). In this context, kundalini was discussed as a paradigmatic "spiritual emergency". Transpersonal psychologists understood crises supposedly induced by a kundalini awakening as transformative and therapeutic experiences, transcending the boundary between pathology and health (Lukoff 2009, 134). Such considerations were not limited to

Therapeutisierung und Soziale Arbeit (*Handbook of the Therapeutisation and Social Work*, 2016), and Maasen et al.'s edited volume *Das beratene Selbst: Zur Genealogie der Therapeutisierung in den 'langen' Siebzigern* (*The Counseled Self: The Genealogy of Therapeutisation in the 'Long' Seventies*, 2014), among several others. Eva Illouz' *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help (2008)* is an example of a study treating therapeutisation in an English-speaking context. I am indebted to my colleague Stephanie Gripentrog-Schedel for sharing her valuable insights on the therapeutisation of religion with me.

transpersonal psychologists. Psychiatrists interested in religious experiences reached similar conclusions about kundalini's link to psychosis (Hoch 1988; Sannella 1976).

An indicator of the increasing entanglement between religion and therapeutisation was the integration of the new diagnostic category "Religious or Spiritual Problem" in the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-4, 1994).[891] David Lukoff, Francis Lu, and Robert Turner proposed the new category "to increase the sensitivity of mental health professionals to spiritual crises and issues in therapy" (Lukoff 2009, 138). The proposal echoed the efforts by transpersonal psychologists and the anti-psychiatry movement to de-pathologise and re-evaluate mental health conditions. Aligning with the diagnostic category of the DSM-4, Lukoff defines kundalini experiences as a "spiritual problem" (*ibid*.) and emphasises that "this new diagnostic category has its roots in the transpersonal movement's attention to spiritual emergencies such as kundalini awakening" (*ibid*., 139).

The interest of transpersonal psychologists in kundalini, their assessment of it as a transformational crisis, and its differentiation from pathology underscore kundalini's therapeutisation. By examining the intersections between kundalini and the religio-therapeutic discourse, one can identify the thematic emphases and developments within the therapeutic field, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the therapeutisation of religion during the latter half of the twentieth century.

[891] The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) is a comprehensive classification system published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). It is widely used by clinicians, researchers, and mental health professionals for diagnosing and classifying mental disorders. The DSM provides standardised criteria and definitions for a wide range of mental health conditions, facilitating a common language for diagnosing and treating patients. It has undergone several revisions since its first edition was published in 1952. The most recent edition is the DSM-5, which was published in 2013 (APA 2024; Lukoff, Lu, and Turner 1998).

27. Transculturation: Kundalini as a Product of Transcultural Exchange

The dissemination history of kundalini should be understood within the context of "translocal" (Bornet 2021, 3),[892] "transnational" (Manjapra 2014), and "transcultural" (Pratt 1992) exchanges of religious ideas and practices, facilitated by "agents of transculturation" (Jobs and Mackentun 2013, 8). These frameworks highlight intercultural modes of interaction in a globalised world and underscore the importance of religious actors for the process of transculturation. Gopi Krishna, a key figure in kundalini's dissemination, exemplifies an "agent of transculturation".[893] His extensive travels, international collaborations, and the establishment of Kundalini Research Foundations (KRF) in multiple countries point to the transcultural essence of modern kundalini research. Furthermore, by defining Gopi Krishna as a transcultural agent, we can trace the intricate dynamics of kundalini's interpretation as an object of research. Therefore, analysing kundalini as a result of transcultural exchange illuminates the dynamics of transculturation and supports theories of "entangled history" (Appadurai 1996).[894]

The concept of transculturation traces back to the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz Fernández (1881–1969), who coined the term in 1940. However, it was not until the publication of Mary Louise Pratt's book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) that the concept of transculturation gained wider recognition. Moving beyond unidirectional acculturation, the concept of transculturation describes the multilateral nature of intercultural processes (Jobs and Mackentun 2013, 8–9; Pettinger 2013, 153). Ortiz and Pratt's focus on marginalised territories, particularly in colonial and post-colonial settings,

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[892] Philipp Bornet distinguishes "translocal" from "transnational" by emphasising their different reference points: Unlike transnational interactions, "translocal […] does not necessarily imply contacts across national borders and suggests interactions across other types of borders (language, race, socio-economical class, religion) within a given political or spatial entity" (Bornet 2021, 4).

[893] Despite categorising Gopi Krishna as an "agent of transculturation", it must be emphasised that he grew up in a modern South Asia where the blending of Euro-American and traditional cultural elements, including those related to kundalini, was already underway. The entanglements between South Asia, Europe, and North America did not begin with Krishna, and made his kundalini teachings possible in the first place.

