

The Importance of Rousing Serpents: Kuṇḍalinī and the Evolution of Modern Yoga in the Work of Vivekananda and Yogananda

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This paper examines the centrality of Kuṇḍalinī among the early modern globalizers of yoga, especially Swami Vivekananda and Paramahansa Yogananda, as well as several more minor figures. While neither man referred to his system as “*haṭha* yoga”—of which Vivekananda is famously quoted as being dismissive at best—both put forth frameworks that are perfect examples of what James Mallinson has termed “classical *haṭha* yoga,” employing originally ascetic physical techniques such as *bandhas* and *mudrās* to achieve tantric goals, namely raising Kuṇḍalinī. However, both men are also, in their own ways, deeply invested in modernizing the concept, articulating it through the lenses of contemporary science, medicine, and yoking both together into a theory of spiritual evolution. The paper also places the frameworks of Vivekananda (as represented in his *Raja Yoga*) and Yogananda (as presented in *Autobiography of a Yogi* and his mailorder lessons) in the context of other contemporary modernizers such as Kuvalayananda, Sivananda, and teachers in the Krishnamacharya lineage.

Author: FOXEN, Anya (California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo)

Presenter: FOXEN, Anya (California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo)

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