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CHAPTER 17

Tracing Vivekananda's *Prāṇa* and *Ākāśa*: The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and Rama Prasad's Occult Science of Breath

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Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), a Bengali swami who taught yoga and Vedānta in India and the West, contributed significantly to the emergence of modern yoga (e.g., de Michelis 2004; Pokazanyeva 2016).[1] In his short life, his fame as a gifted spiritual teacher extended throughout India, the United States, and Europe, and his popular lectures were emblematic of a confident explication of Hinduism that often argued against the grain of colonialism. In his famous *Râja Yoga* (1896), a book that compiles a series of talks on the yoga of Patañjali held in winter 1895–1896 in the United States, Vivekananda outlines a cosmology that innovatively employs the concepts of *prāṇa*, which he commonly translates as "energy," "force," and "movement," as well as *ākāśa*, which he usually translates as "matter"

[1] While the errors and misunderstandings in this chapters are certainly my own, I am grateful to Keith Edward Cantú, Dominik Haas, and Dominic S. Zoehrer for their valuable comments on earlier versions.

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or "ether." These principles are not only applied on a macrocosmic level but are also relevant for Vivekananda's understanding of the individual's constitution on a microcosmic level. For example, on the latter, *prāṇa*, pulsating in the individual, implies the movement of breath and thought; *ākāśa*, on the other hand, associated with certain functions of the (sense) organs, is equated with the mind. This very brief summary of Vivekananda's cosmology and anthropology that claims to span science and religion—a typical occult motive—already reveals the complex stratification of his usage of these key terms. So far, they have been interpreted in the light of nineteenth-century occultism along two major lines: one mainly following the interpretation of *prāṇa*; the other that of *ākāśa*.

One way Vivekananda's theory of *prāṇa* has been understood is in its function as a "healing agent," a notion that can be paralleled with the mesmeric *fluidum*. Elizabeth de Michelis (2004: 159–168), Karl Baier (2009: 479), and Dominic Zoehrer in this volume pursue such an argumentation.[2] A second line of interpretation has traced the influence of nineteenth-century ether theories on Vivekananda's notion of *ākāśa*/ether.[3] In proximity to discourses of science, Vivekananda at times translates *prāṇa* as "force" and *ākāśa* as "matter,"[4] which is reminiscent of Ludwig Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff: Empirisch-Naturphilosophische Studien* (1855; *Force and Matter: Empirical-philosophical Studies*), and the vast net of materialist and anti-materialist discourses related to these notions in the nineteenth century.[5]

While the above approaches are revealing, I will elaborate in this chapter on some additional implications of Vivekananda's notion of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* in relation to premodern Indian sources familiar to him. In doing so, I will limit this preliminary investigation to sources that employ both *prāṇa and ākāśa*, as is the case in *Râja Yoga*. My approach, then, is

[2] Zoehrer also elaborates on the mesmeric *fluidum* and its correlation with *prāṇa* in the works of Helena P. Blavatsky (1831–1891), the co-founder of the Theosophical Society. All mentions of Theosophy in the present chapter are to the Theosophical Society established by Helena P. Blavatsky and Henry S. Olcott (1832–1907).

[3] Asprem (2011) discusses the historisation of discourses on ether and matter in Victorian physics, and the involvement of the Theosophical Society in these discourses, while Pokazanyeva (2016) also directly refers to Vivekananda.

[4] See, for example, CWV II: 436.

[5] In *Kraft und Stoff*, a well-known book of popular science that was translated into fifteen languages, Büchner postulates the unity of force and matter and propagates, although not fully consistently, a material monism that reduces categories like mind, soul, and thought to a force-bearing imperishable substance (Bergunder 2016: 89–90).

twofold: First, I engage with the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, a kind of esoteric *Rāmāyaṇa* that teaches a path to non-dual liberation, which evidences Upanishadic, tantric, and Haṭhayogic streams of influence. I also examine the influence that a Theosophically tinged English translation of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* by Vihari Lal Mitra may have had on Vivekananda. Second, I discuss a cluster of texts by the North Indian Sanskrit pandit and Theosophist Rama Prasad Kasyapa (c. 1860–1914), which can be grouped around the *Śivasvarodaya*, a tantric text that gives instruction for divination through breath or *svara*. Under the heading of an "Occult Science" or a "Science of Breath," Prasad produced three influential publications that were based on a translation of the *Śivasvarodaya*.[6] I also refer to the reception history of the Occult Science of Breath within German occultism and Theosophy predating Vivekananda's *Rāja Yoga* in so far as it relates to *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*. As will be shown, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* emphasises both *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, but does not, as far as I can tell, link them as a functional pair. The cluster of texts by Rama Prasad occasionally mentions *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* as a pair and also highlights each of these notions in a specific way.

This chapter, then, sheds new contextual light on the use of Vivekananda's term *prāṇa* and its close associate *ākāśa*. In doing so, my approach to Indian sources is inspired by the work of James Madaio (2017), who has persuasively argued against the selective historiography of Advaita Vedānta and the demarcation between so-called classical and neo-Vedāntic proponents. These categories appear more obfuscating when attention is paid to medieval and early modern Vedāntic, Advaitic, and yogic sources that demonstrate creative integrations that are not dissimilar to those ascribed to figures such as Vivekananda. This leads to a reconsideration of the Indian sources familiar to Vivekananda, whose oeuvre Madaio positions as a "vernacular *advaita*" (Madaio 2017: 7). In this chapter, I pursue one such source, the medieval *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, which purports a form of Advaita that did not emerge within Vedāntic traditions and therefore does not entail the same epistemic constraints associated with Śaṅkarite Vedānta (ibid.: 7 n. 21). With that being said, I also consider the work of Karl Baier (2018), who rightly observes that traces of a cosmology based on *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* appear in Theosophical discourse before Vivekananda. In doing so, I highlight Vivekananda's likely but rather

[6] In this chapter, I refer to Prasad's texts based on the *Śivasvarodaya* in a generic way as the "Occult Science of Breath," implying the *Occult Science* (1892 [1884]), *The Science of Breath and the Philosophy of the Tatwas* (1890), and related articles in *The Theosophist* (1887–1889).

elusive reception of Theosophical literature, the latter incorporating itself a vast body of (South) Indian medieval and early modern Sanskrit texts, such as the *Yoga Upaniṣads*. Indian Theosophists pioneered in translating Haṭhayogic and tantric literature from Sanskrit to English, thereby mediating an arcane body of literature to a broad public. One of these early works is Rama Prasad's translation of the *Śivasvarodaya*, a possible entry point for Vivekananda into nineteenth-century occultism.[7]

Prāṇa and *Ākāśa* in Premodern Indian Thought

Mentioned in early Vedic texts, *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* have deep roots in Indian religions and philosophies as independent notions. For centuries, each of them was relevant for cosmological and anthropological explications because both can be understood to span the macro- and microcosm. However, in premodern contexts, they were rarely, if at all, closely associated with each other, let alone positioned as a functional pair. Before pursuing Vivekananda's engagement with these terms, I briefly discuss several premodern meanings of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*.