[894] "Entangled history" is a historiographical approach that highlights the interconnected and mutually influential nature of historical developments across different regions and cultures, providing a more integrated and comprehensive view of the past. The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai significantly contributed to theories of "entangled history". Some of his key concepts are outlined in his work *Modernity at Large* (1996). For example, the idea of various "scapes" to describe different dimensions of global cultural flows, e.g., "ideoscapes". allowing the flow of ideas, ideologies, and cultural symbols across different regions. Moreover, in the book, he argues that global cultural flows do not move in a linear or uniform manner but are characterised by disjunctures and contradictions (Appadurai 1996).

faced criticism for its limitations.[895] In such contexts, marked by power imbalances, transculturation cannot simply be seen as a process akin to a Malinowskian exchange of "give" and "take".[896] Instead, it necessitates acknowledging the "power disequilibrium" (Jobs and Mackentun 2013, 13) in cultural interactions (M. U. Stein 2009, 255–256). Therefore, Alasdair Pettinger accurately suggests that "transculturation is not a template for making sense of what happens when something or someone moves from one culture to another; it is more usefully thought of as a guiding principle, one that insists on the range of possibilities, demanding that we attend to specific configurations and power relations" (Pettinger 2013, 153).

Related studies analysing the transformation of South Asian concepts in the wake of transculturation include Baier's "Theosophical Orientalism and the Structures of Intercultural Transfer" (Baier 2016), which explains the global dissemination of the chakras in the light of transcultural processes; Hauser's "Following the Transcultural Circulation of Bodily Practices" (Hauser 2018), which speaks of "transcultural circulation" (*ibid*., 507) when observing the transcultural dissemination of postural yoga and the chanting of mantras; and Kraler's "Yoga Breath" (Kraler 2022), which considers concepts of transcultural transfer and entangled history as key for the development of *prāṇāyāma* as yogic breath cultivation in early modern yoga. These three studies demonstrate that the concept of transculturation is a useful tool for analysing the entangled histories of religious ideas and practices and their transformations in response to transcultural exchange.

The history of kundalini's modern transformation is a testament to the transcultural exchanges between South Asian, European, and US-American agents. Colonial India served as the point of departure for its transculturality, where orientalism was a substantial factor in shaping cultural dynamics. As outlined above, the "discovery" of "oriental wisdom" by non-South Asians (and its subsequent reappropriation by South Asians) fuelled the initial interest in *kuṇḍalinī*. However, the example of kundalini illustrates how transcultural exchange between South Asians, Europeans, and US-Americans in Colonial India resulted in the renegotiation of power dynamics and the dichotomies between "East" and "West" (Okropiridze 2017).

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[895] Postcolonial perspectives criticised Pratt's (and others') biased approach to transculturation for focusing solely on how the centre influences the periphery while neglecting the dynamics of transcultural exchange originating from the periphery (Parry 2004).

[896] The social anthropologist Bronisław K. Malinowski (1884–1942) suggested in the preface to Ortiz's book that transculturation was informed by mutuality and reciprocity, an assumption that Ortiz and Pratt picked up in their studies on transculturation (Jobs and Mackentun 2013, 9–10).

The transformative outcomes of transcultural exchanges lead to what the philosopher Wolfgang Welsch considered as "new diversity […] arising from transcultural permeations" (Welsch 1999, 203). Welsch further emphasised the transient nature of transculturality,[897] suggesting that any result of a transcultural exchange is merely a snapshot in a continual process of transition: "The diagnosis of transculturality refers to a transition, or to a phase in a process of transition. It's a temporary diagnosis" (*ibid*., 208). This perspective aptly describes the ongoing process of kundalini's travelling back and forth between European and US-American contexts, whereby its interpretation continues to evolve.

A notable result of the activities of kundalini's "agents of transculturation" was its oscillation between the characteristics attributed to it in the context of Hindu nationalism and its universal and global reshaping outside of South Asia. In other words, transculturation explains how kundalini became equally tied to nationalism and globalisation. As I argued in this study, Hindu nationalists reclaimed kundalini during the 1970s as a response to its international fame. Simultaneously, Gopi Krishna argued for kundalini's universalism and advanced its transculturation by establishing branches of his KRF throughout South Asia, Europe, and North America. This process resulted in divergent claims by national and international agents, who appropriated the concept for their needs.[898]

A similar development occurred in the modern history of postural yoga (Hauser 2013). Singleton describes its transculturality[899] with the following words:

> Quasireligious forms of physical culture swept Europe during the nineteenth century and found their way to India, where they informed and infiltrated popular new interpretations of nationalist Hinduism. Experiments to define the particular nature of Indian physical culture led to the reinvention of *āsana* as the timeless expression of Hindu exercise. Western physical culture-oriented *āsana* practices, developed in India, subsequently found their way (back) to the West, where they became identified and merged with forms of "esoteric gymnastics", which had grown popular in Europe and

[897] While transculturation refers to the process through which cultures and cultural elements influence each other and change, transculturality pertains to the condition or state of cultural interaction. Refer to Welsch (1999) for a philosophical examination of the concept of transculturality.

