Yoga from the Yoginīs’ point of view*

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to trace and to analyse the co-occurrence of the terms yoga and yoginī in the selected corpus of yogic and tantric texts (Vidyāpīṭha). The findings demonstrate that these terms start to appear together only from a precise point in time and in the sources that belong to or were influenced by a particular tantric tradition, namely, the Sakti-tantras belonging to the Vidyāpīṭha (classification of A. Sanderson), and it is within this part of the corpus that the yoginīs (be them women or supernatural beings) are said to perform a very particular kind of yoga, that breaks the current definitions of yoga as being voluntary and conscious practice.

The expressions ‘a yoginī practicing yoga’ or ‘yoginīs related to yoga’ seem to be self-evident and redundant when referred to dictionary definitions, including that of Monier-Williams, which gives yoginī as a derivation from yoga and a feminine form of yogin.1 However, the link of yoginī and yoga is not in fact obvious at all. We encounter these two terms in a number of texts and they have nothing to do with each other in most of them.2

One of the results of my Ph. D. thesis (2006) was the establishment of the typology of meanings of the term yoginī and its synonyms in purānic and tantric medieval Śaiva texts. This typology proves that the terms yoga and yoginī cannot be easily connected.

For example, the MBh is full of yogins and yoga; however, the only occurrence of the term yoginī as such indicates in this text a sort of astronomic junction.3 In older Śaiva purāṇas, there are two types of yoginīs: the non-Śaiva and the Śaiva.4 The first type, appearing in the earlier purāṇas representing brahmanic tradition, is linked to a very particular kind of ‘yoga’, that of the creation of the universe and of the various species that populate it. It has nothing to do with a set of particular physical and mental exercises and, even if some practices of this sort appear in the purānic descriptions of the non-Śaiva yoginīs in question, they are called tapas and not yoga.5 The occurrences of the term yogini used to qualify Śatī-Pārvati constitute a bridge between the Śaiva and the non-Śaiva types of yoginīs. The earlier purānic texts also prefer to use the term tapas and not yoga to talk about her exploits. The goddess receives the title of yoginī in the purāṇas not because of
her particular qualities achieved through yogic practices, but mostly because she is the wife of Śiva who is a great yogin.6

The other type of the yoginis, the Śaiva ones, desired or feared, can be found in both purānic and tantric texts, as well as in lay medieval Indian literature. These Śaiva yoginis can assume the following four aspects: they can be: (i) real women, sometimes engaged in tantric practice, (ii) non-human beings or possessing spirits of ambiguous and mostly harmful nature, manifesting themselves to the practitioners after some emotionally powerful and often transgressive practice, these also appear in purānic stories where they are helping the gods to destroy the demons. Following the same logic, they are invoked by initiated Śaivas in order to magically destroy the enemies of kings, (iii) Yoginis are worshipped in their symbolic forms in mandalas as surrounding the absolute deity; they can also symbolise the centres of the body, the transitions between these centres and the accompanying states of consciousness; they embody mantras, which their names serve to codify and to decode, and they often appear as mantras or vidyās themselves, (iv) finally, a yoginī is a name and a quality of the absolute, representing the highest state of consciousness in the radical traditions of the initiated Śāktas such as Trika and Kālikula.

This net of overlapping forms and functions of yoginis incites us to analyse how these meanings can be related to yoga and what this yoga, or, rather, these yogas might be. In order to clarify the relation between the terms yoga and yoginī, I shall now address the yogic texts. The yoginis (along with feminine figures in general) are absent from the YS, the text that has become a root one in discussion of what yoga is. Moreover, I have not come across a single description of a woman who practices ‘classical’ yoga in early texts, and who would be termed a yoginī for this reason. However, the siddhis that can be gained with the help of the practices described by the YS are the same as those yoginis possess in tantric texts.7

In later texts on yoga, such as the HYP, the terms yoga, yogin and yoginis appear together. In the HYP the result of practice is, in fact, comparable to the state of yoginis.8 These yoginis, whose state the successful practitioner achieves, together with the capacity to perform creation, preservation and destruction of the universe, can come from one source only: the early texts of Trika and/or of Kālikula. We also find yogini in the passage dealing with sexual practices and the war of fluids à la David White, (which clearly suppose the participation of real women), namely vajroli, sahajoli and amaroli.9 HYP defines yogini in terms of the mastery of physical and subtle bodies.10 These references have greatly influenced the European vision of what is called tantric yoga. However, Śaiva tantric influence in these passages is not reflected in secondary literature.

Khecarī-mudrā and khecarī-siddhi are mentioned in GherS.11 The text acknowledges the same practices as HYP, but does not mention any yoginis. The common feature between these yogic texts is the fact that they refer to tantras and to Minanath.12 The most important aspect of this is the fact that the state of or capacities of khecarī, or a sky-going yogini constitutes one of the results of the
yogic practice. This cannot be reduced only to grammatical or metrical reasons, because the yogic texts could have easily expressed the same meaning without referring to khecari, as was done by YS. This sort of emphasis of the feminine is exceptional in yogic texts, whereas it is quite common in the antinomian Śaiva tantric practices, which we shall address further. This allows us to conclude that the terms yoga and yogini do not appear together in the yogic texts before the advent of traces of tantric influence of a very particular kind. Thus, the terms yoga and yogini were probably not originally connected. We also have synonyms for yogini such as dākini, sākini and others, which cannot be derived from yoga, and the first occurrences of these terms do not belong to the context of yoga, but lead us rather to the cremation ground, where these beings are said to devour human bodies.\(^{13}\)