Prāṇa is generally translated as "breath," "spirit," "vitality," or "vital principle" (Monier-Williams 1899: 705). This encompassing principle forms an intricate part of Indian thought, connected to such vast categories as individual life and life at large (as in the Upanishads), as well as prolongation of life and spiritual attainment through *prāṇāyāma*, which means "control of *prāṇa*" or "breath control." Upanishadic thought, which developed out of earlier strata of the Vedas, extensively discusses *prāṇa* as a vital principle. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* even places it on the same ontological level as *brahman*, the highest principle in the cosmos, and *ātman*, the universal self which is—on some accounts—ultimately identical with *brahman* (Zysk 1993: 204). In "classical" Sāṃkhya,[8] *prāṇa*

[7] Regarding some of Vivekananda's key terminology, which was partly mediated in the Indian context through Theosophists, I argue elsewhere that Vivekananda's notion of "superconsciousness" can be related to Theosophical sources and their usage of this term. See Jacobs and Kraler (forthcoming).

[8] What I refer to as the "classical Sāṃkhya" extends roughly from the first to the tenth century CE, epitomised in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* by Īśvarakṛśṇa (c. 350–450 CE), a work that came to be viewed as foundational and was commented on numerously. Late medieval Sāṃkhya can be dated between 1500 and 1600 CE (Larson 1979: 134; 152).

does not play an overtly important role.[9] Also, in Pātañjalayoga, a tradition closely associated with the broadly diffused tradition of Sāṃkhya, *prāṇa* is not discussed metaphysically but only in reference to breath control. It is in medieval Haṭhayoga that the control of *prāṇa* through breath regulation or *prāṇāyāma* techniques (as well as mental practices) gains superior soteriological potential. For some medieval authors, the control of *prāṇa* is the defining category for Haṭhayoga (Mallinson and Singleton 2017: 32). *Prāṇāyāma* was also used as a therapeutic tool to cure imbalances of *prāṇa* or *vāyu* ("air," "breath") accumulated in the body, as explained in some editions of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* (Birch 2018: 56–57).[10] Space does not permit to unpack further details here; suffice it to say that premodern Indian contexts emphasise *prāṇa* as a vital principle and a therapeutic tool, both of which are relevant for understanding Vivekananda's use of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* in healing contexts, which, until the present, have been largely interpreted in the light of mesmerism.[11]

Ākāśa is generally translated as "space," "sky," or "ether" (Monier-Williams 1899: 127). In the earlier Upanishads, *ākāśa*, not unlike *prāṇa*, is occasionally identified with *brahman*, as is the sun (*āditya*) and the mind (*manas*) (Dasgupta 1932 [1922]: 43). In Sāṃkhya cosmology, *ākāśa* is the first and the subtlest of the five elements (*bhūta*s), bearing the other four and thus entailing a creative component (Pokazanyeva 2016: 326). In the classical explications of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, *ākāśa* is not "eternal" (*nitya*) and does not resemble either *puruṣa* or *prakṛti* in any way—despite

[9] Rather, the role often ascribed to *prāṇa* seems to be partially supplanted by the principle of intellect (*buddhi*): "The buddhi is spread all over the body, as it were, for it is by its functions that the life of the body is kept up; for the Sāṃkhya does not admit any separate *prāṇa vāyu* (vital breath) to keep the body living" (Dasgupta 1932 [1922]: 262).

[10] An addition of a chapter from the *Dharmaputrikā* to the *Haṭhapradīpikā* (Birch 2018: 56–57) states that the yogi, suffering from disease through an imbalance of *vāyu*, should "draw out the breath that has accumulated [there] as one [would draw out accumulated] fluid from the ear with water" (*Haṭhapradīpikā* 5.9–11, as quoted in Birch 2018: 57). This re-balancing of *prāṇa/vāyu* is induced through "many exhalations and inhalations" (ibid.). Vivekananda seems to apply a similar concept by explaining: "Sometimes in your own body the supply of Prâṇa gravitates more or less to one part; the balance is disturbed, and when the balance of Prâṇa is disturbed, what we call disease is produced. To take away the superfluous Prâṇa, or to supply the Prâṇa that is wanting, will be curing the disease" (Vivekananda 1896: 42).

[11] The broader implications of Vivekananda's theory and practice of *prāṇāyāma*, or yogic breath cultivation, will be addressed extensively in my Ph.D. thesis.

its creative component (Duquette and Ramasubramaniam 2010: 520).[12] However, the sixteenth-century Vijñānabhikṣu, who attempted to unify Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, and Pātañjalayoga, ascribed a causal quality to *ākāśa* that approximates the function of *prakṛti* in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* (ibid.). In the philosophical school of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, *ākāśa* is equalled to *ātman*, and both are called "the supremely great or all-pervasive," and are considered "eternal" (Dasgupta 1932 [1922]: 292).

Vivekananda's Cosmology in Relation to Sāṃkhyan Cosmology

Vivekananda's *Râja Yoga: Conquering the Internal Nature* (1896) is a collection of lectures on Pātañjalayoga, a tradition that assumes the metaphysics and cosmology of Sāṃkhya. Before engaging with the exegesis of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*, Vivekananda establishes a cosmological framework in which he sets forth the ideas of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* as a metaphysical background that is not specifically tied to the *Yoga Sūtra* itself, but, in his view, linked to the broader explications of the Yoga-Sāṃkhya tradition.