[898] Kundalini's nationalistic appropriations were not limited to South Asia. In the US-American religio-therapeutic context, kundalini was staged as part of US-American religious history. Esalen denotes the most obvious example of non- South Asian nationalistic appropriation of kundalini. The Institute incorporated neo-tantra as "Esalen tantra", with tantric theories such as kundalini subsequently being marketed as Esalen theories (Kripal 2005a, 125). Further research is required to consider kundalini's national appropriations outside of South Asia.

[899] Singleton does not use the expression "transculturality".

> America from the mid-nineteenth century (independent of any contact with yoga traditions). (Singleton 2010, 5, original emphasis)

Other scholars of yoga studies arrive at similar conclusions, integrating insights from postcolonial studies (Black 2020), highlighting the neoliberal aspects of modern yoga (Jain 2015), and mapping the travel activities of South Asian yoga and meditation teachers (Newcombe and Deslippe 2020). Aside from granting insights into the transculturation of modern yoga, these studies reinforce the notion that institutionalised yoga followed the above-outlined division between nationalism and globalisation: South Asian yoga schools assert yoga's Hindu national identity, while schools outside of South Asia commonly emphasise its universal character (McKean 1996; Strauss 2004). The pivotal point, as particularly emphasised by McKean, is that some South Asian-origin yoga schools underscore their universal appeal abroad while simultaneously highlighting their alignment with Hindu nationalism within South Asia (McKean 1996, 16). This duality often reflects strategic opportunism, revealing the most advantageous aspect of the same identity depending on the context.

The example of Karan Singh perfectly demonstrates this duality. As a fervent patriot and member of Indira Gandhi's Hindu nationalist government, he supported kundalini projects to strengthen South Asia's Hindu identity, e.g., Project Consciousness (see Chapter 17.3.3.). Simultaneously, Singh espoused the universalism of Hindu religions abroad, maintaining contacts with transpersonal and integral psychologists and speaking at international conferences to disseminate his message. Episodes of kundalini's modern transformation thus mirror parallel developments in the transnational transmission of yoga and related concepts. Employing the concept of transculturation to elucidate kundalini's transformation extends its original meaning, as proposed by Ortiz and Pratt, and deepens our understanding of cultural exchange beyond colonial and postcolonial contexts. Furthermore, transculturation retains its descriptive power, illuminating the structural and praxeological dynamics inherent in transcultural interactions. By examining the modern interpretations and global dissemination of kundalini we gain valuable insights into the processes of transculturation and the entangled histories of religious ideas. Modern kundalini concepts stem from global entanglements and are transcultural products, which necessarily transcend their South Asian origin. Consequently, kundalini's transmission history serves as a compelling case study of the dynamic and reciprocal nature of transcultural exchange.

28. Scientism: Kundalini as Transgressor of Boundaries

For many modern religious figures, science is a contested ground. Some reject it, while others appropriate it for their own needs. These two approaches, however, are not always contradictory. Since the mid-nineteenth century, alternative religious groups have developed new strategies of negotiations between these two entities: Despite dismissing science as too materialistic, belonging to an "oppositional Other", and undermining religious beliefs, (alternative) they have equally justified their beliefs with the help of scientific tools, methods, and theories (Asprem 2013; Hammer 2004). Scholars of religion described this discursive field with concepts such as the "scientification of religion" (Stuckrad 2014) and "scientism" (Hammer 2004).

Stuckrad's *The Scientification of Religion* (2014) illuminates the impact of intellectual debates on the construction of religious meaning and practice. According to Stuckrad, "secular environments" (Stuckrad 2014, 180) and scholars from both the natural sciences and the humanities have influenced the transformation of religion since the nineteenth century. The present study, in contrast, analyses religious endeavours to renegotiate or eliminate the boundary between religion and science (*ibid*., viii–ix).[900] Accordingly, I use the concept of the scientification of religion in the sense of Stuckrad; however, instead of focusing on "secular environments", I shed light on the renegotiations between religion and science in "religious environments". Scientism, then again, can be defined as the legitimising strategy to reconcile or subsume religious beliefs within a scientific framework (see below). In this thesis, I argued that the history of kundalini's modern transformation can be largely read as its scientification. This implies that its interpretation as an object of research during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries resulted from the discursive entanglement of science and religion (*ibid*., 180). Accordingly, several individuals who contributed to the dissemination of kundalini interpreted the concept in a scientistic light, pleading for its empirical investigation. The Theosophical Society played a pivotal role in this process, initiating what I termed the "first wave of kundalini's scientification" by propagating the "synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy" (Blavatsky 1888). This was followed by the efforts of authors and religious teachers in the early twentieth century, who ensured that kundalini maintained its status as an object of research, marking the "second wave of

[900] Any suggested "boundary" between the categories of "religion" and "science" relies on the assumption of a preceding "separation". Refer to Gieryn (1983), Bergunder (2016), and von Stuckrad (2014) for a discussion of boundary-makings and their transgressions.

kundalini's scientification". Despite these enthusiastic forerunners, kundalini's scientification peaked in the 1970s and 80s. During this period, the idea of investigating and demonstrating kundalini empirically found global expression with research projects being launched in the United States, Germany, South Asia, and Japan.