In order to discover what kind of tradition could have influenced the later yogic texts, we have to address the Śaiva and the Śākta texts of the initiated. If we look at yogini-related practices from a Śaiva perspective, taking Śaivism as a unified system as proposed by Sanderson (1990), that is including Śāktas, we shall find yoginis with certainty only where we enter the territory of the Bhairavaśāstra.\(^{14}\) Within Bhairavaśāstra an important distinction between the Mantrapīṭha (or the seat of mantras, which in many respects also means a male god-oriented tradition) and the Vidyāpīṭha (or the seat of invocations rather related to the goddesses) should be made. The first is represented by the text and the cult related to Svacchandabhairava. SV provides us with a few references concerning yoginis; the list of dreams confirming that a disciple is apt to receive the initiation mentions among the auspicious ones a vision of vīras and vīreśīs, selling human flesh, obtaining a great mātsyas and bhairavas, etc.\(^{15}\) These vīreśīs seem to be real women, participating in the practice along with vīras, literaly 'heroes'. The practices of these vīras are described in chapter 2, and they include the usage of a rosary made of mahāsāṅkha, which is a standard name in tantras for human (skull)-bones, worship eight cremation grounds outside a maṇḍala, and other transgressive elements. The practice of vīras promises the opportunity to play with women as a reward.\(^{16}\) This should be read as a confirmation of the growing importance of women in this practice, although they are not called yoginis in this passage. In the description of the arrangement of the worlds in chapter 10 we find two references to yoginis. In the first case they surround a particular form of Rudra called Ḥatlaka, who governs one of the underworlds.\(^{17}\) Alexis Sanderson has kindly provided an important citation that identifies a doctrine bearing the name of the mentioned Rudra and the Kula-stream.\(^{18}\)

In the second reference of SV 10, it is the goddess who is worshipped by yoginis and others.\(^{19}\) However, SV does not invoke yoginis yet. Even in a detailed list of magic women attracted by practice in 2.283f we find no yoginis. Among the doctrines known to SV we should mention Pāśupata, Kāpālīka and other Atimārgic traditions such as Vaimalas, Mausulas and Kārukas. SV states that these doctrines
can take their followers only to a certain state within the tattva ladder described in chapter 11, whereas the Mantramārga, expounded here by SV itself, promises the highest state. Among the listed doctrines, only the Kāpālikas might be related to yoginiś.

The very last reference to yoginiś, and the most important one, occurs in chapter 15. Logically, chapter 12 (explaining the tattvas and siddhis) should be the concluding chapter of the whole text. However, the text has 15 chapters in total, and it was known to Kṣemarāja in this form. The last chapters deal with the following subjects: chapter 13 deals with black magic and is very close in style to the kāpālika yoga, explained in SV 6 and which has a close parallel in TS 23. Chapter 14 explains various mudrās. These mudrās are out of context, because they are not used by the human practitioner anywhere else in the text. Chapter 15 gives a secret code for the words denoting components of the human body and for different kinds of women involved in what are apparently sexual practices (v. 1-23). This chapter also explains chommas or secret non-verbal signs to be shown to each other by the initiates (24-32a). We have a number of passages dealing with chommas in BY 53, YSP, TS, but the short list of SV does not demonstrate any clear connection with these texts. The last passage of SV alludes to melaka or the practice of union and to the yoginiś that bestow boon in this context. Most important is the fact that chapter 15 suggests interactions with the yoginiś are part of the practice, and the terms yoginiś and yoga occur in the same passage. These three last chapters are closer in their style to the Vidyāpītha than to the Mantrapītha and there are two ways to interpret their presence in the text. As for the second, it is possible to suggest that the whole text can be read at two levels: for the usual worshippers (purer and less radical) and for the vīras, who would need a special language to hide from public their transgressive practices. These practitioners would have access to oral tradition as well, and the last 3 chapters probably reflect that.

Among the practices that are traditionally associated with the ‘classical’ variant of yoga, we find some references in SV to breath-exercises and a developed structure of the subtle body, including various channels and knots, and yoga related to sounds. And yet it is clear, that the practice linking yoga and yoginiś cannot originally come from the SV itself.

Another current within Mantramārga, called Vidyāpītha, should be understood as a set of different traditions, among which three can be distinguished. All of them, the cult of Tumburu-bhairava cult, which I leave aside, the Yāmalas and the Śakti-tantras incorporate yoginiś. In these texts, from the fifth to sixth centuries on, the yoginiś as well as dākinīś and śākinīś, are linked to yoga. The earliest text that has come down to us on this subject is BY. This text deals with the classification of yoginiś in its ancient variety, lists the secret signs serving as a means of communication between the sādhakas and the yoginiś, explains the procedures of worship and the arrangements of 24 yoginiś. Yoginiś in BY seem to be of two types: (i) those who, along with mothers receive the worship: these should be
considered rather to be deities or symbols, and (ii) those who are in human form and who should be found, recognised, addressed with a special symbolic language. The post-initiation practice described in BY allows us to suggest that the third ontological position of yoginīs in this text is that of a male sādhaka engaged in a very special practice which requires clothing and behaviour similar to that of yoginīs.26 BY is one of the texts that reflects what is called Kula, or the Clan [of the yoginīs] tradition, and it influenced numerous later texts. BY has almost equal number of references to the yoginīs, as well as to yoga. But what sort of yoga? The ‘classical’ yoga is virtually absent in the checked chapters. Yoga here seems to be a practice of mantras, the encounters with human yoginīs on special dates and the invocation of wild and dangerous deities with transgressive substances, such as human flesh and blood: the practitioner goes about with a skull, puts on women’s clothing, is associated with inauspicious substances, places, and sacrifices.

