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A STUDY ON HATHA YOGA PRACTICES AND KUNDALINI AWAKENING IN  
KAKKANADAN'S "SRI CHAKRAM"

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ABSTRACT

Kakkanadan paved a new path in Malayalam by plunging deep into the heritage to bring forth tantric concept and to align it with literature to give a different dimension of thinking. His "Sri Chakram" occupies a unique position among his literary works. Through this story the author portrays a painter, a sensuous model and a guru. The story shows a lot of direct evidences for tantric practices in India, to arouse Kundalini. Hatha yoga practices harmonize the mental and pranic energy in human body. It is mainly focused on awakening Kundalini at the base of spine.

He begins the story by showing the efforts of the painter to invoke Kundalini in his body. The painter practices bhastra, a very important breath retention method in Hatha Yoga to awake Kundalini. An attempt has made in article to bring out tantric concept like Kundalini awakening through Hatha yoga practices, how they have influenced the inner core of a writer like Kakkanadan.

**Keywords:** Serpent power (Kundalini), Kumbhaka, Bhastra, Hatha yoga, Muladhara.

Introduction

Kundalini is the source of energy in human body. Arousing kundalini through yoga practices will lead to liberation. Sir John Woodroffe explains:

Man is the microcosm of the macrocosm. Kundalini Sakti is at rest –that is, in the form of static potential energy. This Sakti coiled around the Supreme Siva is called Maha- Kundalini, to distinguish it from the same power which exists in individual bodies, and which is called Kundalini. (Serpent Power 36)

Human being is considered as the microcosm of the macrocosm. When Kundalini awakes it pierces through the six knots to reach sahasrara. If one attains that stage one will get liberation from all bondages. In short, Kundalini is the individual bodily, representation of the great cosmic power (Sakti) which creates and sustains the universe. The rousing and stirring up of Kundalini merges an individual to the universal consciousness or union of the two is the essence of Indian yoga.

Kundalini is described as being coiled up at the base of the spine; usually within Muladhara. At the base of the spinal cord every human being has a powerful, yet dormant source of energy. Sir John Woodroffe observes this idea as:

The word 'Kundala' means coiled. The power in the goddess Kundalini or that which is coiled ; for the form is that of a coiled sleeping serpent in the lowest bodily centre, at the base of the spiral column, until by the means described she is aroused in that yoga is named after her, Kundalini is the Divine Cosmic Energy in bodies. (Serpent Power 1)

Kundalini is therefore the mightiest manifestation of creative power in human body. Jung's seminar on Kundalini Yoga, presented to the Psychological Club in Zurich in 1932, has been considered as a milestone in understanding of the transformation of inner experience. Jung describes serpent power as:

"Sakti- Kundalini or Devi Kundalini is goddess. She is the female principle, the self manifesting power which surrounds the gem at the center, the gold , seed, the pearl, the egg. The Kundalini serpent is however, also Devi – Kundalini, a chain of glittering lights, the 'world bewilder'". (The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga 74)

Jung explains how the awakening of Kundalini takes place:

"By the grace of heaven, which is the Kundalini something in you, an urge in you, a leading spark, some incentive.... and that is Kundalini". (74)

Jung continues:

"The Kundalini in psychological terms is that which makes you go on the greatest adventures. It is the quest that makes life liveable, and that is Kundalini, this is the divine urge".(21)

Jung explains Kundalini awakening and its results thus:

"From the standpoint of the gods this world is less than child's play, it is a seed in the earth, a mere potentiality. Our whole world of consciousness is only a seed of the future. And when you succeed in the awakening of Kundalini, so that she begins to move out of here mere potentiality, you necessarily start a world which is a work of eternity, totally different from our world". (26)

Jung says:

"To activate the unconscious means to awaken the divine the Devi, Kundalini to begin the development of the supra personal within the individual in order to kindle the lights of the gods, Kundalini which is to be awakened in the sleeping Muladhara world, is the supra personal, the non – ego ..... for this reason Kundalini is the same principle as the Scoter, the saviour serpent of the Gnostics. (68)

Hatha yoga helps to hold mind and body in a harmony. It helps come out from all obstacles which hinder spiritual development. It helps to purify moral, mental, intellectual and spiritual side of human beings. It helps to navigate through life in a phenomenal way. Hatha yoga practices are designed to bring harmony within ourselves and with the Universe. Sir John Woodroffe writes:

"Hatha Yoga comprises those sadhanas, or prescribed methods of exercise and practice, which are concerned with the physical body. The word hatha is composed of the syllables 'ha' and 'tha' which means the 'Sun' and 'moon'- that is, the prana (which dwells in the heart) and apana (which dwells in the Muladhara) air. These two by their disagreement prevent each other from leaving body, but when they in accord to leave it. Both their union and yoga in the susumna and the process leading there is called pranayama. Hatha yoga or hatha vidya is therefore the science of the life principle, using that world in the sense of the various forms vital air (vayu) into which prana is divided. Prana in the body of the individual is a part of the universal breath (prana) or the "Great Breath". (Serpent Power 198-210)

When one is engrossed in material world, it is difficult for him to transcend his level of consciousness to experience the higher consciousness. It is only through the awakening of dormant energy in one's body – Kundalini, can achieve this goal. Yoga has gradual and systematic methods for awakening Kundalini. The painter wants to get liberation, in order to attain that state of bliss he uses a model. The very beginning gives a plethora of images on yoga. Kakkanadan writes:

Awake, the coiled up sleeping serpent power in Muladhara (13)

This very sentence substantiates the undertone of this story of Sakti and he is trying to arouse Kundalini in him. Awakening of Kundalini is basically the awakening of your own awareness and consciousness. Sir John Woodroffe reveals this idea of Kundalini as:

The Devi Kundalini, luminous lighting shining in the hollow of this lotus like a chain of brilliant lights, the world-bewilder who maintains all breathing creatures ,asleep coiled three and half times around the linga, covering with Her head in Brahma Dvera. (Serpent Power 118)

Kundalini lies in the Muladhara in the form of a sleeping serpent. She is coiled up in three and a half around a Siva linga. The opening line of "Sri Chakram" gives ample evidence to the practice of yoga. A worshipper especially a yogi does a lot of yoga practices to arouse Kundalini. The painter sits in padmasana and does pranayama, Kakkanadan conveys:

Sitting here in padmasana, blocking the perineal region, by retaining the air to ignite the fire in Svadistana chakra to make you awake. When you awake, you pierce through three knots (granthis) and six Chakras and reach Sahasrara to unite with Siva. As a result of this, elixir like nectar will permeates 72000 nerves in my body. Be merciful mother, awake, awake, awake. (13)

These words of the painter throws more light on the in depth knowledge of the author on yoga practices. Sir John Woodroffe's authentic words substantiates Kakkanadan's idea on nadis , Kundalini awakening and its effects. According to Hatha yoga scriptures, there are 72000 nadis in human body which control all the bodily functions. Among these, ida and pingala are the most prominent. The pingala nadi carries solar energy and ida nadi carries lunar energy. These two flow on either side of spinal cord, as ida on left and pingala on right. They carry high range of energy to chakra points. If the energy in the nadis does not flow freely, energy will be blocked. Hence the first and foremost function of Hatha yoga is the purification of the nadis. Muladhara is the meeting place of ida, pingala and sushumna.hence it is called as yukta triveni. Sir John Woodroffe explains the nerves (nadi) in human body as:

"The nadis (nerves) are the conduits of prana. Through them its solar and lunar currents run. Ida, pingala and susumna are the chief among the nadis. Out of these three, susumna is the chief. The three are also known as Ganga(ida), Yamuna (pingala), Saraswathi (susumna), after the three sacred rivers of India. The muladhara is the meeting place of the three "rivers" and hence is called Yukta-Triveni". (Serpent Power 111-112)

The main object of hatha yoga is to connect finite body with infinite source. Pranayama practices balance the pranic energy in the body. The purpose of the asana is to bring balance to ida and pingala to ignite Kundalini. These words give a crystal clear picture for the yoga practice of the painter. He wants to enjoy the bliss. He wants to get liberation that is why he is begging the divine mother to awake from sleep. These words shed more light on Kakkanadan's in- depth knowledge on Hatha yoga to arouse Kundalini. The painter first practices pranayama (breath- control). Through this Kakkanadan shows the exact pranayama practices of a yogi to awake the sleeping serpent in his body. Sir John Woodroffe observers this very idea as:

Pranayama is first practiced with a view to control and develop prana. The latter is then moved into Susumna by the stirring of Kundalini, which blocks the entry (Brahma Dvara) thereto .With the disappearance of prana there forms, Ida and Pingala "die" and the Prana in Susumna by means of the Sakti Kundalini pierces the six Chakras which block the passage in the Bhrama nadi and eventually becomes laya in the in the Great Breath which is the final end and aim of its process. (Serpent Power 212-213)

Kakkanadan's "Sri Chakram" gives ample evidence for Jung's ideas on Kundalini and Woodroffe's idea on Kundalini awakening. The painter in the story wants to get liberation. His efforts to portray the Mother became in vain. Mother is merciful; the painter only needs Her bliss for salvation. Kakkanadan tries to portray the inability of the painter to paint the Goddess on his canvas as:

“You are the abode of sound and meaning, I must have portrayed you on my canvas. What will I paint today? How will I portray you? The brush had fallen from my hand, my mind is frozen now. Kundalini, you are sleeping by drinking the elixir like nectar dripping from my Ida and Pingala”.(16 )

The painter does pranayama, which is a main component of yoga. He blocks the air by Kumbhaka to stir Kundalini which blocks the entry to Brahmawara. Then only Kundalini could pierce six Chakras to reach Sahasrara. Kundalini is sleeping by drinking the elixir which drips from the nadis. The painter does Bhastra to arouse Kundalini to pierce through the knots. Kakkannadan shows the painter's effort to arouse Serpent power with great efficiency. Sir John Woodroffe observes this yoga practice as:

Bhastra is an important Kumbhaka, which aids the Prana to break through the knots (granthis), which are firmly placed in the susumna. (Serpent power 214)

Sir John Woodroffe's authentic observation of Pranayama practices substantiates the idea of the painter's perseverance to wake Kundalini. The sleeping Kundalini resides in Muladhara and its ascent is through susumna nadi. A sadhaka should be a regular practitioner of yoga, and then only one will be in communication with susumna. The painter becomes desperate due to the inability to portray Almighty Mother on the canvas. His brush fails to portray Her. His mind is frozen. Kundalini power itself is Sabda Brahman. The Kundalini in the body of painter is sleeping; he tries to arouse it as:

I sat in padmasana posture in order to stop the flow of elixir. I retained breath to make you starve. I tried to invoke you from Muladhara. I craved for the union of you with the prana existing in the thousand petaled lotus. As a result of this union, I urged for a drastic change in my intellect and become wise by the exploration of the secret of your Sri Chakra (18).

These words clearly depict how Kakkannadan skilfully draw the painter's efforts to wake Kundalini by doing Kumbhaka. These lines clearly portray his ardent desire for bliss. He does Kumbhaka to wake Kundalini to reach sahasrara. Sir John Woodroffe shows:

The Yogi, assuming the Padmasana posture, inhales (puraka) and exhales (rechaka) alternatively through the left (ida) and right (pingala) nostrils, retaining the breath meanwhile (kumbhaka) for gradually increasing periods. The deities of elements of pranayama are Brahma, Rudra and Vishnu. The prana enters Susumna and if retained sufficiently long goes, after the piercing of the Chakras to the Bhramarandhra. (Serpent Power 214)

Woodroffe's authentic words give a crystal clear picture of kumbhaka and pranayama. The painter does this method of yoga to inflame Kundalini from muladhara to attain salvation. Even though the painter could not stir Kundalini, his inner urge for awaking Kundalini is evident through the story. Overcoming the bondages and experiencing Divine Mother in every aspect of life is called liberation.

## Conclusion

Kakkannadan has fantastically woven this story by interlinking ancient wisdom with modern vision. A close analysis of his work throws more light on his admiration for ancient knowledge, unquenchable thirst for attaining liberation. His devotion for Almighty Mother is shown through each sentence. His gratitude for the Almighty Mother, in the form of Kundalini is unexplainable. He adores Mother than anything in this Universe. He needs only Her blessings. His words portray the deep rooted desire of a sadhaka. Only one who is thoroughly passionate about such tantric practices will be able to follow that path. He wants to experience life more intensely. The painter tries to arouse Kundalini without necessary guidance and assistance. Hence he loses mental and physical balance.

Kakkannadan has imbibed all the core concepts of hatha yoga practices and Kundalini to awake serpent power in human body. His "Sri Chakram" gives ample evidence for Jung's ideas on Kundalini and Woodroffe's idea on Kundalini awakening. The author shows his deep knowledge by encompassing the details of Hatha Yoga practices and Kundalini.

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