In the introduction to *Râja Yoga*, Vivekananda states that all existence evolves out of *ākāśa*, a primordial matter, or the element ether (Vivekananda 1896: 30; 36). *Prāṇa*, a vibrating energy and the "sum total of all force," activates this primordial matter, and together they form all existence on the macro- and microcosmic levels (ibid.: 31). In its lower vibrations, *ākāśa* gives rise to all objects, from the stars to the human body, and in its "finer state of vibration [*ākāśa*/ether] will represent the mind" (ibid.: 36). The vibrations of *prāṇa* are manifested in physical forces on a macrocosmic plane within the universe, including motion, gravitation, and magnetism, and in (psycho-)physical forces on the microcosmic one within the individual, such as movement, nerve currents, and thought (ibid.: 31). The "subtle" action of *prāṇa* correlates with the "subtle" material quality of *ākāśa* and the "gross" action leads to "gross" manifestations, thereby producing tangible objects (ibid.: 36; 14). Since tangible manifestations are caused by the subtle vibration of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*,[13] the "whole universe is composed of these subtle vibrations" (ibid.). The universe is "an ocean of ether, consisting of layer after layer of varying degrees of vibration under the action of Prâṇa" (ibid.: 45). Although Vivekananda

[12] On the Sāṃkhyan notions of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, see below.

[13] "The finer is always the cause, and the grosser the effect" (Vivekananda 1896: 11).

comments on the *Yoga Sūtra*, linked to Sāṃkhyan metaphysics, many of these functions of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* (e.g., their vibrating quality) are not found in the classical doctrines of these traditions. The contexts that employ similar attributes to these terms will be further discussed below.

In order to better comprehend Vivekananda's understanding of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, I will address below another of Vivekananda's lectures called "Cosmology," also held in the winter of 1895 in New York, which was originally entitled "Sankhya Cosmology" (Burke 1985: 580). Before turning to this lecture, it is helpful to set this discussion in the context of the classical articulation of Sāṃkhya in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*.[14] Notably, Sāṃkhya "enumerates" a set of twenty-five principles or *tattva*s. The first two principles—"consciousness" (*puruṣa*) and "materiality" (*prakṛti*)—are eternal and form the basic Sāṃkhyan duality. They are ontologically distinct, and it is through their proximity or co-presence that twenty-three further aspects of reality emerge. *Puruṣa* is a "witnessing translucent presence" (Larson 2012: 76) and a unique principle distinct from *prakṛti* and the other principles derived from it (including the mind). Though manifold in its appearance, *prakṛti* can be reduced to an unmanifest singularity (*mūlaprakṛti*). The twenty-three *tattvas* emanate in the following order: intellect (*buddhi*); egoity (*ahaṃkāra*); mind (*manas*); the five organs of perception (*jñānendriya*s); the five organs of action (*karmendriya*s); the five subtle elements (*tanmātra*s); and the five gross elements (*mahābhūta*s), of which *ākāśa* is the first.

Returning to Vivekananda's lecture on Sāṃkhya, the swami, echoing the classical material, explains key aspects of Sāṃkhyan thought, such as the ontological dualism of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. He expounds that all phenomenality emerges from *prakṛti* in its unmanifest or undifferentiated (*avyakta*) form (CWV II: 433). This creation from "nature" (Vivekananda's translation of *prakṛti*) occurs in cyclical repetition. From there, *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* emerge:

> There is one element which […] is eternal; every other element is produced out of this one. It is called Âkâsha. It is somewhat similar to the idea of ether of the moderns, though not exactly similar. Along with this element, there is the primal energy called Prâna. Prana and Akasha combine and recombine and form the elements out of them. […] Prana cannot work alone without the help of Akasha (ibid.: 435–436).

[14] For an account of Sāṃkhya, see Larson 1979.

Vivekananda goes on to explain the emergence of the other elements out of *ākāśa* (i.e., air, fire, water, and earth), which, through the interaction of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, form the sense organs of the human body (ibid.: 436–438). Finally, Vivekananda mentions *puruṣa*, or "the pure, the perfect, […] the Self of man" (ibid.: 438), and he reveals the final purpose of the play of forces between nature (*prakṛti*), *prāṇa*, and *ākāśa*: "Nature is undergoing all these changes for the development of the soul; all this creation is for the benefit of the soul, so that it may be free" (ibid.: 439).

This lecture lists most of the relevant aspects of Sāṃkhyan thought, recognises *ākāśa* as the first of five elements, and most importantly, refers to *puruṣa*'s and *prakṛti*'s primary ontological status and the soteriological potential for liberation central to Sāṃkhya. Nevertheless, the understanding of *ākāśa* and *prāṇa* differs significantly from the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*. Therein, the "gross" element *ākāśa* does not directly emanate from *prakṛti* but is generated from the "subtle" elements (Larson 1987a: 51). Although Vivekananda acknowledges a generative relation between "subtle" and "gross" materiality, he does not subsume *ākāśa* under that scheme but rather attributes these qualities to *ākāśa* itself. *Prāṇa* is not, as Vivekananda holds, considered as a "primal energy" in Sāṃkhya; rather, it is limited to a vital function in the human organism (ibid.: 25). Consequently, in classical Sāṃkhya *prāṇa* is no cosmological agent that, together with *ākāśa*, would "form the elements out of them" (CWV II: 435), nor do they interact to create the human sense organs or the mind.

It is important to note that the cosmology outlined in Sāṃkhya forms the basis for many cosmological renditions in Indian history, as will become evident when dealing with Rama Prasad. From the medieval period onward, Sāṃkhyan psycho-cosmology was absorbed into numerous traditions, including Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Vedānta, and, then, the cosmological side of the Sāṃkhya doctrine was often emphasised (Larson 1979: 152). Indeed, by the fourteenth century, within Advaita Vedānta for example, the traditions of Sāṃkhya and Pātañjalayoga were no longer viewed as "rivals but rather as pan-brahmanical traditions/technologies" (Madaio 2018: 8 n. 47). Generally speaking, Vivekananda assumes this backdrop of inherited tradition but, in doing so, he also articulates his own rendition of Sāṃkhya cosmology, which privileges *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*. Thereby, he stretches the framework of classical Sāṃkhya and Pātañjalayoga. When Vivekananda speaks of varying degrees of prāṇic vibrations that produce different planes of reality in *Rāja Yoga*, this is a position alien to these traditions in which *prāṇa* is only relevant to the human organism.

Yet, the link between *prāṇa* and the mind, which Vivekananda employs, is already established in Pātañjalayoga (Zysk 1993: 208). Unlike Vivekananda, though, the classical Yoga-Sāṃkhya tradition does not recognise *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* as a functional pair responsible for unfolding the cosmos. The confluence of ideas in medieval India, to which I now turn, partly explains why the usage of these notions diverts from the classical doctrines of the Yoga-Sāṃkhya tradition that was commented on by Vivekananda in the aforementioned lectures.