Within Śakti-tantras, the third group within Vidyāpītha, the visible subgroups are the texts of Trika (SYM, TS, MVT) and of Kālikula including Krama (JY including YSP, KSb, KS). In both of these subdivisions the feminine is predominant and in some cases only goddesses are worshiped. In these texts, we find complicated many-layer arrangements of the feminine and masculine deities in Trika, a system of twelve Kālis who are also conceptualised as yoginīs in Krama, as well as the first lists of the 64 yoginīs. The yoginīs have a full set of criss-crossing and overlapping forms and functions: a real woman, who had been initiated and played the role of partner in sexual practices;27 a being or a spirit invoked by mantras and transgressive practices; a mantra itself; a representation of the body-centres and of the energy; and a goddess ‘embodying’ a particular geographical point, etc. TS and YSP texts propose highly transgressive practices including the offering and consumption of wine, meat, and products of the body, manipulations with dead bodies and even human sacrifices.

Now I propose to look at different yogas from within the Śakti-tantra division. In Trika we shall briefly look at SYM, TS, and MVT. SYM follows the tradition of the Yāmalas and in the majority of passages the practices described have little to do with ‘classical yoga’, while yoginīs are abundant. The practices related to these yoginīs include mastery of the mantras, the offering and consumption of impure or forbidden substances including human flesh, the offering of one’s own blood at night in a cremation ground, visualisations, the construction of maṇḍalas, etc. However, the āsanas and other ‘classical’ elements of Patañjali’s YS do not play any important role. Even yoga as such does not seem to constitute an important category in SYM, and it appears mostly as a part of the noun yogesvari, i.e. Queen of yoga.

Later TS, calling SYM its ‘root’-text, combines yogini-related practices and the later tendencies of the development of ‘classical’ yoga, such as the elaborated system of cakras and channels in the body. TS 1.136 mentions practices such as recaka, pūraka, and kumbhaka; terms such as yoga and yogin have much more
importance when compared to SYM. Chapter 2 is an explanation of the links of letters and deities, which is called yoga by Bhairava in 2.139. It means a correct combination of short and long syllables, respectively rudras and yoginis as explained in 5.12. The union of numerous yogas in this text has the following consequences: objects previously considered as ‘real’ and as being outside the body of the worshipped are now internalised and we find that places of worship now belong to the subtle body in 15.36f. Yoga of the channels is explained in chapter 24. This chapter provides the only reference to yogāsana,28 and to a practice that enables a person not only to leave their own body but also to enter the bodies of others.29 A simple form of the kundalini-system can be found in chapters 25 and 27. Of most importance, however, is chapter 16, which provides unique information about the interrelations of yoga and yoginis, and gives a typology of the practices of yoginis (to be discussed further). But the ‘classical’ yoga is only one of many yogas known to this text. The goddess asks Bhairava to explain the ‘root’-yoga in 23.2 to her, and his reply actually consist in describing of kāpālika-like magic practices. However, both this statement and an earlier variant of these magic formulas are borrowed from SV 13. Generally it looks highly likely that at least two yogas, the yogini-related one and the updated ‘classical’ one, came together in TS.

This tendency is even more pronounced in MVT.30 The following aspects of these yogas are the most pertinent for my analysis: (i) the acceptance or rejection of brahmanic values, (ii) the time needed to achieve the highest state, (iii) the description of the highest state (samādhi), and (iv) the active/passive state of the practitioner. First of all, in MVT we find the references to the eight-limbed yoga, or the ‘classical’ yoga associated with the work of Patañjali. This purity-oriented yoga chooses to expunge all impurity and, in what became a classical reading of YS, postulates control over the processes of the body and the consciousness. Samādhi31 in this yoga would signify a cessation of mental operations. This yoga is oriented towards a liberation that can be achieved only after a long period of time (unspecified in the text). We also find references to the six-limbed yoga, traditionally linked to the philosophy of Śiddhānta. This yoga is theistic and insists upon tarka, logic. The uppermost state in this yoga is also called samādhi. Here, however, the meaning is different: besides a more ‘classical’ reading, it can even represent a sort of trance, according to the later commentaries cited by Vasudeva.32 It continues to be a purity-oriented yoga, in which the result is achieved by initiation and the rituals that follow it. As a rule, complete liberation can be achieved only after death.

But the yoga related to yoginis is also present in this text (not, unfortunately, a subject investigated in Vasudeva’s study), and it is an altogether different thing. Basically, it is a set of transgressive practices, understood as the conscious abolishment of the rules of brahmanic society. This yoga constitutes an extremely rapid method: the time of achievement is counted in months. This rapidity has an impact upon all its aspects: the practitioner is not the one who tries, of his own
volition, to stop mental processes; rather he is passive, he is just a creature suddenly grasped by yoginīs. The highest state, samādhi, which from a Śaiva point of view might be seen as the state of equality/unity with Śiva, is here a state of possession/pervasion by the power of Śiva. However, what most strikingly differentiates this yoga from all the other approaches is neither this rapidity, nor its transgressive rituals, but rather the extremely important role of the yoginīs in its practice. Even if MVT has a tendency to internalise the yoginīs, we still find the references to the practitioner becoming like yoginī (8.1, 19.29) and the leader of their cakra (11.14), being able to fly with them (22.26), obtaining the knowledge of yoginīs (15.28), becoming a joy of their family (17.23), and becoming a part of it (19.25f). The union or melaka with them is an important part of its practice, bringing siddhis (19.21, 22.32); the description of a ritual of attraction of yoginīs with one’s own blood is also provided (10.27f).

The Kālikula division of Vidyāpītha, especially in its Krama variety, preserves the antinomian BY-like representations of yoginīs. This is particularly prominent in the Jayadrathayāmala, a text compiled in Kashmir around the tenth century, but preserving much more archaic elements, possibly coming back to the Kāpālika tradition.

For the Vidyāpītha texts in general, the role of yoginīs in its practices can be summarised as follows:

1. With regard to the source of its doctrine, this comes from the mouth of yoginī; the doctrine is propounded by yoginīs, who also serve as the guarantors of its correct transmission and preservation.

2. At the institutional level, yoginīs give permission for the bestowing and receiving of initiation by the granting of signs in dreams. They themselves initiate people; yoginīs guard the respect of secrets and control post-initiation practices; and they also attest to the levels of the practice. At the opposite poles of the scale of various practitioners, we find ‘a sacrificial victim of yoginīs’ and ‘the beloved of yoginīs’ or, even better, ‘the son of yoginīs’. The first state is a punishment for non-performance of rituals or for the disclosure of secrets, while named rewards stimulate the initiated one to perform practices correctly.

3. At the ritual level, forbidden and sacred substances, plants, animals, sounds, trees and objects of worship, places and people, are all qualified in their relation to yoginī as such; meetings with yoginīs is the essence of ritual practice. No practice is possible without mantras, and the most powerful mantras are those transmitted by yoginīs or related to them (i.e. calling them). The main goddess cannot be reached, unless the yoginīs take practitioner to her. In short, the identification (external as well as internal) of the male practitioner with the yogini is a necessary condition of the praxis.

4. With respect to the representation of the micro- and macrocosm, the yoginīs constitute the manifested universe. They also encode the various states of consciousness. All transitions and transformations go through them and a net of power-places related to yoginīs covers the entire territory of India. Yoginīs pervade
the subtle body of the practitioner and they are mantras that permit the linking together of the micro- and macrocosmic levels. 40

(5) As for the result of practice, the supernatural capacities that a male sādhaka is supposed to obtain are exactly those that yoginīs have. The practitioner loses his own identity and flies up with the yoginīs into the sky, becoming, in fact, like a yogini. The highest level he can achieve is that of the non-dual cosmic consciousness, reabsorbing all: it is nothing but Goddess, also qualified as yogini. 41

Although as represented in the tantras of the Vidyāpītha, women enjoy very high respect, while for a man to achieve something is exceptional, we should not take this as a sign of equality between women and yoginīs. 42 We shall now concentrate our attention only upon those aspects that are important for the understanding of what yoga is when related to yoginīs with the help of two examples from TS 16 and NT 20.

The classification of yoginīs in TS 16 43 opposes the highest yoginīs, who appear to be already perfect 44 and therefore do not practice anything, and the lower ones, characterised by the fact that they ‘obtain’ yoga. Their practices can hardly be called yoga if one has YS in mind. What is more, it is clearly opposed to japa, homa, and vrata (v. 163), which seem to refer here to a normal religious practice. Yoginīs, attracting by ruse, always drink vital breath (prāṇā) or blood, and in order to change their form some of them kill a pāśu or carry men away. Some have the ability to read the minds of others; others can move as they wish by the power of their mantra or assume multiple forms; others know the past, the present and the future and possess the eight qualities (those of YS). TS gives an important résumé, listing the four means by which these yoginīs can achieve higher status: by yoga, by tapas, by vision of (the deity) of their mantra, and by sacrificing a living being who has been born a number of times for this purpose. 45 The tapas does not mean anything different from the brahmanic understanding of it. Yoga in this context might refer to the combination of ‘classical’ yoga with visualisations and kundalini-like practices. The vision of the deity of one’s own mantra is the way to express the successful practice of mantra, i.e. mantrasiddhi, a control over the deity. The last practice refers to finding, sacrificing (and eating) a living being who has particular body-signs and is born between one and seven times especially for this purpose. The descriptions of such practice pervade multiple tantric texts can even be found in RT. Baka, the king of Kashmir, was sacrificed by a yogini Bhaṭṭā, who flew up in the sky as soon as she performed it. 46 In TS 7, there is a practice—also a human sacrifice—to be performed by a sādhaka in order to gain the power of flight. 47

Lower yoginīs, however, in order to obtain the basic quality, which is the ability to change form, should, besides attracting blood (v. 181-214), also perform a set of colourful practices, such as urinating in a particular manner, or putting human bones in the kitchen pot of another person. These strange practices do not seem to have directly transformative potential, but they serve to attract a victim whose blood/vital energy or sacrifice provides new supernatural capacities for a yogini.
TS 16 thus proposes the perspective of at least two meanings of the term yoga. In fact, all practices described can be united by the term yoga, and this, in a larger sense, would signify a method; however, we also have references to yoga's being only one of many possible means for the yogini to achieve a higher status. The sādhakas seem to achieve similar results by performing exactly the same actions as yoginis, mirroring their practice.

We do not find in the tantras any moral judgement of these actions of yoginis, except in NT 20. The goddess, concerned about the state of humans, asks Śiva how it is possible that these creatures (yoginis and others) are so cruel, why they drain the prānā of living creatures and why they kill. The Lord replies that when they drain the energy or kill paśus, they follow the teaching of Śiva. In fact, they are free from anger and desire to kill, and by killing paśus they perform yāga to the god of gods. They are the protectors of the teaching of the great Bhairava. Moreover, the paśus were created only for this purpose—to be used in the ritual (yāga) of the lord (pati). The term upayukta rather than 'killing' is underlined by Śiva. This term is a derivation of upa-yuj, and thus can be related to yoga. Here the yoga would be intended for the paśus, who, once killed, are linked to the great god and thus liberated, this being considered as grace and not violence. It is exactly this that is understood under the term yoga in NT.

The text represents yoga as being of three kinds: supreme, subtle, and physical, all three types here being related to yoginis. The highest yoga (v. 11-21), the closest to the samādhi of a more 'classical' vision, would be a direct merging with the absolute. The action of the highest yogini towards paśu is compared to the process of Śaiva initiation, namely, the immediate destruction of impurities. The separation from the body is taken to be a liberating process here and not killing. As for the second type of yoga, sūkṣma (v. 22–37), it is described in terms of the attraction of a victim and the extraction of his vital essences. NT, above all in the explanation of Kṣemarāja, represents the process as possession. It is also close to the Śaiva initiation, where the principle of consciousness of the guru enters the body of the disciple and, being joined with his principle of consciousness, drives it up along the central channel. Both, possession by yogini and the process of initiation, are described by the same term, āveśa. Here the object of action is rather the vital energy of the person. The third type, sthūla yoga, is related to the physical body, and the main concern here is to be protected from the physical attacks of malevolent creatures, especially from dākinīs/sākinīs and people who use black magic. Again, none of these types of yogini-related yogas (also practiced by the initiated, v. 41f) can be linked to something known from more 'classical' yogic texts.

However, this yoga has some important Śaiva predecessors. On the basis of comparative analysis of the tantric and non-tantric texts that mention Śaiva yoginis, I came to the conclusion that the Śaiva yoginis, linked to a particular way of achieving siddhis and liberation, could appear only when the following closely related conditions were reunited: (i) when a rapid and effective religious
practice had been established, the accent being placed on achieving a high state by performing ritual acts within one life (visible already in the Pāśupata tradition), (ii) when a practice predominantly orientated to this world had been formulated: obtaining power over all women, becoming a king, destroying all enemies, flight, etc., (iii) when progress in Śaiva practice had been connected to a set of what, from a brahmanic point of view, were highly transgressive rituals, (iv) when all this had been connected by an imagery of the Śaivas in which Śiva is represented as an ambiguous figure surrounded by wild, crazy, shouting, intoxicated gānas, who soon become yoginīs.58

The Pāśupata tradition, which does not itself mention any yoginī, influenced later yoginī-related currents in a number of details, that is, in the description of siddhis, in the time taken for the achievement of their signs, in the logic of the rapid progress mentioned above, and even in the terms used.59 A set of strange practices that include the necessity to complicate one's own life in a radical way by pretending to be crazy or criminal is also known to the Lākulas.60 However, in most cases it is in the tradition of the Kāpālikas, with its antinomian practices, that scholars have tried to find the sources of the practices related to yoginīs.61 The question of whether the Kāpālikas could have been the ‘fathers’ of the yoginīs deserves special attention.

Indeed, in medieval Indian literature we do find the texts that place the Kāpālikas together with the practice of magic containing the most antinomian elements, such as human sacrifices. This is the case in Bhavabhūti’s MMadh, DKC of Daṇḍin, Kathāsaritsāgara of Somadeva, etc.62 The Kāpālikas, indeed influenced the rituals of the later tantric traditions. But it is hard to separate their ideas in texts such as BY and JY from the later Mantrāmārgic development. Moreover, it is not until the seventh century drama of Bhavabhūti, Mālatīmādhava, that we have a clearly expressed verbal link between yoginīs and Kāpālika practices.63 From the point of view expressed in SV and TS, referring to kāpālika-yoga, these people practiced some sort of black magic, killing or bringing under control others through the manipulation of herbs, blood, poison and similar substances but, even in the texts of the Vidyāpiṭha, they are not related to the yoginīs in explicit way.

This seem to be contradictory and I propose the following possibilities to explain the situation: (i) the practitioners of Vidyāpiṭha itself were seen as Kāpālikas by outsiders as this seems to be the case with Aghoraghaṇṭā and Kāpālakunḍalī, called Kāpālikas by Bhavabhūti, though these look more like the practitioners of Mantrāmārga than those of the Atimārga (where the Kāpālikas originally belonged), (ii) we have to consider the possibility of multiple traditions within what was called Kāpālika practice and reconsider the different terms that refer to it, namely Somasiddhāntins, Kāpālikas, Mahāvratins, Mahāpāśupatas, etc. It is possible that these terms were not synonymous. It was perhaps one of these currents that introduced the yoginīs. The present state of sources, however, does not allow us to either prove or disprove it.
Even if the Kāpālikas served as a screen on which the fears and desires of society were projected, thus rendering their descriptions contradictory, we can state that a few aspects of their practice distinguish them from the earlier Pāṣupatas: the rapidity with which visible results are achieved and the violence that is the necessary price to gain a quick response from their gods (as represented by most of the early medieval texts). They also seem to favour trance and altered states of consciousness rather than rational control in their practices. And this distinction is a very important one, as neither yoginis nor siddhis appear to humans unless these are posted close to the door of death or insanity. In both the texts of the Vidyāpīṭha and in purāṇas, yoginis appear only when a person is ready to commit suicide, or when one is dreaming, hallucinating, or has just performed a practice of the kind that abolishes the separation between a normal and an ‘altered’ state.  

To conclude, the yoga related to the yoginis leads us to a very particular tradition, that of Vidyāpīṭha with its Kāpālika roots, and this link can by no way be transferred to all yogic currents. It invites us to reconsider what yoga in general actually is. A number of dictionaries defining ‘classical’ yoga underline the voluntary and conscious character of yogic practice, ‘it is an active practice, never passive’, writes Wood for example. However, what we perceive in the texts of the Vidyāpīṭha is the extremely important role of yoginis in different levels of practice, the passivity of the practitioner, and the far-reaching consequences of these. Yoga related to yoginis is not to be seen from the point of view of the practitioner, but from the point of view of yoginis, who, according to NT, by means this yoga link the pāṣus to the absolute, while the traditional definition of yoga presupposes some kind of voluntary practices, there is nothing of that kind in a creature suddenly possessed by a yogini. Even though in such texts as TS, SYM, YSP we encounter the descriptions of rituals supposed to attract yoginis, as soon as they do appear, nothing more is said, and the practitioner seems to find himself totally subject to their will. This yoga should also be understood as a practice that works with what is called ‘altered states of consciousness’, especially in relation to visionary yoga and possession. Non-dual tendencies, links between the levels of the universe, parts of body and states of consciousness, acting as what one is not, as well as the extreme rapidity of achievement, are the main features of this yogini-related yoga.  