Kundalini's scientification largely reflects the discursive history of the relationship between science and religion since the late nineteenth century. Accordingly, analysing the discursive strategies revolving around its claimed scientific nature may reveal broader developments during that period. In this chapter, I will touch upon the use of scientism as a legitimising framework for religious ideas against the backdrop of efforts to reconcile science and religion (Hammer 2004; Asprem 2014).

28.1. Scientism(s) as Legitimising Strategy

Scientism refers to the epistemological stance that uses scientific methods and standards to legitimise worldviews, beliefs, behaviours, and practices traditionally outside the realm of science.[901] Hammer provides a helpful definition of scientism:

> Scientism is the active positioning of one's own claims in relation to the manifestations of any academic scientific discipline, including, but not limited to, the use of technical devices, scientific terminology, mathematical calculations, theories, references and stylistic features – without, however, the use of methods generally approved within the scientific community, and without subsequent social acceptance of these manifestations by the mainstream of the scientific community through e.g. peer reviewed publication in academic journals. (Hammer 2004, 206)

Building on Hammer's definition, I argue that Gopi Krishna's project of kundalini research framed kundalini in a scientistic light. Krishna first defined his experience as the activation of kundalini, bolstering his account with scientific theories and disciplines, and subsequently sought to initiate a "scientific" research endeavour. Considering that Krishna operated in various cultural contexts, his scientism exemplifies the scientistic strategies described by

[901] As mentioned in the "Introduction" of this study, I use "science" in a broad sense, encompassing the humanities, medical science, social sciences, and natural sciences. Consequently, the concept of "scientism" extends to all these branches of science. However, in the case of kundalini, natural and medical sciences prevail for scientistic considerations. Brooke's *Science and Religion* (1991), Lewis and Hammer's edited *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science* (2010), and Egil Asprem's *The Problem of Disenchantment* (2014) examine the relationship between religion and science from interdisciplinary perspectives and by including a variety of historical case studies.

Hanegraaff as "New Age Science" (Hanegraaff 1996) while equally illuminating "Hindu scientism" (Nanda 2010), a trend among South Asian religious teachers since Swami Vivekananda (*ibid*., 129). While Gopi Krishna served as my primary case study, I demonstrated throughout this study that the scientistic interpretation of kundalini extended beyond his work. Analysing kundalini's role as an object of research within New Age science and "Hindu scientism" reflects the complex dynamics of negotiating the boundaries between science and religion.

According to Hanegraaff, "New Age Science" is characterised by a high regard for science while exhibiting scepticism towards academic rationalism.[902] Hanegraaff explains this contradiction with a blurred differentiation between scientific findings and their religious and philosophical interpretations. This results in the distinction between "old sciences", meaning natural sciences with academic affiliations, and "new sciences." The "old sciences", in Hanegraaff's assessment, are largely rejected as outdated or incomplete. "New sciences", on the other hand, seek to develop unified worldviews based on their interpretations of scientific findings (Hanegraaff 1996, 62–64).

Gopi Krishna's project of kundalini research is an accurate example of the attempt to develop a "new science". In his book *The Dawn of a New Science* (1978), he portrayed his role in such an endeavour with the following words:

> I did not ever dream […] that it was in my fate to make certain disclosures about a mighty secret, buried under the ruins of this great civilization [the Indus Valley culture] of the past, to lay the foundation of a new Science and to open another area of investigation for the lovers of knowledge. (Krishna 1978c, 58)

This quote demonstrates how Krishna adhered to "New Age Science" by expressing the necessity for a "new science". However, while he maintained that his new "Super-Science" (Krishna 1978a, 30) would unfold "revelations beyond anything known to or conceived by science at present" (*ibid*., 31), he nonetheless sought collaborations with scientists (affiliated to "old sciences") to support his credibility.

Meera Nanda conceptualised another distinct form of scientism: Hindu scientism (Nanda 2010; 2016).[903] Unlike New Age science, Hindu scientism does not reject academic disciplines as "old sciences" that must be overthrown with innovative ideas and paradigms of an alleged "new science". Quite the contrary, Hindu scientism asserts "that there is 'no

[902] Hess (1993) discussed perspectives on science within the New Age movement in the United States.
[903] Nanda follows Hammer's above-quoted definition of scientism (Nanda 2010, 280).

conflict' between science and Hindu beliefs about the natural world, soul, evolution etc., and that modern science has only reaffirmed what their Vedic ancestors already knew" (Nanda 2016, 129). Therefore, instead of condemning science, Hindu scientism praises scientific accomplishments as confirmation of the scientific insights inherent in the *Vedas*. This "myth of 'scientific Hinduism'" (*ibid*., 2) traces back to Hindu reformers such as Swami Dayananda Saraswati and was popularised by Swami Vivekananda (Brown 2010, 208; Nanda 2016, 129).[904] Nanda underscores how "Vivekananda opened the door to a form of scientism which […] has become the dominant episteme of modern yoga and indeed, of contemporary Hinduism itself" (Nanda 2016, 129). Hindu scientism further includes a political component, as it consolidated claims of Hindu supremacy as propagated by Hindu nationalists (Strube 2023, 94).