Prāṇa and *Ākāśa* in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*

In medieval India, there were no insular Haṭhayoga, Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, Pātañjalayoga, or Tantra "schools" that were unaltered by the practices and metaphysical speculations of other traditions. Interaction and adaption across sectarian boundaries on the issue of yoga, for example, is evidenced by several medieval texts that include subtle body schemes and techniques typical of Haṭhayoga, Pātañjalayoga, as well as Vedāntic metaphysics. Examples of various types of adaptations, often written in Brahmanical contexts, include medieval and early modern works, such as the *Jīvanmuktiviveka*,[15] *Aparokṣānubhūti*, *Yogacintāmaṇi*, as well as the *Yoga Upaniṣads* (Birch 2013, 2018; Bouy 1994). In the *Aparokṣānubhūti*, the notion of *rājayoga* (lit. "king-yoga"), which originally appeared in a Haṭhayogic context, is positioned atop a fifteen-fold system of Vedāntic yoga that subsumes Pātañjalayoga within Advaita Vedānta (Birch 2013: 406–407). This move, and the innovations of, say, the *Yogacintāmaṇi*, resemble Vivekananda's attempt to integrate Pātañjalayoga within his explication of Advaita Vedānta, calling it Raja Yoga. In a similar vein as Birch (2013) and Madaio (2017), I argue that it is important to see Vivekananda's approach to yoga as part of a long tradition of adaption and integration within Advaita-related movements.

Another polyvalent Advaita tradition is evidenced in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (c. tenth century CE),[16] which is attributed to the mythical saint Vālmīki.

[15] Vivekananda praised the fourteenth century Vidyāraṇya who integrated the (*Laghu-*)*Yogavāsiṣṭha* into Advaita Vedānta and extensively appropriated Pātañjalayoga in his *Jivanmuktiviveka* (Madaio 2018).

[16] The *Yogavāsiṣṭha-Mahārāmāyaṇa*, the work translated by Vihari Lal Mitra, consists of almost 30,000 verses and pre-supposes the tenth-century *Mokṣopāya* and the *Laghuyogavāsiṣṭha*, both of which have origins in Kashmir (see, e.g., Hanneder 2005).

While purporting a radical form of non-dualism, the work demonstrates familiarity with various strands of Indian philosophical traditions, such as Upanishadic Advaita, Yogācāra Buddhism, non-dual Trika Śaivism, as well as Haṭhayogic and tantric elements (Timalsina 2012: 304).[17] In an extensive "prologue" to the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* presents the troubled prince Rāma, who is taught by the sage Vasiṣṭha in the form of a dramatic dialogue.[18] Purporting a non-dualistic philosophy, Vasiṣṭha teaches a means to realising liberation while living (*jīvanmukti*). The text incorporates various streams of tradition and employs numerous narratives, including the apprenticeship of Vasiṣṭha himself, who learned from the eternally living crow Bhuśuṇḍa.

In this narrative that is found in the *Nirvāṇa* section of the text, the "yoga of *prāṇa*" (Timalsina 2012) is introduced by the yogi-crow Bhuśuṇḍa with the aim of liberation while in a body. Here, the yoga of breathing is ascribed the same soteriological status as contemplative techniques like *jñānayoga* (ibid.: 304; 308; 324). The Haṭhayogic practice of *prāṇa* engenders Bhuśuṇḍa's corporeality, immortality, and liberated status, since it keeps his body alive as well as granting him liberation (ibid.: 304; 306; 310). It thereby varies from the overall tendency of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* to emphasise the world as an illusionary veil (ibid.: 324). The yoga of Bhuśuṇḍa enacts tantric and yogic subtle body schemes, such as the three main *nāḍī*s and the *cakra*s, while *prāṇa* is depicted as governing all bodily functions (ibid.: 311). *Prāṇāyāma* includes the regular *prāṇa*-flow within the body and the intentional control of breath with the goal to merge the mind with the flow of breath (ibid.: 314; 316).[19]

Hence, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* highlights the "*prāṇa*-mind nexus" (Madaio 2017: 5), a theme central to many strands of Indian thought—and to Vivekananda's cosmo-anthropology. In the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, this nexus is activated by the principle of vibration, or *spanda*, which is attributed to *prāṇa* (*prāṇa-spanda*). According to Mainkar, the doctrine of *spanda* shows Śaiva (i.e., tantric) influence on the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, and he sees in it

Following Madaio (2019: 122 note 1), I use the title "Yogavāsiṣṭha" in a generic way, implying both the *Laghuyogavāsiṣṭha* and the *Yogavāsiṣṭha-Mahārāmāyaṇa*.

[17] According to Timalsina 2012, most scholars have neglected yogic elements in the text because its Haṭhayogic and tantric aspects have been overshadowed by its poetic tropes and the work's repeated emphasis on knowledge-based methods of awakening (*jñāna*).

[18] On the transformative nature of dialogue in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and the work's pedagogical approach, see Madaio (2019).

[19] For other useful comments on yogic material in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, see Madaio 2019: 124, note 26.

an important point of difference between the Vedānta of Śaṅkara and the Advaita of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (Mainkar 1977 [1955]: 243). With regard to *prāṇa*, on the microcosmic level, this means "[w]hen the *prāṇa* vibrates and is on the point of passing through the nerves […], then there appears the mind full of its thought processes" (Dasgupta 1952 [1923]: 256). On the macrocosmic level, "[i]t is the vibration of the *prāṇa* (*prāṇa-spanda*) that manifests itself through the *citta* and causes the world-appearance out of nothing" (ibid.). The yogic practice that derives thereof (briefly described above), and the ontological relation between the principle of vibration (*prāṇa*) and the mind, is echoed in Vivekananda's cosmological accounts, including the praxeological-microcosmic level and the metaphysical-macrocosmic level.

Dasgupta (1952 [1923]: 240–244) summarises the "world creation" in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, and its appearance from the principle of thought, as follows:

> [T]he world has appeared from the mind (*citta* or *manas*). […] At the beginning of each so-called creation the creative movement of *manas* energy is roused. Thought-creation [… combines with…] each successive outflow from the supreme fund of potential energy. Thus it is said that the first creative movement of *manas* manifests itself as the *ākāśa* creation (ibid.: 243–244).

Since "it [i.e., *prāṇa*] is identical with *citta*" (ibid.: 259), this cosmological outline could have been inspirational for Vivekananda's cosmology: from "thought-creation," which is connected to *prāṇa*, *ākāśa* emerges. This is, however, speculative.