As for the derivation of the term from yoga, yogini related to yoga, understood as a method of obtaining magical powers, would not be the only term used for the phenomenon, for we have also dākini and śākini (and about 40 others). These creatures were not always linked to yoga, and it is probable that the yogini-related form of yoga appeared precisely when these beings were re-conceptualised and classified under one term, that of yogini, in its new, Śaiva meaning. This change seems to have occurred at the time when the aims of yogic practice shifted from liberation to the seeking of superpowers and from Atimārga to Mantramārga. This ground is yet to be explored.
Bibliography

Primary sources


Secondary sources


Törzsök, J. see SYM.


Notes

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1 In the present article I leave aside the occurrences that can be both masculine and feminine, such as yogibhiḥ, and I shall concentrate upon the explicitly feminine cases.

2 Judit Törzsök (1999, p. iii), who edited and translated the shorter version of SYM, was the first person to address the question.

3 MBh 01.060.015e. We find this use of the term further in astronomy texts, see Dehejia and White. The link between yoginīs and time can also be seen in SYM 21 and TS 24.

4 For the probable dates of the purānic passages mentioning these yoginīs, see Serbaeva (2009).

5 See Serbaeva (2006a, ch. 2), for the details on non-Śaiva yoginīs.

6 For the representation of the goddess as yoginī see Serbaeva (2006a, ch. 2).

7 YS mentions knowledge of the universe and of the body (3.26f), the vision of the ‘perfected’ (3.32), the mystic intuition (3.33), the particular abilities of the sense-organs (3.36), the ability to fly (3.42), to enter the bodies of others (3.38), to be invisible (3.21), to read the mind (3.19), to leave the body (3.39), and the classical list of eight siddhis, beginning with ānima (3.45). The list of tantric siddhis with their analysis and the translation of the relevant passages shall be presented in my habilitation (work in progress).

8 HYP 2.55ab: yoginīcaṇḍasamānyah srṣṭisamāṇhāraṅkāraṇah / ‘He will be similar to the circle of yoginī [as for the powers, i.e.] he will be able to perform the creation and the destruction of the univers.’ The ability to perform the creation and destruction of the world belongs to yoginīs in TS 16.59.

9 HYP 3.83-87, HYP 3.96b. It is worth mentioning that the terms vajrolī and others do not occur in the other tantric sources selected for this article.

10 HYP 3.102: rakṣed ākuṇcanād āṛḍhvaṁ yā rajah sā hi yoginī / aṭṭiṇāṅgatam vetti khecari ca bhaved dhruvam //. ‘The yoginī is the one who protects the “rajas” by bending [it]
upwards. She knows the past and the future, and suddenly becomes a sky-goer.’
This line, absent in the edition of Sinh, can be found in the Adyar edition.
11 Gherš 1.51 sādhanān netikarmāpi khecarisiddhim āpnyāt, and 3.1; 3.26; 7.5; 7.9.
12 Gherš 2.4, 23, HYP 1.4-5, 20, 28. Alias Matsyendranātha, the mythic ‘founder’ of the
Yogini-kaula, see Karambelkar (1955).
13 Both in MārkP 8.107-108 and in DKC 6, this term denotes a creature living in cre-
matic grounds and feeding upon human flesh. It has no relation to yoga in these
texts whatsoever.
14 The question if the Kāpālikas belonging to the Atimārga invoked any yoginīs or
dākinīs demands an independent investigation. The recently found sources are rather in
favour of this hypothesis.
15 SV 4.14abf: jvalatiptravanam ramyaṃ viravīrēśibhir vṛtaṁ // viravētasiddhais ca
mahāmāmasya vīrakram... etc. ‘If one sees] the pleasing, shining forest of the
ancestors, [sees himself] being surrounded by heros and heroines, or by heroes,
vētālas and siddhas, or selling human flesh...’
16 SV 10.9a: ramante tatra vai virā nārībhīḥ saha lilaẏa // ‘The hero will enjoy there
playfully with women.’
17 SV 10.116-118: yadārdhve caiva sauvarnaṃ pātālāṃ parikitattam // tatra vasaty asau devo
hātakaḥ paramēsvaṛaḥ //... // siddhairudagānaīr divyair bhaginīmāṭbhīr vṛtaḥ //
yoginiyogakanyābhī rudraś caiva sakanyakaiḥ // ‘On the top of that is situated what
is called the Golden Underword. There lives god Haṭaka Paremsvaṇa... He is sur-
rounded by siddhas, rudras and gaṇas, as well as by sisters and mothers, by yoginīs
and yogīc maidens, rudras and their girls.’ Parallel in TS 10.137-140. Both passages
appear to be examples of further development of NG 5.15f. For other examples of
the textual borrowings from SV to TS, see Sanderson (2001). For the full represen-
tation of all parallel passages in selected tantric corpus, see Serbaeva, forthc.
18 Sanderson (1986, p. 186), n. 83: JY 1, f. 191v3: hāṭakākhyaṃ (i. e. kulasrotaḥ) sada
jñeyam maśraṃ vāme ‘pi daksine / kvacid anyēsv api (vil)jñeyam kulaśāsanatparaiaiḥ //.
‘The doctrine of Haṭaka should be known as the mistixte of Vāma and Dakṣiṇa. It is
also known as Kulasāsana, and by other names.’
19 SV 10.605cd: pūjitā yoginiyṃrdnaiḥ sādhakaiḥ surakinnaraiai // ‘[Goddess] is worshiped
by the multitude of yoginīs, practitioners, gods and kinnaras.’
20 SV 10.1169-1171 and 11.42f.
21 These mudrās reflect the list of the objects held by Svacchandabhairava in ch. 2.
22 SV 15.32b-37: pūjāgīnipayuktasya dhvānyuktasya mantrinā // samayācārayuktasya
kālmāsakavidaḥ priye // kriyopetasya devesī yoginīs tu varapradāḥ // ċārṣayanti
mahādevaṇaṃ nānābhogasamanvitam / girirājasya devesī yaṃ gatvā phalam asnute //
bhairavena samājñaptāḥ śaktayas tu varānane / anyāś ca siddhīr vividhā adhāmā
madhyamottamāḥ //... / evāṃ saṃkṣepataḥ proktam melakām tu varānane // satāb-
hyāsagotnaṃ dadate carukan sakam / yasya samprāśanāā devid viśeśadadro bhavet //’ ‘O
goddess, the yoginīs give boons to those masters of mantras who are joined with the
japa, fire-offerings] and pūjā, who are joined in dhyāna, who respect the regulations
of conduct, and who are aware of the time and the clans [aṃśa. The last 2 are the
time-space conditions of meeting the yoginīs of the particular family.,] and are
dowed with kriyā. They [the yoginīs] will show the great way, having various
pleasures. O goddess of the king of the mountains, one who follows it will get
the fruit. O beautiful, he will have the power to be directed by Bhairava and will have various other supernatural capacities, common, middle and supreme. ... Melakā has been briefly explained. To the one who always does the yogic exercises he [Bhairava] will give his own caru [transgressive transformative substance]. Having partaken of it, he [the practitioner] will become like the leader of heroes [i.e. Bhairava].’