Gopi Krishna's scientification of kundalini aptly aligned with the agenda of Hindu scientism. In his writings, he portrayed kundalini as an ancient religious concept that originated in Hindu dharma, emphasising the authority of the *Vedas* (Krishna 1978a, 129). Krishna's scientism, paired with his essentialisation of the *Vedas*, led to the increasing interest in looking at kundalini from a scientistic point of view among late twentieth-century Hindu nationalists (see Chapter 17.3.). Analysing kundalini's scientification through a Hindu scientistic lens thus also exhibits a political layer.

Krishna used both New Age science and Hindu scientism to underscore kundalini's "scientific" nature. His project of kundalini research therefore exemplifies modern attempts to put religious ideas in a scientistic light.

28.2. Levels of Interactions between Religion and Science

Asprem suggested three levels of interactions between representatives of religious traditions and natural science: rhetorical, social, and conceptual (Asprem 2013, 405).[905] Despite advocating different religious traditions, New Age science and Hindu scientism employ similar strategies across Asprem's levels, aspiring to demonstrate the superiority of their distinct worldviews over science. At the same time, the claimed scientific validity also asserts a dominance over competitors in the religious field (Hammer 2004, 205–208; Nanda

[904] Refer to Chapter 5.3.1. for a discussion of Vivekananda's use of the concept of "Vedic science".

[905] Despite Asprem's focus on the Theosophical Society, he emphasises that the levels he distinguished can also be applied to other new religious groups that demonstrate structural similarities (Asprem 2013, 406), an observation that also resonates with Hammer's (2004, 205) findings.

2016, 129). I will demonstrate this observation by elucidating how Krishna's scientism complies with these three levels.[906]

Krishna's rhetorical level of interaction oscillated between religious transfigurations and scientific rationalisations, bridging religious concepts with empirical frameworks. Several passages in his writings indicate that he aimed to adhere to academic conventions, such as empirical evidence, peer review, reproducibility, and falsifiability. Moreover, Krishna uses a scientistic jargon when describing his investigations into kundalini, e.g., calling his religious institutes "research centres" and referring to his bodily experiences as "laboratory investigations" (Krishna 1976a; 1978a, 95).

Regarding Krishna's links to New Age science, particularly Fritjof Capra's technique of "parallelism" finds expression in Krishna's writings.[907] Accordingly, Krishna drew parallels between his "findings" on kundalini and modern science (particularly biology). Aligning with Capra, he underscored the need for a new worldview based on the presumed parallels between modern science and "Eastern mysticism" (Capra 1975, 83; Krishna 1978a, 36). Unlike Capra, Krishna was not a trained scientist. Thus, his parallelism remains a somewhat shallow attempt at referencing scientific theories to support his scientistic claims.

Hindu scientistic language is saturated with resemblance thinking, Vedic references, and Hindu supremacist claims (Nanda 2003, 131–132). Krishna employed these perspectives to discuss kundalini throughout his writings. A notable example of Krishna's use of Hindu scientistic rhetoric is the following quote:

> For any present-day investigation of the phenomenon [of kundalini] the most prolific source of information about this extraordinary state would be found to be the inspired compositions of the illuminati of India from the Vedic times. For many decades to come modern science will have to depend on this ancient treasure for the collection of preliminary data about this phenomenon. The scholars who now rush forward with their comments and explanations about the state or methods for the induction of ecstasy only offer themselves for the ridicule of the progeny. (Krishna 1978a, 129)

[906] Asprem's three levels "stand in a continuous and mutually dependent relation to each other" (Asprem 2013, 405) and must not be perceived as separate categories.

[907] Fritjof Capra's most successful work is *The Tao of Physics* (1975). Therein, he explored what he considered parallels between "modern physics" and Asian religions. For discussions of Capra's writings and his parallelism, refer to Hanegraff (1996, 69, 74) and Hammer (2004, 282–292).

Krishna's rhetorical strategies targeted intellectuals in Europe, North America, and South Asia. At the same time, his emphasis on being an uneducated "simple" householder bestowed a level of authority on his concepts aimed at a fellowship beyond the academy.