In any event, it is clear that *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* are highlighted in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, as well as in Vivekananda's innovative rendition of Sāṃkhyan cosmology. Similarly, the concept of a vibrating *prāṇa* is key to Vivekananda's cosmo-anthropology. Another element of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* that appears to have influenced Vivekananda is the swami's three-fold division of *ākāśa*, which permeates, again, the macro- and microcosmic levels. The *Yogavāsiṣṭha* employs *ākāśa*, or space, in a three-fold manner: *(bhūta-) ākāśa*, or the elemental space; *cittākāśa*, or the mental space; and *cidākāśa*, or the space that is consciousness (Slaje 1994: 279).[20] So does Vivekananda

[20] In the final analysis, however, all of these demarcations of space are ultimately consciousness: "All of this is *brahman*, the space that is consciousness [*sarvam eva cidākāśaṃ brahmeti*]" (*Laghuyogavāsiṣṭha* 6.9.224 cited in Madaio 2019: 115). Indeed, according to Madaio (2019: 125 note 33) there are numerous declarations of this sort in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*.

when he speaks of "the ordinary space, called the Mahâkâsha, or great space […], the Cittâkâsha, the mental space, [… and] the Chidâkâsha, or knowledge space" (Vivekananda 1896: 51).[21] In the threefold conception of *ākāśa*, Vivekananda is in many aspects clearly aligned with the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. He explains that in *mahākāśa* perceptions, imaginations, and dreams arise (ibid.). This is also the primary association of the space-giving quality of *(bhūta-)ākāśa* in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, based on the concept that these impressions of individual consciousness, and space in general, are ultimately emptiness (*śūnyatva*) (Slaje 1994: 274–276). The individual's attainment of *cidākāśa* is both in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and by Vivekananda characterised by objectless perception (ibid.: 280 n. 307; Vivekananda 1896: 51). Other than in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, for Vivekananda *cittākāśa* gives rise to the yogi's ability of thought reading and "supersensous" perception (ibid.). Although the notion of *siddhi*s (magical powers) in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and in premodern yogic contexts could be relevant for a close analysis of this statement,[22] here he most likely draws on similar accounts of clairvoyance that were prevalent in Theosophy at that time.

Like other disciples of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda had read the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (in Bengali or Sanskrit) before he asked for an English translation in a letter from New York to Calcutta in 1895 (Gupta 1974: 987; cf. Madaio 2017: 7 n. 21). The fact that he explicitly ordered the "English translation […published] in Calcutta" (CWV VI: 337) may be due to his needs teaching English-speaking disciples, or due to a specific interest in this translation. That he requested Mitra's translation, however, certainly suggests he was already familiar with it. What makes the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* translated by Mitra "special" (Indologists would say "highly inaccurate") is his tendency to impose and weave in Theosophical terminology and concepts.[23]

[21] Although Vivekananda substitutes *(bhūta-)ākāśa* by *mahākāśa*, the parallel here is obvious. According to Jürgen Hanneder (personal conversation, 29 November 2019), *mahākāśa* is used as a synonym for *(bhūta-)ākāśa* at least once in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*.

[22] Such an analysis is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter.

[23] For example, Mitra appraises the efforts of Blavatsky and Olcott in propagating "the efficacy of Yoga meditation" among the Indian public (Mitra 1999 [1891]: 3). Vivekananda's reference to Mitra's translation is one of the most explicit evidences that he engaged with literature influenced by Theosophy. Another example is noted by Philip Deslippe (2018: 34), mentioning a letter sent by the swami from New York to the Theosophist Edward T. Sturdy (d. 1957) in which he requested, probably for the purpose of teaching yoga, two Haṭhayogic texts, the *Haṭhapradīpikā* and the *Śivasaṃhitā*. These texts were first translated by Sris Chandra Vasu (1861–1918), a Theosophist who Vivekananda personally knew (Bose 1932:

The first two volumes of the English translation of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* published before 1896 (i.e., in 1891 and 1893) are, indeed, full of references to "vital air," or *prāṇa*, and to the "vacuous space," or *ākāśa*. Equally, it repeatedly refers to a "divine mind" as the ultimate source, and this "infinite sphere of the intellect is the seat of the Supreme" (Mitra 1999 [1891]: 429). The three forms of *ākāśa* mentioned above "have all sprung and come to being from the essence of the *Chit* or Divine Intellect" (Mitra 1999 [1893]: 260). In an article entitled "The Ether," first published anonymously in the *New York Medical Times* in February 1895—around the time when Vivekananda requested the English translation of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*—Vivekananda says that both Hindu and Greek philosophers were devoted to the "study of the mind" and the transcendence of "limited human consciousness"; their ambition was to "resolve all physical phenomena to unity" (Vivekananda 1985 [1895]: 56). The result, as he claims, was the Indian notion of *ākāśa* and the Greek notion of ether.[24] And he gives an important additional clue here: *Ākāśa* is the first manifestation "after the mind" (ibid.). Vivekananda argues that although *ākāśa*/ether explains the molecular structure of material existence, this principle does not explain the space between these molecules. For him, this space is filled with the "Infinite Mind," a position that resembles the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*:

> [I]f there is anything which will explain this space, it must be something that comprehends in its infinite being the infinite space itself. And what is there that can comprehend even the infinite space but the Infinite Mind? (ibid.: 59)

There is significant evidence that the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* had direct bearing on Vivekananda's articulation of *prāṇa*, *ākāśa*, and related concepts. In the following section, I shift my attention to Rama Prasad's Occult Science of Breath, a Theosophically influenced cluster of texts revolving around the tantric source text *Śivasvarodaya*, which, I argue, may have also influenced Vivekananda's use of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*. While there is explicit textual evidence that Vivekananda knew the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, the same cannot be said of

184). Deslippe (2018: 34) also attests that Vasu's translation of the *Śivasaṃhitā*, "The Esoteric Science and Philosophy of the Tantras: Shiva Sanhita" (1887), was distributed among Vivekananda's advanced disciples.

[24] Mitra makes a very similar argument for the "Aryan" monist quest common to Greeks and Hindus. He concludes: "According to Vásishtha this single substance is the *chit* or divine intelligence, which produces the Mind, which is conversant with matter" (Mitra 1999 [1893]: 225 note *).

the *Śivasvarodaya*—or of its translation by Rama Prasad. The argument in the following section is therefore based on terminological and semantic overlaps between Rama Prasad's and Vivekananda's interpretation of the pair *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*.

Rama Prasad's Occult Science of Breath

The *Śivasvarodaya* (The Arising of the Breath of Śiva) is a tantric text of which some portions may date back to the twelfth century (Cantú forthcoming). The central notion of the text is *svara*, which can be translated as "sound" or "breath" (Monier-Williams 1899: 1285).[25] The *Śivasvarodaya* deals with prāṇic rhythms and the flow of *prāṇa*, or *svara*, through the three main *nāḍī*s, channels for subtle energy called *iḍā*, *piṅgalā*, and *suṣumnā* (Bühnemann 1991: 304 n. 59). The tantric practitioner employs the knowledge of *svara*-flows for purposes of divination. The right timings and appropriate actions for religious practice and healing—including the prediction of and warding off death—are determined by the rhythm of prāṇic flow (Mallinson and Singleton 2017: 485 n. 20).

Rama Prasad, a North Indian Theosophical author and translator, had first incorporated the *Śivasvarodaya*, although without revealing the name of the original Sanskrit work, into his *Occult Science: The Science of Breath* (c. 1884).[26] Despite its subtitle ("Translated from the Original Sanskrit"), it is clearly an interpretation of the original text rather than a translation. A few years later, Prasad published a series of essays entitled "Nature's Finer Forces: The Science of Breath" in *The Theosophist* (November 1887–March 1889). *The Science of Breath and the Philosophy of the Tatwas: Nature's Finer Forces* (1890) was published based on these essays, to which Prasad appended a partial translation from the *Śivasvarodaya* (Prasad 1890: 180–236).[27] In his first publication, he introduces the regulation of

[25] Regarding "breath," it means more specifically "air breathed through the nostrils" (ibid.).

[26] However, some comments on Prasad's work in *The Theosophist* already mentioned the original Sanskrit title *Śivasvarodaya*. For a discussion of Prasad's cluster of texts and its reception within Theosophy, especially with regard to Blavatsky, see Baier 2009: 372; 390–391.

[27] Prasad referred to the appended translation not as the *Śivasvarodaya*, but as a portion of a Sanskrit work called the *Shivágama*, or the "Teachings of Shiva" (Prasad 1890: 181). According to Keith Cantú (personal communication), the appended translation follows the *Śivasvarodaya* remarkably well despite certain omissions and eccentricities in the number of verses.

svara as a yogic practice, being the main focus therein. In the later texts, an overwhelming part is the interpretation of the *Śivasvarodaya* in relation to a cosmogonic rendition. Only the 1890 edition has appended a translation of portions of the *Śivasvarodaya*.

In Prasad's Occult Science of Breath, *svara*, also called the "Great Breath," or the "Breath of Life" (Prasad 1890: 1; 137),[28] is the central agent and cause of the universe: "It is the *Swara*—the Great Controller of All—that Creates, Preserves, and Destroys and Causes whatever is in this world" (Prasad 1892 [1884]: 6). *Svara* is also said to be an "abstract intelligence," or "*intelligent motion*," and the "*current of the life wave*" (Prasad 1890: 137; 11; original emphasis). *Svara* as a vitalistic principle—or "life-wave"—is connected to the breath of beings (ibid.: 12), and it has, again, the capacity to bridge macro- and microcosm:

> The primeval current of the life-wave is, then, the same which in man assumes the form of inspiratory and expiratory motion of the lungs, and this is the all-pervading source of the evolution and involution of the universe (ibid.: 12).

Having a Sāṃkhyan emanationist cosmology at its base, the first entities to emanate from *svara* in this cosmogony are the *tattva*s:[29] "The *tatwas* are the five modifications of the Great Breath" (ibid.: 1). Of these, *ākāśa* is the first: "When the process of evolution began, this Swara, this great power, threw itself into the form of Akàsa, and thence respectively […] into the forms of [the other elements, MK]" (Prasad 1888a: 276). According to Prasad, ether is five-fold and correlates with the respective qualities of the five elements. It would thus be wrong to translate *ākāśa* simply as "ether." Instead, since *ākāśa* is attributed with the element of sound, he suggests translating it as "sonoriferous ether" (Prasad 1890: 1). The universe persists through a constant change of the *tattva*s, which is mirrored in the flow of breath. The science of breath tells the yogi, which *tattva* governs

[28] The "Great Breath," or the "Breath of Life," is an important theme in Theosophy. Surprisingly, in Blavatsky's work, these notions, especially in their application to higher cosmological realms, is mainly associated with *ākāśa* rather than with *prāṇa* or *svara*. See, for example, Blavatsky 1877: 133; 140. However, Blavatsky refers to Prasad's understanding of *svara* as the "Great Breath" in her "Psychic and Noetic Action," published in *Lucifer* (1890).

[29] *Tattva* (lit. "thatness") is a "true or real state" or "principle" in Sāṃkhya (Monier-Williams 1899: 432). In Prasad's outline the five "*tatwas*" coincide with the five elements (Prasad 1890: 1).

the present moment and he thereby can cure diseases, conquer death, and make right prognoses for the future (Prasad 1892 [1884]: 1–6).

Regarding the overlap and distinction between *svara* and *prāṇa*, there are a few crucial aspects in Prasad's work that I will briefly address. Although for Prasad *svara* is the more encompassing term in the sense of the vital source of the universe, he also speaks about *prāṇa* in cosmological and yogic contexts.[30] Generally, Prasad tends to distinguish between *svara*, the Great Breath, and *prāṇa*, "physiological life" (Prasad 1890: 90), the latter mainly being associated with the terrestrial sphere and this solar system (ibid.: 30; 80). This connotation of *prāṇa* with the terrestrial spheres including its association with the individual's vital force is a common theme in Theosophy, and Theosophical doctrines normally do not associate *prāṇa* with life at large that permeates the cosmos.[31] However, in *Occult Science*, Prasad also speaks of *prāṇa* as the "vital principle, which is indestructible" (Prasad 1892 [1884]: 7 n. *). For Prasad, yoga is the "discipline of *prana*" (Prasad 1888b: 550), and by "constant practice of the eight branches of Yoga, the *práṇa* is purified" (Prasad 1890: 77).