23 The corresponding passages are translated in my habilitation, work in progress.
24 VT mentions yoginī only once: in v. 321ab they are represented as the protectors of the doctrine: yoginiḥ śatā bhrasṭāḥ kathyaṇte dharmalopakah. However, the four sisters [among them or of Tumburu: Jayā, Vijayā, Ajitā and Aparājītā] are included into the majority of the later lists of yoginī-s. Serbaeva (2006a, App.10).
25 Thanks to Prof Alexis Sanderson, I was able to work with Ch. 53, 54 and 56 of this 12000-śloka text.
26 BY 56.90-101, esp. 99-101ab: yoginīsahitaṁ nātyāṁ virabhāvālambanam / uttiṣṭhā sat-vayuktasya sarvāvasthāgatasya ca // vitarāgasvarāpasya śmaśāne krīḍatas tathā // māsam ekaṁ mahākṛitāḥ dhyānayuktah karoti yah // sa bhaved yoginām yogi saprapācchan alaksanaḥ // . ‘To dance with yoginīs is the foundation of the “heroic mood.” [Namely, it helps with] being joined with the substance, which is “standing” [ref. to kunḍalinī], and going to every [possible] state. He whose nature is being free from passion, plays at cremation ground. One who will do this “great play” for a month while joined in dhyāna, he will become the yogin of the yogis [in the state of expansion without distinguishing marks.’
27 A woman can be also a guru in Krama. See Serbaeva (2006b).
28 In v. 166. On the āsana-s and their unimportance in Śaiva yoga see Vasudeva (2004, p. 401).
29 Utkṛṇtī and saṃkṛṇtī, in TS 24.296f and MVT 21.9-19.
30 Various types of yoga in this text were analysed by Somdev Vasudeva (2004).
31 Rastogi (1993, pp. 247-80), writes that the definition of yoga became that of samādhi already in early commentaries on YS.
33 Sanderson (2005b, pp. 179–80) the Kāpālikas perceived samādhi as possession, according to the commentary of Jñānaśivācārya, writing in the far south in the sixteenth century (sāṁyasamāvēśāvādaḥ...).
34 The yoginīs in the Jayadrathayāmala is the subject of my book (in preparation).
35 KSB 2.12; 4.31b; TS 6.176-178a; DPś 1.14f; 2.21a; YSP 9.4-5 and esp. 42: vratalopo na kartavyaṁ gotrād anyatra suvrate / mahākṛṣṭivrodho’pi devinām śāsane sthitah //; VS 1.6a.
36 SSS 3.1-17; SYM 2; MM and comm.; NT 19-20; KT 8.103, 107f; 10.121b-123a; the rule-breaker will be eaten by sākinīs in 11.92-95a; YSP 8.38b-40a: ... māsena tu mahāyogī yoginiḥ paśyatecchayā / tair vr̥tās tu caruṁ kṛtvā trailokyā vicaret kṣanaṁ / sarvajñāḥ sarvakartā ca sṛṣṭisamhārakāraḥ / yoginīnām pade devi kartā ca jāyate // . ‘Within a month the great yogin will be able to see the yoginīs at will. Encircled by them, having made the caru, he will go in [all] three worlds at that very moment. Omniscient, able to do whatever, he performs creation and destruction. O goddess, he will achieve the level of the yoginīs as for destroying and creating.’ Rules are explained in TS 9.540-560 and in Tā 15.552c-557a.
Rastogi (1987), states that yoginiḥbhūḥ is a typical Kula concept. When parents unite identifying themselves with Śiva and Śakti and then give birth to progeny, the child, who is Śiva-incarnate and the instant repository of knowledge is designated as yoginiḥbhūḥ, see Tā 29.162-163. This state signifies bhairavavah, the state of absoluteness transmissible to progeny. The title of ‘born of yogini’ is also attributed to Abhinavagupta himself, see Sanderson (2005a). The same logic exists for the feminine: among the yoginis the highest are those who are born of yoginis: TS 16.307-311. JY 4, f.224v1, em. Sanderson: yoginiāgarseṃbhau (sāṃbhūto: em.: sāmbhūta A) ruddrāṃśa malavarjitaḥ // śaktipātāt prabuddhaḥ ca (prabuddhaḥ ca conj.: prabuddhasya A) matprasādāc ca bhairavi //; TS 9.37b, 28.94 and 96.