On a social and institutional level, Krishna strove to establish ties with scientists by founding research centres and joining research associations. Such efforts corresponded to the institutional change prevalent in alternative religious settings in the twentieth century, which largely determined the forms of institutional organisation of New Age science (Hero 2010). In the context of South Asia, Krishna's scientism was institutionalised in government-funded institutes and research projects, such as Krishna's collaboration with AIIMS. Other social interactions included publication projects, such as his book *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius*, co-published with Weizsäcker in 1972, and Krishna's attendance at international conferences. The latter aspect is a key denominator of New Age science and paradigmatic of the 1970s and 80s. Events, such as the 1978 symposium "New Dimensions of Consciousness. Symposium on the Coevolution of Science and Spirit", exhibited a recurring pattern: spiritual leaders (such as Zen masters, kundalini initiates, Sufis, open-minded Christian monks, and new religious gurus) convene with natural scientists (including physicists, biologists, and medical doctors) and psychologists (Bochinger 1994, 39; Höllinger and Tripold 2014, 29). These interactions aimed to advocate for integrating science and mysticism, thereby promoting new paradigms and the advent of a New Age. Krishna's level of involvement in these conferences is a crucial marker of the success *and* failure of his project – while his invitations to and participation at such events increased the recognition of his kundalini research, his frequent cancellations resulted in growing suspicion on the part of New Age scientists.[908]

Asprem's third level of interaction concerns the negotiation of "the conceptual content of specific theories and paradigms" (Asprem 2013, 405). Scientistic interpretations of evolutionism pose a possible example as they played major roles in Hindu scientism (Nanda 2010 280), theosophy (Hammer 2004, 223), ongoing considerations by New Age scientists (Hanegraaff 1996, 470), and Gopi Krishna's writings about kundalini (Krishna 1967).

[908] New Age conferences are also an indicator of kundalini's transculturation and globalisation. My research has demonstrated that kundalini was a recurring topic at New Age conferences worldwide. More research is required to determine the impact of these events on the development of religious concepts in the late twentieth century.

A full discussion of the conceptual interactions between these different approaches to evolutionism lies beyond the scope of this chapter.[909] Theosophy and New Age science had an ambiguous relation to Darwin's evolutionism. Accordingly, with Hammer, "just as science in general can serve both as a positive and negative Other, evolution plays a similar double role" (Hammer 2004, 223). Nonetheless, they accepted the basic framework of evolutionism and employed it in their considerations about reincarnation and the evolution of consciousness (Asprem 2013, 409). A key notion in New Age science concerned the advent of a "new cycle of evolution, which would be marked by the appearance of a new consciousness within humanity that would give birth to a new civilization" (Spangler 1984, 17). From a Hindu scientistic perspective, then again, nothing is wrong with Darwinism except its ignorance about pre-existing evolutionary theories in the *Vedas*. Hindu scientism, therefore, also accepted the framework of evolutionism, emphasising its harmony with Hindu beliefs (Brown 2012; Nanda 2016, 129).[910]

Gopi Krishna's conceptual interactions with evolutionism integrate views postulated by theosophy, Hindu scientism, and New Age science. Following their ambiguous approaches, he rejected Darwinism as doing "incurable harm to a devout mankind" (Krishna 1981, 82) but celebrated the framework of evolutionary theory.[911] According to Krishna, collective awakenings of kundalini would trigger what Spangler called a "new cycle of evolution". Such insights, as he maintained, were not new but reaffirmed claims by "Vedic sages" (Krishna 1978a, 135). Therefore, Gopi Krishna's evolutionary kundalini theories reflect the ambiguous perspectives of a scientific theory from theosophy, Hindu scientism, and New Age science.

Krishna's project of kundalini research corresponds to religious efforts to eliminate the boundaries between science and religion. While the Theosophical Society was a key player in such endeavours, later developments equally questioned and challenged the demarcation lines between "science" and "religion". Kundalini's scientification exemplifies the "transgressions of [their] boundaries" (Bergunder 2016, 120). It could be further argued that Krishna's project of kundalini research illustrates global attempts to reconcile religion and

[909] Refer to Chapter 10.2.2. for a discussion on Gopi Krishna's evolutionism and its link to kundalini.

[910] Hindu scientism's acceptance of evolutionism was a notable advantage in the competition with Christianity, which often, though not universally, rejected Darwin's evolutionism. This rejection led to widespread accusations that Christianity was an outdated religion (Brown 2012).

[911] Attempts to exclude dissenting voices through polemics were already evident in Madame Blavatsky's writings and maintained an important strategy in New Age science (Asprem 2013, 410; Hammer 2004, 252). Krishna's criticism of Darwinism follows this pattern.

science, hoping to launch some sort of scientific religion. Kundalini then represents a goddess equally worshipped as a harbourer of salvation and as an object of research in the "laboratories of enchantment" (Asprem 2014, 287).

29. Summary: Kundalini, the Goddess of an Era

The final part of this study analysed kundalini's modern transformation on a macro level. As its four chapters demonstrated, kundalini's impact transcended the mere transmission and reinterpretation of tantric ideas in South Asia and beyond. Instead, its evolving interpretations mirrored large-scale patterns, trends, and structures, offering a comprehensive understanding of the late twentieth-century transformation of religion. While kundalini-based practices and theories were not the driving forces behind the vast majority of religious developments of this era, they nonetheless achieved remarkable success among religious seekers and practitioners. Its lack of uniformity emerged as its greatest strength and the key to its widespread appeal: the symbol of kundalini encapsulated the diverse topics and aspirations of the period. Independent of nationalities and belief systems, kundalini succeeded in uniting a significant fellowship across North America, Europe, and South Asia, evolving into a defining emblem of its time. Through this lens, the goddess kundalini can be seen as a microcosm of the era's religious and cultural shifts.

List of Figures

Figure 1: “The Dream of Ravan” (Part IV) across its three publication platforms (from left to right): Initial publication in April 1854 in the *Dublin University Magazine* (N.N. 1854), its partial republishing in January 1880 in *The Theosophist* (Truth Seeker 1880), and its publication as a book in 1895 by the Theosophical Society (N.N. 1895). 53

Figure 2: Book cover of Vivekananda’s *Raja Yoga*, depicting kundalini’s rise (Vivekananda 1920). 72

Figure 3: Anatomical map depicting kundalini’s correspondence with the right vagus nerve (Rele 1931, xx). 90

Figure 4: Journals distributed by the Kundalini Research Institute (KRI), *Journal of Science and Consciousness for Living in the Aquarian Age* (left figure) and *Kundalini Quarterly* (right figure) (ARC, Mss 1, Special Research Collections, UCSB; printed with permission of the Special Research Collections, UCSB). 132

Figure 5: Gopi Krishna (photo credit: unknown; printed with permission of Michael Bradford). 137

Figure 6: Gopi Krishna’s study (photo credit: unknown; printed with permission of Michael Bradford). 169

Figure 7: Cover of Gopi Krishna’s revised 1971 Shambala edition of *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (Krishna 1971). 176

Figure 8: Gopi Krishna’s invitation to Europe by Ursula von Mangoldt (LGK, box 6.1.7., photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich). 184

Figure 9: Folder of the “Second International Conference on Kundalini” (LGK, box 4, photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich). 196

Figure 10: Gopi Krishna’s welcoming at KRFC (ARC, Mss 1, Special Research Collections, UCSB; printed with permission of the Special Research Collections, UCSB). 197

Figure 11: *Spiritual India and Kundalini Magazine*, volume 1, cover and table of contents (scanned by Michael Bradford; printed with permission of *ibid.*). 213

Figure 12: Allahabad Institute for Kundalini Research, *Rules and Regulations* (LGK, box 6.7.2., photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich)..... 214
Figure 13: Letter envelope Weizsäcker to Krishna, 1969, front and back (LGK, box 6.1.5., photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich). 267
Figure 14: Cover of the first edition of *Kundalini: Evolution and Enlightenment* (J. W. White 1979). 299
Figure 15: Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), Mission Statement (ARC, Mss 1, Special Research Collections, UCSB; printed with permission of the Special Research Collections, UCSB). 302
Figure 16: Front page "Kundalini Yoga" series, *Blitz*, April 10, 1976 (LGK, box 5., photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich). 361
Figure 17: Front page "Kundalini Yoga" series, *Blitz*, May 1, 1976 (LGK, box 5., photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich). 362
Figure 18: Front page "Kundalini Yoga" series, *Blitz*, May 8, 1976 (LGK, box 5., photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich). 365
Figure 19: Characteristics of the five basic brain waves (Abhang et al. 2016, 21)..... 397
Figure 20: Elmer Green preparing a research subject for biofeedback experiments during Elmer and Alyce Green's research trip to South Asia in 1973 (ARC, Mss 1, Special Research Collections, UCSB; printed with permission of the Special Research Collections, UCSB). 406
Figure 21: Itzhak Bentov's illustrated image of physio-kundalini's "path of initial stimulus" and its subsequent "normal circulation path" (Bentov 1988b, 186). 423
Figure 22: Itzhak Bentov's illustrated cortical homunculus, depicting the "kundalini current" along the sensory cortex, with pleasure centres (Bentov 1988b, 179). 425
Figure 23: Sannella's categories and subcategories of "objective signs" and "subjective symptoms", with examples from the Kundalini Clinic's case histories (Sannella 1976, 44–51). 442

Figure 24: Current building on Bush Street 1801, San Francisco, where the Kundalini Clinic moved in 1984 (photo credit: Marleen Thaler). 448
Figure 25: Motoyama's illustrations of an AMI with electrodes attached (left figure) and a CI measuring energy ejected through the chakras (right figure) (Motoyama 1978, 118, 94). 477
Figure 26: JFFS newsletter, Special Feature Pandit Gopi Krishna (Nakajima 1981, photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Central Library Zurich). 485
Figure 27: Main gate Esalen Institute, Highway 1, Big Sur, California (photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Esalen Institute). 489
Figure 28: Big Sur coastline with the Esalen baths (photo credit: Marleen Thaler; printed with permission of the Esalen Institute). 491