Although there are certainly differences in the outlines of Vivekananda and Prasad,[32] the obvious parallels are the constitution of the world's existence on *svara/prāṇa* and *ākāśa* as the first *tattva*/element, and the regulation of breath as a tool for health and healing. There is additional evidence that Vivekananda knew Prasad's Occult Science of Breath. First, both Prasad and Vivekananda refer to the same passage in the *Ṛgveda* for explaining existence based on a principle that "breathed breathless in itself" (Prasad 1892 [1884]: i). Vivekananda avers that this was *prāṇa* that "existed without vibration" (CWV II: 435). For both of them, this principle was in a state that was ontologically distinct from its later cosmological function—breathless and non-vibrant.[33] Second, Prasad states that the

[30] Regarding its macrocosmic connotations, Prasad also mentions *prāṇa* in relation to *rayi*, which can be translated with "stuff, materials" (Monier-Williams 1899: 868). He attributes *prāṇa* with "solar, positive life-matter" and *rayi* with "negative, lunar life-matter" (Prasad 1890: 80). This echoes the *Praśnopanishat* I. 3–4, in which *prāṇa* and *rayi* are presented as a primordial pair from which all creatures are born (Gharote et al. 2017: 57–58).

[31] See for example Blavatsky 1888, vol. 2: 593.

[32] Of these, the most important ones are that Vivekananda does not apply the science of breath for divination, but instead mainly focuses on the yogic practice of *prāṇāyāma*; also, Vivekananda does not place strong emphasis on the *tattva*s and their constant modification in his cosmology.

[33] Additionally, they both refer to the Sanskrit compound *anidavatam* (Prasad) and *ánidavátam* (Vivekananda).

science of breath is based on verifiable experiments and that through this practice the yogi controls the elements and nature: "All these facts are established by experiment, which may, at any time, be repeated by any body who cares for it. This is the course of nature. But a Yogi commands nature. He turns every thing his own way" (Prasad 1892 [1884]: 9). Both of these arguments—yoga as a verifiable science and the yogi that aims to control nature—are two of Vivekananda's *leitmotivs* in *Râja Yoga* (Vivekananda 1896: 11; 6). Third, like Vivekananda, Prasad mentions a direct interdependence of the functional pair *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*. Explaining the functioning of the telephone, he states that its vibrations are those of the "*sonoriferous* ether, the constituent of the Indian *prána*, which is called *ákása*" (Prasad 1890: 3 n. *, original emphasis).

Although Vivekananda was unaffectionate towards the Theosophical Society, especially after the events at the World Parliament of Religion (Pokazanyeva 2016: 335), it is likely, given these parallels, that Vivekananda indeed knew Prasad's work, easily available in Calcutta at that time. The first and second editions of *Occult Science* (c. 1884 and 1892) were published by R.C. (Ratan Chand) Bary & Sons in Lahore, not necessarily revealing a Theosophical background at first sight. Additionally, Prasad's school mate in the Government College Lahore, Sris Chandra Vasu (1861–1918), who was also an influential scholar-translator and Theosophist, hosted Vivekananda as his guest before his voyage to the United States (Bose 1932: 184). Vivekananda often stressed the reception of indigenous sources, which may have attracted him to Prasad's works, perhaps mediated to him through Sris Chandra Vasu before his departure. In any case, the Occult Science of Breath gained international fame among nineteenth-century occultists. Some relevant points of its reception before Vivekananda's formulation of *Râja Yoga* in 1896 that already implement—and possibly increase—the *prāṇa-ākāśa* nexus are briefly outlined below.

The Occult Science of Breath within German Occultism and Theosophy

Prasad's Occult Science of Breath was influential in German occultism and the reception of yoga in German-speaking countries at the turn of the century (Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2004: 145–148). Famous proponents of German occultism like Carl Kellner (1851–1905), Theodor Reuß (1855–1923), Gustav Meyrink (1868–1932), and Franz Hartmann

(1838–1912) drew from Prasad's texts.[34] His *Occult Science* (c. 1884) was translated into German in 1893 by "Kama," a pseudonym for the poet-cum-occultist Gustav Meyrink, entitled *Occulte Wissenschaft: Die Wissenschaft des Atems*. This translation that operates closely to Prasad's original was published in the same press in Leipzig, Germany, as the Theosophical monthly journal *Lotusblüten* (1893–1900), which was edited by Franz Hartmann—one of the most influential Theosophical writers of his time (Baier 2018: 395). Karl Baier has observed that Hartmann's postulation of unity of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, ultimately forged by a divine will and consciousness, as well as the functional unity of their equivalents, force and matter, is a clear predecessor of Vivekananda's cosmological outline (ibid.: 407). Also, Hartmann speaks of a vibrating existence of matter on different planes (ibid.: 406; Hartmann 1893a: 415; 437–438).

Tying on to Baier's research, I have investigated possible Theosophical sources for Hartmann's metaphysical speculations, which are undoubtedly Rama Prasad's works. Hartmann refers to Prasad in at least two essays (Hartmann 1893a, b).[35] From these, "Das Wesen der Alchemie" (1893a), if inexplicitly, draws extensively from Prasad, but also from other established Theosophical metaphysics such as the sevenfold constitution of the cosmos (ibid.: 417). Besides obvious overlaps in content—with the most salient points being the repeated references to *prāṇa*, *ākāśa*, and the *tattva*s—Hartmann combines the symbols and colours of the five *tattva*s (ibid.: 422–425) as they are introduced by Prasad (1892 [1884]: 12–13; 1890: 7; 22–23). In a largely innovative move, Hartmann transposes the science of breath into a theory of alchemy, based on the knowledge of the *tattva*s, or the "modifications" of *ākāśa*:

> The key to the entering of chemistry into the field of alchemy lies in a correct understanding of the qualities of "ether," or, to be more accurate, of the Akâsha and its modifications, and we have good reason to believe that in this respect we are on the eve of great discoveries (Hartmann 1893a: 438 as translated in Baier 2018: 407).

[34] Kellner (1896: 9) mentioning "surya-swara" (lit. "sunbreath"), "Sonnenatem," and "Mondatem" in his *Skizze* on Yoga indicates the reception of Prasad through Kama (1893: 18–19), because the latter applies exactly the same terminology in German. Reuß (Merlin 1913: 4–5) mentions the phrase "Finer Forces of Nature" twice in his "Mystic Anatomy."

[35] The two relevant passages in Hartmann (1893b: 27, 33) are "This principle of life, which the Indians called 'prana,' could also be called a function of the general primary matter or 'ether.' It constitutes the life force of each organism." "Science [may] turn its attention to the 'finer' forces of nature, *i.e.* the various modifications of movement, which occur in the solar ether (which the Indians call Akâsha)."

