

The Character of Immortality in the Nātha-Siddha Sanskrit Texts

It is well known that the aim of Nātha-Siddhas is the attainment of immortality. But what kind of immortality it is? Do the Nātha-Siddhas seek immortality in some kind of a spiritual and non-material body (as most scholars believe), or do their texts speak about immortality in a physical, material body? Although the precise nature of immortality is not explicitly described in the Nātha-Siddha Sanskrit literature, some verses seem to support the concept of corporeal immortality in a material (*bhautika*) body.

Two main techniques are used to achieve this goal. The first one deals with the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*) and is called *khecarīmudrā*. As James Mallinson has shown in his brilliant study on this topic (Routledge 2007), various hathayogic texts discuss two different purposes of this *mudrā*. A body should either be flooded by the nectar of immortality (*amṛtaplāvana*), or the nectar should be saved and kept in store in the head (*bindudhāraṇa*). In any case the result is a body which is free of diseases, ageless and therefore immortal.

The second technique (the discussion of which is the main subject of the paper) is the ‘mastering of elements’ (*bhūtajaya* or *bhūtasiddhi*), by which a yogin can overcome the limitations of the material world, being no more bound by mundane laws of nature. The ‘mastering of elements’ appears to be an old and widespread yogic technique. References to it are to be found in a great variety of non-hathayogic texts (*Śukānupraśna* section of the *Mahābhārata*, *Yogasūtras*, *Śaivāgamas*, etc.). In the Nātha-Siddha Sanskrit texts and in other hathayogic literature this technique is usually described in passages dealing with the art of concentration on five gross elements (*pañcadhāraṇā*). This concentration, however, must be distinguished from a similar technique described in several tantric texts: the ‘purification of elements’ (*bhūtasuddhi*), the aim of which is a construction of a new, temporal ritual body, whereas the result of the *pañcadhāraṇā* is a concrete permanent body endowed with various perfections (*siddhi*). Such a body is still formed by gross elements and therefore it is physical and material, but a yogin has the ability to control these elements, and thanks to this skill his body is immortal.

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