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Abstract

This study explores the modern history of kundalini with an emphasis on its scientification. Concepts of *kuṇḍalinī* originated in South Asian tantra and yoga texts and practices and have undergone significant transformations since the late nineteenth century. Modernisation processes transformed the premodern South Asian views of *kuṇḍalinī* into modern kundalini concepts, which became a globally discussed topic of late twentieth-century religion. This transformation process can be divided into three chronological periods. The first period involved the initial interest of and interpretations by the Theosophical Society, Hindu reformers, and other South Asian intellectuals during the 1880s and early 1890s. The second period (c. 1896 to 1933) features influential South Asian writers and publication projects, such as Swami Vivekananda, Vasant Rele, and the works published under the name Arthur Avalon, which resulted from the collaboration of several South Asian tantra specialists and John Woodroffe. The third period, the focus of this study, spans from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, marked by the international prominence of the South Asian author Gopi Krishna (1903–1984), whose book *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967) catalysed kundalini's modern heyday. Krishna was also significantly involved in elevating the importance of using empirical scientific methods to research kundalini during this period. This study emphasises the institutionalisation and international collaborations of empirical kundalini research during the third period. Gopi Krishna's pivotal role in initiating and promoting empirical kundalini research through his international projects and collaborations forms the main case study. In addition to Gopi Krishna, the present study examines the involvement of (mainly) US-based institutes as historical examples of empirical kundalini research, such as the Kundalini Clinic and the Esalen Institute. As a concluding analysis, I assess kundalini's relevance within the broader social, cultural, and religious processes of the 1970s and 1980s. I argue that kundalini's significance extends beyond its immediate context, as it uniquely reflects developments in recent religious and cultural history. This study posits that kundalini became so popular because it functioned as a unifying symbol around which different currents of the era converged. The study of kundalini, therefore, facilitates a deeper understanding of the cultural landscape of the time.

Abstract (German)

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht die moderne Geschichte von Kundalini mit dem Schwerpunkt auf dessen Verwissenschaftlichung. *Kuṇḍalinī*-Konzepte entstammen südasiatischen Tantra- und Yoga-Texten und Praktiken und haben seit dem späten 19. Jahrhundert bedeutende Wandlungen erfahren. Verschiedene Modernisierungsprozesse haben zur Transformation vormoderner Ansichten von *kuṇḍalinī* beigetragen, woraufhin sich Kundalini zu einem weltweit diskutierten Thema innerhalb der Religionsgeschichte des späten 20. Jahrhunderts entwickelt hat. Dieser Transformationsprozess lässt sich in drei Phasen unterteilen: Die erste Phase umfasst das anfängliche Interesse an *kuṇḍalinī* und die Interpretationen durch die Theosophische Gesellschaft, hinduistische Reformer und andere südasiatische Intellektuelle während der 1880er und frühen 1890er Jahre. Die zweite Phase (ca. 1890er bis 1930er) zeichnet sich durch die Beschäftigung mit Kundalini durch einflussreiche südasiatische Autoren sowie Publikationsprojekten aus, wie Swami Vivekananda, Arthur Avalon und Vasant Rele. Die dritte Phase erstreckt sich von den späten 1960er bis in die Mitte der 1980er Jahre und stellt den Schwerpunkt dieser Studie dar. Sie ist primär durch die internationale Bekanntheit des südasiatischen Autors Gopi Krishna (1903–1984) geprägt, dessen Buch *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Energy in Man* (1967, dt. als *Kundalini: Erweckung der geistigen Kraft im Menschen*) Kundalinis Blütezeit einleitete. Krishna war auch maßgeblich daran beteiligt, die Anwendung empirischer Methoden zur Erforschung von Kundalini zu propagieren. Die vorliegende Arbeit analysiert Institutionalisierungen sowie internationale Kooperationen der empirischen Kundalini-Forschung während dieser „dritten Phase“. Dabei stellen Krishnas Kundalini-Projekte die Hauptfallstudie dar. Zudem werden die Beteiligungen von (hauptsächlich) US-amerikanischen Institutionen als Beispiele für Kundalini-Forschung beleuchtet, darunter etwa die Kundalini Clinic und das Esalen Institute. Abschließend wird die Relevanz von Kundalini in breiteren sozialen, kulturellen und religiösen Kontexten der 1970er und 1980er Jahre analysiert. Die Bedeutung von Kundalini reicht dabei über dessen unmittelbaren Kontext hinaus und spiegelt auf einzigartige Weise zentrale Entwicklungen in der jüngeren Religions- und Kulturgeschichte wider. In diesem Zusammenhang postuliert diese Studie, dass Kundalini so populär wurde, weil es als vereinendes Symbol fungierte, in welchem verschiedene Strömungen der 1970er und 1980er Jahre zusammenflossen. Die Untersuchung von Kundalini ermöglicht daher ein tieferes Verständnis der kulturellen und religiösen Landschaft jener Zeit.