Should A yogi be healthy? Health Concepts in Early Haṭhayoga Texts

The physical body assumes a paramount role in contemporary transnational globalized yoga, particularly within the realm of modern posture-based yoga. It is inextricably linked to the pursuit of health and well-being. However, much of what constitutes yoga today, both in India and worldwide, draws its roots from Sanskrit yoga texts, particularly from Haṭhayoga texts. This presentation delves into several interlinked inquiries: How do early medieval yoga texts conceptualize health? What is the connection between health and the body's soteriology? These inquiries shed light on the positioning of yoga within Hindu traditions before it gained worldwide prominence.

This presentation emphasizes that, at its core, health, defined as the absence of disease, serves as a foundational prerequisite for a profound exploration of the subtle yogic body, including the understanding of consciousness and its complex dimensions. Furthermore, eradicating the misleading self-identity, known as ahaṁkāra, represents a transformative process leading to perfect health. This process involves not only the elimination of physical diseases but also transcending all forms of suffering and surpassing the transient pleasures associated with the physical body. In the grand scheme of things, the corporeal body ascends in importance, evolving into a repository of diverse physical methods that promote health, longevity, and, ultimately, liberation. Consequently, the emergence of the biomedical discourse surrounding yoga in modern India was not created ex nihilo. Haṭhayoga, with its roots stretching back to medieval times, played a pivotal role in shaping this historical transformation.

Author: Dr SHALEV, Hagar (postdoctoral research fellow in the NEEM ERC project (The New Ecology of Expressive Modes in Early-Modern South India))

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