39 TS 16; BY 56; DPś 5.54b: strīvesadhārī bhūtvāsaṃ nagno vāsau mahāmatiḥ // ‘The intelligent one should put women’s clothes or go naked.’; JY 4 f.225r1-2; TS 15.78b; more ancient vratas required identification with Rudra, NG f.49r1-2(3.30-34b), see Sanderson (2005b, pp. 208-09. The concept of kula or family deserves a special study. The kula of the practitioner is defined by his initiation and the yoginī-family on which the flower has fallen defines not only the type of women to look for, but also the more general type of post-initiation practice. The initiated is bound not to go against his ‘family’. See also NS f.6r: labdhalakṣo yadā yogi yoginikulaniścaye // tadā jñeyapadam bhāti jṛmbhate śaktivirahaḥ /... ‘When the yogin obtains the sign of [his] yogini- clan, then the state of knowledge [will manifest] and the body of Śakti will expand.’

40 TS 1.458f, ch. 2, 16.1-49; KS; KT 15.97b states that mantras given by women or received in dreams are automatically valid; KMT 14-16; TS 2. Serbaeva (2006a, ch. 3), App. 6.3, 6.4, 6.8 and 6.9.

41 YSP 4.57-58; 5.5, 25-26, 29-33; 8.55-56; KSb 1.64-68; 2.18, 124; 4.98; 5.38; 7.9. The list of siddhis: TS 16.50f, 4.51; 15.35.

42 TS 16.135-136: sā siddhis tat paraṃ sthānaṃ tadarthe gokādaram // etesāv evam narāḥ kecit kulevam evanyādā yadā // tadaiva tat padam āpnoti virabhāvād anantaram //, v. 143-144: mātrmandalasambodhāt sanskārāt tapaso ‘thavā // prāṇuvanti narāḥ kecit siddhim etām anuttamām // (Parallel to SYM, f.67v6-68r1(28.41-42), ref. and ed. of Alexis Sanderson: mātrmanḍalasanyogāt *sanskāra(jem.: sanskārā A) japato *pi vā(em.: mīvā A) prāṇuvanti *narāḥ (cor.: narā A) *siddhir (conj.: siddhir A) *caṇuṇā prāśitena (em.: yatanāprāśitena A) vā//. TS 16.171a: puruṣāḥ sarvāṃtyāṅgus tad eva phalam āpnyāt // In YSP 6.47a Bhairava proclaims a doctrine especially for women: śriṇu devi mahāprajñē jñānaṃ te kathayāmy aham // nārīṇām ca visēṣena narāṇām yakta cetasāṃ // For the objections to seeing these traditions as those of women or as practiced by women, see Serbaeva (2006b).

43 TS 16.56cd-57ab, 162-171. See Serbaeva (2006a, 2.5 and App. 5.4).

44 Born from ‘perfected’ parents: samastasamayopetāḥ sampūrṇajñānadehajāḥ in 162a.

45 TS 16.170: yogena tapasi vāpi svamantrasya ca dārsāṇāt // yānti yoģeṣvarisamsthām tathā janmapaśor balāt // ‘The yoginis go to the state of Yogeśvarī by yoga, tapas, seeing one’s own mantra, killing a [1, 3, 5, 7] jamma-victim.’
46 RT 1.22.330-334.
47 TS 7.97-99, where the sacrifice of a victim gives the ability to fly. The number of rebirths of the victims (and thus their transformative potential) can be recognised with the help of particular physical signs on their bodies. A prayer to yoginīs who help sādhakas to recognise the paśu is also included, v. 107f.
49 NT 20.4-7. A very similar passage can be seen in YSP 1.21-24.
50 NT 20.7-8.
51 NT 20.9-10. YSP 6.10b-43 states that the victims (paśus) are born only to be sacrificed and when sacrificed, they immediately change their state. Woman should not be sacrificed, as this destroys siddhis, according to YSP 6.99-100.
52 NT 20.18-19ab.
53 NT 20.19cd-21. It can be compared to the most intense śaktipāta, see Tā 1.43 (comm.).
54 Ibid., NT 20.24cd-27 and comm.
55 For details of such practice see Silburn (1983).
56 NT 20.31-32 and comm.
57 Ibid., v. 38-40 and comm.
58 See Serbaeva (2006a, ch. 3 and 4) for details.
59 Serbaeva (2006a, ch. 4).
60 Sanderson (2005b).
62 Lorenzen (1991) provides the following passages on Kāpālikas: p. 13: ‘The Prakrit Gāthāsaptasātī is traditionally ascribed to the first century A.D. Sātavāhana king Hāla but was probably compiled sometime between the third and fifth centuries. It contains a verse describing a “new” female Kāpālikā, who incessantly besmears herself with ashes from the funeral pyre of her lover.’ Lorenzen notes, pp. 17–18, that a tantric ascetic from South India is described in great detail in Kādambarī. ‘This Draviḍa-dhārmika superintends a temple of Cāndikā located on the road to Ujjayin. He had written down the doctrine of Mahākāla, which is the ancient teaching of the Mahāpāśupatas [. . .]. He had many times employed woman-subduing powders on old female ascetics from foreign countries who stayed (at the temple).’ Lorenzen cites Cāndakauśika of Kṣemīśvara where there is a passage describing the siddhis of a kāpālikā: ‘The Kāpālikā held several magical powers: control over a vetāla and a thunderbolt (vajra); possession of magical pills, ointments and foot salve; command over Daitya women; and knowledge of the elixir of life (rasāyana) and alchemy (dhātu vāda),’ pp. 57–59. However, these examples can be seen only as indirect evidence only that yoginīs were known to the Kāpālikas.
63 Sanderson links the practice described in MMadh and its commentary with SYM and JY, śāṭka 2, in his letter to F. Grimal.
64 See Serbaeva (2006a, ch. 4) for details.