Already Prasad presents an idea akin to the alchemy of changing the quality of the "terrestrial element" by applying heat, so that the element "approach[es] its solar state," whereby the "terrestrial coatings" of the same are destroyed (Prasad 1890: 22).

Turning to the Theosophist Annie Besant, a lecture given in Adyar in late 1894 again references the interdependence of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*. Clearly, Besant has read Prasad (1890: 78–79), as she quotes the same passage as Prasad from the *Praśnopanishat* by saying: "From Atma this prana is born" (Besant 1912 [1895]: 57). She goes on to explain that "wherever prana is there also is akasha, and without akasha prana cannot show itself" (ibid.: 58). In this lecture, she compares *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* to electricity and ether, translations that would soon be used by Vivekananda, among others. Vivekananda also postulates a direct interdependence of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, and like Hartmann, he also correlates these terms with force and matter (CWV II: 436). Generally, however, Vivekananda tends to apply *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* as a dual function and does not speak of their unity as Hartmann does (Baier 2018: 407). At the present state of research, it is difficult to determine the exact Theosophical sources from which Vivekananda drew, but in all likelihood, he had adopted a number of Theosophical ideas. This is not to say that Vivekananda necessarily read Hartmann or Besant (at least less likely than Prasad), but these texts exemplify the wide dissemination of a concept that had been formulated before Vivekananda.

Additional Arguments for *Ākāśa*

Vivekananda's cosmology based on the dual function of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* has precedents in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, in Rama Prasad's Occult Science of Breath, and in Hartmann's and Besant's explications derived thereof. Apart from the likely influence that these texts had on the swami, I argue that for Vivekananda there were certain rhetorical advantages in basing his cosmology on these principles. Regarding *prāṇa*, he could tie on to a highly relevant and polyvalent notion in Indian (premodern) contexts that allowed for a subsequent discussion of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* and implementation of *prāṇāyāma* practice within his Raja Yoga. By highlighting *ākāśa*, Vivekananda was able to participate in nineteenth-century discourses on ether theories, in which occultism had its part, and by referring to force and matter, he could present his cosmology in proximity to scientific discourses.

I will briefly shed light on a final argument for Vivekananda's stress on *ākāśa*. Various strands of Indian philosophy polemise against Cārvāka philosophy, a materialist doctrine that identifies the self and consciousness with the physical body. By denying the existence of *ākāśa*, it claims that the body consists of four elements only (Dhole 1899: 74 n. *). In contrast to that, the author of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, the medieval Sāṃkhya-commentator Aniruddha, and a modern commentator on Advaita Vedānta highlight the doctrine of *ākāśa*, at times in relation to their argument against Cārvāka philosophy (Slaje 1994: 208 n. 33; Larson 1987b: 349–350; Dhole 1899: 74–77 n. *). Most likely, Vivekananda adopts the argumentative line of these traditions. The existence of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* that could ultimately be reduced to a universal mind is central to Vivekananda's Advaita perspective with a strong idealist bend. This particularly "Hindu" perspective is, according to Vivekananda, diametral opposed to a materialist worldview, often associated with the West, as the following quote makes plain:

> The Hindu drank in with his mother's milk that this life is as nothing—a dream! In this he is at one with the Westerners; but the Westerner sees no further and his conclusion is that of the Châvâka—to "make hay while the sun shines." "This world being a miserable hole, let us enjoy to the utmost what morsels of pleasure are left to us." To the Hindu, on the other hand, God and soul are the only realities, infinitely more real than this world, and he is therefore ever ready to let this go for the other (CWV IV: 305).

Given the wider Indian philosophical contexts, Vivekananda's highlighting of *ākāśa* stressed his otherworldly religious orientation. This suggests that Vivekananda's focus on force and matter, the "gross" and "subtle" energy and materiality of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa*, was not based on a "*quasi*-materialistic" (de Michelis 2004: 14) worldview but, rather, the spiritualised counterpart of such a "typically Western" position.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has investigated some parallels between Vivekananda's account of *ākāśa* and *prāṇa* and similar views posited in the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and Rama Prasad's Occult Science of Breath. In doing so, Vivekananda's cosmology is contextualised within a framework that underlines the swami's ties to medieval and early modern Indian sources as well as contemporaneous Theosophical works. Revisiting the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* calls attention

to this work's view of *prāṇa* as a vibrating cosmological and soteriological principle closely attuned to the functionality of the mind and *ākāśa* in its creative quality and threefold spatial function. I have also noted here Vivekananda's remarks regarding a universal mind as the ultimate source, which has certain resonances with the radical idealism of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. Consulting Prasad's Occult Science of Breath reveals a direct model for a *prāṇa-ākāśa* interdependency and highlights the 'discipline of *prāṇa*' for healing purposes. Given that Vivekananda implemented all of these elements, I have argued that Vivekananda was likely inspired by both the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and Rama Prasad's Occult Science of Breath.

This chapter does not claim that the frameworks of mesmerism and ether theories, often mediated by the Theosophists, are not crucial for a synoptic perspective on Vivekananda. It does though hold that this view is incomplete—and, on that basis, distortive—if it is not coupled with an understanding of related ideas in Indian sources. Theosophy appropriated a considerable number of Indian materials, yet often interpreted these within a specific Theosophical and occult framework. Hence, Theosophical translators occupied an ambivalent position that both mediated and altered the contents of Indian philosophy. Thus, Rama Prasad's notion of *prāṇa* is clearly aligned with Theosophical interpretations, and the fact that he pairs *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* in his interpretation of *Śivasvarodaya* is due to the conceptual prehistory of these terms within Theosophy. As such, this pair is—regarding both Vivekananda and Prasad—to be read through the lens of an occultism that is inextricably linked with Indian sources. The polyvalent notions of *prāṇa* and *ākāśa* were indeed containers large enough to accommodate both occult and premodern Indian ideas.

While there is much investigation yet to be done on these topics, this chapter supports the view of Vivekananda as an innovative compiler and systematiser. Indeed, as a "cosmopolitan theologian" (Madaio 2017: 9), Vivekananda was aware of several strands of Indian and Western philosophies and perspectives. His philosophical and religious explications, which are mostly in the form of lectures, addressed a great variety of audiences in India and the West. It is reasonable that this spiritual teacher developed innovative approaches that, in the light of colonialism, reflect both his specific "Indian" legacy and his expansion towards and demarcation from things "Western."

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