

Nath-Tantra

The Nath (Adi-Nath) are an Indian sect of tantrik sadhus (renunciate holy men). Like most sects they claim a divine lineage, holding Lord Shiva to have been the first Natha. Historically, the lineage stems from an accomplished yogi Matsyendra Nath who most scholars believe lived around the 11th century C.E.

Hindu scholar, Gopinath Kaviraj provides the following description of the Natha cosmology:

“This shows that the metaphysical position of the Nathas was not monistic, nor was it dualistic either. It was transcendental in the truest sense of the term. They speak of the Natha, the Absolute, as beyond the opposition involved in the concepts of Saguna and Nirguna or of Sakara and Nirakara. And so to them the Supreme End of Life is to realize oneself as Natha and to remain eternally fixed above the world of relations. The way to this realization is stated to be Yoga, on which they lay great emphasis. It is held that Perfection can not be attained by any means unless it is supplemented by the disciplinary practices of Yoga.”

Various traditions trace the origins of Hatha yoga to the Natha—either as inventors or resuscitators of an ancient system in decline. The Natha taught a yoga combining Pranyama (breath control), Asana (body control), Mudra (posture) and Nadanusandhana. The practice results in a state of intense Joy, known as Sahajavastha.

Kaviraj elaborates on the Natha strain of yoga:

“The general principle on which they proceeded appears to be the recognition of the graded character of Matter, ranging from the densest form revealed in our waking sense-experience up to the most rarefied and tenuous form to which the end of Samprajnata Samadhi - the so-called Sasmitha Samadhi - eventually leads. I am speaking here in terms of Sankhya nomenclature. The consciousness of the individual self as enmeshed in grosser matter is really identical with the Universal Consciousness of the World-soul, nay, with Absolute Consciousness itself. Only that limitations have to be carefully removed.”

And in summary:

