

Theory and Practice of Yoga

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RĀJA YOGA, ASCETICISM, AND THE RĀMĀNANDA SAMPRADĀY

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Abstract

Suggestions of yogic and ascetic practices can be found among the earliest archaeological findings from the Indus Valley. Additionally, the ancient sacred chants, the Vedas and Upaniṣads, also tell of yogis and ascetics seeking liberation from the mundane. Eventually, some of these practices became formalized in the Rāja Yoga system. During the last two millennia, Rāja Yoga and many other ascetic practices have formed the basis of religious discipline for the many and varied Hindu renunciant orders. Today, the largest of these is the Rāmānanda Sampradāy. This chapter traces the development and connection between yogic and ascetic practices, and then focuses on how these are incorporated into the life of the Rāmānandī renunciant.

Although the actual origins of what has come to be called 'yoga' remain uncertain, archaeological indications suggest its roots can be traced to the Indus Valley civilization that existed more than four millennia ago. Excavations of the region have uncovered fired stone seals and tablets as well as sculptures depicting individuals sitting in various positions and poses reminiscent of yoga postures. Moreover, a few of the tablets depict an extremely difficult pose currently referred to as Gorakṣāsana, and this suggests both a knowledge of yoga *āsana*-s as well as some form of meditation.¹ Predictably, archaeological evidence from the region suggests the early presence of ascetics and ascetic practices as well.²

¹ Items excavated at both Harappa and Mohenjo-daro bear the likeness of a male (possibly a deity) sitting in a 'yogic' posture and surrounded by various animals. The image is often referred to as 'Proto-Śiva', since it is believed to be an early representation of Śiva.

² M. G. Bhagat, *Ancient Indian Asceticism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1976), pp. 3–4.

Yoga in Vedic and Post- Vedic Literature

Reference to a class of ascetics, called *muni-s*, can be found in the Sanskrit and brahmanical tradition as early as the time of the *Rg Veda*. They were said to be long haired individuals who had mystical powers, some of which later become associated both with ascetic practices, collectively referred to as '*tapas*' or '*tapasya*,' and with the practice of yoga. Thus, from an early date, yoga and asceticism, as forms of spiritual endeavor, have come to be connected. During the latter Vedic times, a variety of terms are used to describe different ascetic practices and individuals, including those known as Vratyas (lit. 'vow takers').³ The *Atharva Veda* contains several references to them and their use of postures (*dsana-s*) and breath control practices (*pranayama*) to attain spiritual powers. In the text, *prana*, or 'breath,' is identified with the supreme spirit and the source of all life.

With the rise of Upanisadic thinking and literature, the interiorization of sacrifice becomes apparent, with a concomitant emphasis on *tapas*, knowledge, and the attainment of transcendental experience taking precedence over ritual worship. The Upanisadic *rsi-s* stress knowledge of and identification with Brahman as the goal of existence, and they find commonality with ascetic practitioners in seeking this transcendental knowledge and immortality. Direct and indirect references to yogic practices are evident in some of the earliest Upanisads, including those later associated with Raja Yoga. They appear alone and in connection with *tapas* in many of the later texts in this category. Thus, here, too, the practice of *tapas* and of yoga are connected and considered legitimate, and they form an integral part of the teachings and the *sddhand* ('religious practice') passed down from teacher to disciple.

By the time of Hindu Epics, the *Ramdyana* and the *Mahabharata*, the practitioners of yoga are primarily ascetic yogis (male) and yoginis (female). Little mention is made of lay practitioners. Ascetics undertake extreme austerities in order to acquire both yogic powers and liberation. Moreover, a variety of *siddhi-s* (supernatural powers) are said to be achieved through the practice of yoga, including such

³ In the *Rg Veda*, the term '*vratya*' literally meant 'obedient, faithful.' It later comes to refer to one 'belonging to or fit for a religious observance,' and then 'engaged in a religious observance.' (Cologne Digital Sanskrit Lexicon, <http://www.unikoeln.de>)

abilities as levitation, controlling the thoughts of others, knowing past and future lives, and even gaining power over certain types of spirits. In the Valmiki *Ramdyana*, the goddess Parvati uses her yogic abilities to fast for thousands of years to gain both ascetic power as well as Siva's favor.⁴ Throughout the Epics, there is frequent mention of hermits and other renunciants who undertake diverse forms of austerity, in conjunction with the practice of yoga, in order to attain various yogic powers, or *yoga Sakti*. Although liberation is an important goal for many practitioners, for others, the quest is worldly and the goal is psychic powers, and even material wealth. Interpolations to the core *Mahabharata*, theorized by some to have been added at about the same time as the introduction of the *Bhagavadgita* into the text, give status and legitimacy to the practice of yoga, by which one can attain both power and enlightenment. What is identified as yoga in the *Bhagavadta* and in the latter sections of the *Mandbharata* includes a broader range of actions than the Patanjali system. In the *Mahabharata*, as in the Upanisads, most ascetics are renunciants, and yoga and *tapas* are treated at times as being essentially the same.'

During the few centuries just preceding the Common Era, a series of later Upanisads were authored. Among these are the Sannyasa, Saiva, and Yoga Upanisads. The concentration of the first two sets are on different types of asceticism, while the third focuses almost entirely on yogic philosophy and techniques. Soon thereafter, ample literary reference can be found regarding a vast array of ascetics and ascetic groups, separated essentially by the types of austerities practiced. Among the practices, elements of the system elaborated by Patanjali are apparent, with some ascetics adhering to the entire system. The goals of the various groups seem to have also been diverse, with some seeking immortality and others liberation. The *Vaikhānasasmarta Sutra*, a fourth century text, elaborates upon the practices and distinctions of many of these groups.' Again, the practice of *tapas* and various elements of the yoga system were used in conjunction by many of the individuals and groups mentioned in the text.

⁴ Valmiki, *Ramdyana* (I.35.19-20).

Eliade, *Yoga*, pp. 146-151.

⁶ Eliade, *Yoga*, pp. 139-142.

The eighteen major Puranic texts and the many minor ones deal primarily with cosmogonies, history and legends, and stories of great beings and divinities. They contain colorful tales of yogis and yoginis who have awe-inspiring supernatural powers resulting from their yogic practices and austerities. Some of the texts also provide descriptions of the various forms of yoga and *tapas* performed and the benefits derived therefrom. While there are some mentions of lay practitioners, most who undertook the various practices are renunciants and ascetics, for the knowledge and abilities to do these are seen to be primarily the purview of the *virakta*.

Sectarian Upanisads and Medieval Yogis

During the first millennium G.E., Hindu and Buddhist Tantric traditions included innumerable yogic practices, in conjunction with diverse personal and joint rituals, to attain the goals of power and liberation. During the same time period, the sectarian Vaisnava Upanisads present literary evidence of the coming together of asceticism, yoga, tantra, and devotionism. All of the elements are commingled in the *sadhana* promoted in these texts. Each of the Upanisads in the group focuses its primary attention and devotion on a particular divinity. The various techniques described are meant to earn the practitioner the wisdom and power to gain direct experience and contact with the respective divinity, as well as immortality, wisdom, and devotion.

Among the variety of ascetic groups that undertook yogic practices during the medieval period were the Pasupatas, the Kapalikas, and the Kanphata Yogis. Although many of these have long ceased to exist, and about which there is little of certainty known, a few have continued up to the present day. The contemporary Gorakhnath Sampraday has its roots in the Kanphata Yoga tradition. This order, which began early in the second millennium is an example of an ascetic order that has long combined elements of the yoga, asceticism, and *tantra* to achieve the twin goals of power and enlightenment. Followers credit the group's traditional founder, Gorakhnath, with writing a foundational and in-depth treatise entitled *Hatha toga*, the substance and philosophy of which is central to their contemporary religious practices. Along with his guru, Matsyendranath, Gorakhnath is said to have performed great feats of yoga and asceticism, through

which he attained many *siddhi-s*. Moreover, the present-day order reveres many of its past members as *siddha-s*, possessors of great *siddhi-s*. As has been the case throughout Indian history, elements of the various orders mentioned here were subsequently adopted and reconfigured in the formation of new ascetic groups. One such group is the Ramananda Sampradaya.

The Rameinanda Sampradaya

The origins of the Ramananda Sampradaya are steeped in mythology and legend.¹ Most Ramanandis venerate Swami Ramananda (circa 14th-15th century) as founder of their order. While little actual evidence of him, his life, and his practices exist, there are various writings that suggest a collection of ascetics devoted to Ram were present in or around the 15th century in North India. These renunciants may well have been the forerunners or early members of the Sampradaya.

Tradition has it that Ramananda was initially an ascetic in the Sri Sampradaya, which was founded in the eleventh or twelfth century by Ramanujacarya. The order adhered to the founder's Visistadvaita philosophy and combined with it the practices of asceticism, yoga, and devotion. During subsequent generations, a variety of doctrines and rules evolved that discriminated against low caste, householders, and females, setting them apart as being inherently inferior and ritually impure. Ramananda eventually ran afoul with these restrictions, which he came to view as discriminatory and incompatible with his own spiritual path and enlightenment. Ultimately, he left the Sampradaya along with other ascetics and devotees attracted by his teachings, and he started his own order. Since his disagreement was specifically with the post-Ramanuja doctrines and discriminatory practices, he kept much of the theology, philosophy, and ascetic aspects of the Sri Sampradaya. What he rejected were the

¹ In attempting to understand any Indian ascetic tradition, we are often left to depend on secondary sources for information, since ascetics have seldom ever written about themselves and their practices. Thus, as is the case with most of our understanding of the past in India, we must rely on speculation in our interpretation of these secondary sources.

bulk of its caste and gender restrictions, as well as many of the allied and narrow social doctrines that had been adopted.

In developing his own monastic order, Ramananda emphasized that the primary goal of *sadbana*, or religious practice, is liberation from the cycle of birth and death so that one can experience eternal love of and oneness with God, through the aspect of Ram. The means to be used for the realization of this goal include both worldly renunciation and selfless devotion. In contrast to the restrictions of the Ramanuja order, it is said that Ramananda did not place limits on who could become a follower and consequently attracted a widely diverse group, including individuals from many castes and occupations, women, householders, and even Muslims, the most famous of the latter being Kabir. Although he was a renunciant himself, this did not prevent Ramananda from teaching householders various forms of ascetic as well as devotional practices. As a result, the current Ramananda Sampradaya has an enormous lay membership, which closely and regularly interacts with and supports the ascetics of the order.

Ramananda-s traditionally refer to the founder of their order as a great yogi, yet there is little known, even within the order itself, the extent to which he may have practiced yoga. What is known is that he became a popular religious reformer and teacher, and it was both his teachings and his own ascetic existence that attracted so many people from various castes and occupations to follow him and take initiation into the life of renunciation. This tradition of drawing in renunciant members from many castes has continued up to the present day, and it is why the Ramananda Sampradaya currently has the largest number of *virakta* members of any Hindu order, an estimated one and a half million.⁸ Commonly referred to as Itamanandr-s, 'Vairagi-s,'⁹ or simply '*sadhu-s*,' its followers come primarily from villages in the northern and western states, especially Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Gujarat. Since they bring with them elements of their own religious cultures, the diversity of the order's austerities and activities shows not only the influence of previous ascetic movements but also of a variety of regional religious

⁸ This number is based on a 1990 study done by the Akhil Bharatiya S^dhu Samaj, an organization of renunciants and others connected with the tradition.

⁹ From the Sanskrit 'vairagya,' or 'non-attachment.'

traditions and practices. Add to this the various subgroupings within the order, and the diversity of practices become even greater. Nevertheless, the practice of yoga, at one level or another, remains an important part of the Vairagi life and life style. Thus, the present-day order represents a contemporary manifestation of a long tradition of renunciants who practice both yoga and asceticism.

Contemporary Practice

In addition to the laxity of caste restrictions, one of the major reasons for the large number of renunciants in the Ramananda Sampraday in comparison to other monastic orders is that its members have a great deal of freedom in crafting their particular lifestyle and set of religious undertakings.. The order emphasizes individuality in its concepts and practices, and it inspires its members to work toward crafting a spiritual path specific to their own personality, inclinations, needs, and goals. Moreover, as they progress toward their goals, members are expected to individualize their *sadbhava* in ways that define paths unique to themselves. Thus, each Vairagi is, first and foremost, an individual seeking devotion, realization, and/or liberation. At the same time, he¹⁰ is a member of a strongly knit community of ascetics. These two aspects work together in that the emphasis on individual creativity serves to make the community stronger through the diversity of knowledge, experience, and realization that the individual brings to the collective. Because, the extent and manner of yoga practiced in the order vary widely, most observations provided herein deal more with general tendencies within the order.

Yoga and *tapasya* blend together seamlessly in the life of many Ramanandi-s. Those who integrate them in their daily *sadband* generally view yoga and *tapas* as parts of the same process. From the time of *diksha* ('initiation'), Vairagi-s are taught the importance of both as valuable and powerful tools in a renunciant's life. However, not all Raxnanandi-s use or practice the various methods and techniques in the same manner or to the same extent. While some do little

¹⁰ Since over 99% of Ramanandi reunuciant's are male, male gender pronouns are used throughout in reference to them.

more than give them lip service, others devote a relatively large amount time and energy to learning and undertaking the practices. One's guru, ascetic family,¹¹ and individual personality all influence the degree to which yoga and *tapasya* are learned and incorporated into an individual's *seldhanti*. Nevertheless, yoga and austerities are important elements that help give identity and direction to both the order as well as the individual Vairagi.

Raja Toga

Whether or not they practice all the aspects of Raja Yoga, Ramanandi-s give deference to the system, and they all formally seek to imbibe in their lives at least the first two limbs, *yama* ('restrictions') and *niyama* ('observances'), which they see as comprising a fundamental set of moral guidelines.¹² Moreover, a new initiate into the order is assumed to have already begun following these before becoming a Ramanandr. During initiation, the first instruction given him by his *dais^y guru* (one who gives initial ordination) typically includes one or a series of *mantra-s* for doing *japa* (*mantra* recitation) as well as performing *dharand* ('concentration') practices, both of which are done as a part of one's daily *sadhand*. Generally, *asana-s* and *preirjelyeima* are taught in conjunction with the *mantra-s*, since they are seen as important in helping prepare the body and mind to practice concentration. The combination of these practices helps one to withdraw focus from the things of the world to the things of the *spirit*. In essence, this process is *pratyatzeira*. Therefore, from the outset Vairagi-s are expected to incorporate aspects of six of the Raja Yoga limbs as a part of their lifestyle, at least at the basic level. To what extent Ramanandr-s today practice these on a regular basis is uncertain. Some will admit to having left the practices for different forms of *sadhaneis*, while others will claim to be, and are, strong practition-

¹¹ Ramanandf-s define their family in a fashion parallel to birth families. Thus, one's teacher is the 'father' of one's spiritual life, the other disciples of the same teacher become one's guru brothers and sisters, whether or not they are renunciants. One's teacher's teacher is called grandfather guru, the his other disciples become one's uncle or aunt gurus.

¹² These consist of non-violence, truth, non-stealing, sexual abstinence, non-greed, cleanliness, contentment, self-study, and surrender to God.

ers. Additionally, from time to time, all Ramanandi-s are expected to perform *anusthana-s*, which are vow based sets of ritual performances (see below). Since these often demand greater physical endurance and mental concentration than the normal daily life of a Vairagi, yogic practices are frequently integrated into such undertakings, because it is believed that these practices will help assure successful fulfillment of the vows undertaken.

Yoga, Vows, and Anusthana-s

A Vairagi's life is framed by the vows and practices he undertakes. When vows are combined with specific forms of *tapasya* for a prolonged period, then the entire process is traditionally known as an '*anusthana*.' The closest contemporary English translation of the term is 'spiritual retreat,' although this rendering does not capture the real meaning of the term for Ramanandi-s. During an *anusthana*, Vairagi-s perform specific and intensive disciplines for a predetermined period, which can be anywhere from a few days to a year or more. In doing the various *tapas* for which vows are taken, some yogic practices are inevitably incorporated. For example, a Vairagi may vow not to eat, or drastically limit his food consumption for a period of a week or a month. He may take a vow to eat only fruit for a specific period. In such cases, specific forms of *pranayama* and *dharana* are considered important tools to help stave off hunger pangs as well as provide energy to help fulfill the vow. If one vows to live under no shelter during the rainy season, he may perform yogic practices to help keep warm or get beyond physical discomforts that inevitably occur. If a Vairagi is inspired to make such practices a permanent part of his life, then he may undertake a further initiation and become a Tyagi or even a Mahatyagi. It is here that yoga and *tapasya* find their staunchest adherents among Ramanandi-s.

Yoga, Tyagi-s and Mahatyagi-s

There are a variety of suborders within the Ramananda Sampraday that are meant to appeal to, and build on, the diversity of available paths to the divine. Those who desire to pursue a more physically austere lifestyle than that generally experienced in the order have

the option to take initiation as a Tyagi, literally `renunciant! The name of this initiatory vow is *khiik cliksri* (lit. 'ash initiation') and refers to the daily practice of covering one's bodies with ashes from the sacred fire that is to be regularly maintained. Although all Tyagi-s wear some cloth, this often consists of little more than a *longoti*, and perhaps a *lune*, and they typically spend more of their lives roaming throughout the northern and central portions of India than the generally more sedentary Vairagi-s who have not taken the Tyagi vow. They say of their lifestyle, *Tamta yogi, bahata pani.* Literally translated as, 'A wandering yogi is like flowing water,' it expresses the belief that an ascetic who is not tied to a place has fewer attachments and more freedom, both of which are important to the renunciant life.

Integral to the Tyagi vow is adherence to a set of practices known as `tri tap,' or 'three austerities,' in which the year is divided into three four-month periods, with a specific daily *tapasya* connected to each period. The first of these austerities done during the four hottest months of the year, is called *dhani* (`sacred fire') tap. It consists of sitting in prayer or meditation surrounded by a set of small fires made of dried cow dung. The practice is to continue for approximately one hour daily during the hottest time of the day and is preceded by a bath and the covering of the body with dhani ashes. The second *tapas* in the series is known as *maidan* (`field') tap. Performed throughout the monsoon season, the practice involves foregoing the use of any form of shelter. The obvious consequence is that the Tyagi is exposed entirely to the elements of nature during that time. The third *tapas* is performed during the coldest time of the year and is known as *jal* (`water') tap. Tyagi-s immerse themselves in water up to the waist or even the neck for one hour nightly, between midnight and sunrise. This foam of *tapas* is the most hazardous of the *tri tap*, since the cold temperature can cause hypothermia, loss of muscle control, and even drowning.

Sometime during the late nineteenth century, an additional sub-order arose from within the Tyagi-s, whose vows further increase the practitioner's degree of physical renunciation. Known as `Mahatyagi-s,' members of this group take the most physically-restrictive vows of any Hindu renunciant order as a whole. In addition to the Tyagi vows mentioned above, Mahatyagi-s also vow to observe the practice of *maidan tap* at all times, to never cut or comb their hair, to wear no cloth, and to limit bodily covering to a *longoti* of 1Sanana

tree bark or *munja* grass. In addition to the strict vegetarian diet common to all Vairagi-s, the Mahatyagi diet additionally omits all grains, many root vegetables, and beans as well. Some members of the suborder will add further restrictions to this already limited dietary practice, such as no milk products or tea.

Because their adopted *sddband-s* put greater physical and mental demands on Tyagi-s and Mahatyagi-s than those of most other Vairagi-s, there is more emphasis in these suborders on physical conditioning, sharpening of mental focus, and development of a greater will power. Without these, there is far less likelihood of success for Tyagi-s and Mahatyagi-s. Even with the increased mental and physical conditioning, many members do not stay in the suborders for a long period, opting instead to return to the general Vairagi population and practices. Those who persist find that performing the various forms of *tapas* successfully requires a deeper knowledge and practice of yoga as well, so their *sddband* typically includes several elements of Raja Yoga, along with certain Tantric practices. In practicing Raja Yoga, Tyagi-s and Mahatyagi-s understand and interpret the various limbs specific to their needs, visions, and *sddband*. This often results in the addition of both tantric and devotional elements, as described below.

All eight Raja Yoga limbs are viewed as powerful tools for developing will power (*dtma Sakti*) and spiritual energy (*ojas* or *divya Sakti*). However, while all aspects of the first two limbs, *yama* and *niyama*, are generally important to Vairagi-s, Tyagi-s give them added emphasis, especially with respect to cleanliness, abstinence, and non-greed. To a Tyagi, any laxity of these is believed to diminish one's will power and valuable spiritual energy and can create sizable obstacles in one's *sddband*. To help develop and attain these *Sakti-s*, both the practice of *dsana-s* and *prandyama* are considered to be fundamental tools.

Tyagi-s see both *dsana-s* and *prdnayama* as physical actions that give the practitioner a direct connection to the powers of the mind and spirit. Each yoga posture is believed to have its *own siddhi* (here, 'yogic power'), the attainment of which is dependent up the ability to maintain the pose motionless, with a steady mind, for a specific period of time. With respect to the meditation poses, such as *padmdsana* or *siddhdsana*, Tyagi-s say that the ability to sit completely motionless and mentally 'controlled' for three and a half hours in either position will grant one the power of that pose. Some other poses require a longer time, while some need much less. The *siddhi*

of *mayurdsana* (peacock pose) of *hamsdsana* (swam pose), for example, is said to be attainable with less than an hour of perfect practice. The various powers available through the perfection of an *asana* include such abilities as being able to sleep at any time or not at all, prevent illness, maintain youthful appearance (if desired), and physical strength. Another, and some believe, much stronger tool for gaining focus and power is *pranayama*.

Pranayama is undertaken for a variety of reasons. On a physical level, the various types of breath control are done to strengthen the lungs, purify the blood, and relax the body. There are specific breathing practices for focusing the mind, heating or cooling the body, controlling one's heart beat, being able to fast for long periods, being able to assimilate poison without harmful consequences, and so forth. However, Tyagi-s see the practices as far more powerful and important than to be used simply for these purposes. The most important goal of *pranayama* consists of awakening the subtle energies within, such as the *kundalini Sakti* at the base of the spine, cleansing of the *susumna* (an invisible channel that travels up from the base of the spine to the top of the head), and raising the *kundalini* energy through this channel until it reaches the energy center, or *cakra*, at the top of the head. However, to accomplish this, other practices that are generally associated with tantra are utilized as well, especially *bandha*-s and visualizations. Tyagi-s believe that these help awaken, focus, and channel the subtle *oja Sakti*, which is then used to accomplish various physical and psychic feats, such as levitation, mind control, and so forth. Additionally, the focus and power gained helps to awaken the *kundalini*. With this comes both power and, hopefully, liberation.

At the same time, the dangers of *pranayama* are also understood by most Ramanandi-s. One occasionally hears stories within the order about *siddhus* who became physically incapacitated and/or mentally disturbed through improper breath control practices. Thus, one needs proper training and guidance, an intense commitment, and a potent ability to focus and concentrate, so as not be distracted by the things of the world, or seduced by the powers that are inevitably gained. For this reason, those interested in learning the various forms will generally seek out a well-trained and experienced *sadhu* to be the guru from whom they can learn these practices. Integral to this training and process; *pratyahara* and *dhyan* are both seen as invaluable additions to the Tyagi's *sadhana*.

Pratyahara (the withdrawal of the mind from external sense identification) is viewed by Tyagi-s as changing sensory input from that of material and external stimuli to internal stimuli, so that one learns how to see, hear, feel and even speak with the Divine within. *PraOëihetra* is achieved through practices meant to inspire detachment, but the term can also refer to the introspective study of sacred texts. The principal text for the Ramanandf-s is the *Ramcaritmanas* (or *Manas*) of Tulsidds, and the focus is clearly devotional. Some in the order also read and study the *Adhyatma R^mtiyaha* and various Upanisads, including several of the Yoga Upanisads. These other texts are used primarily to help develop a greater understanding of the philosophical and practical dimensions of yoga, and of the Self.

Practices used specifically to develop focus and concentration are known as *dharatta*. Generally speaking, this limb consists of specific techniques used to slow the wavering mind and bring it under control. In the West, such practices are often referred to as 'meditation.' *Dhtratzei* may involve concentration on a thought or a sensation, or it may include the repetition of a *mantra*, such as *Sri Rama s'araharn mama* ('Lord Ram, you are my refuge'). The latter is seen not only to develop concentration but to stimulate awareness of and a closer relationship with the Divine within. Here, the power believed to be inherent in the sound of the *mantra* is believed to help bring about focus and awareness.

To the Ramanandi-s the last two Raja yoga limbs, i.e. *dhydna* and *samadhi*, are not practices as much as they are states of mind and being and thus cannot be taught. They can only be attained. For Vairagi-s, *dlyana* occurs as perception, awareness, recognition, and remembrance of one's true nature which gradually becomes manifest. Once this state is realized and integrated into one's daily existence, then the individual is able to see beyond the duality of the physical and material world and achieve realization of the Self as united with Rama. This state, according to Ramanandi-s, is *samadhi*. It is characterized by a transcendence of the wavering mind, focused and enlightened awareness, complete equanimity of thought, and true peace. This is simultaneously the goal of yoga, of *tapas*, and of *bhakti*. It is the epitome of existence.

Conclusion

Until the last few decades, most of the *mahant-s*, or leaders, of the Ramananda Sampraday have typically come from the ranks of practicing Tyagi-s. Since that time, however, a gradual shift in emphasis has occurred in the higher ranks of the order in the direction of philosophical study and away from large scale involvement in austerities and yogic practices. This de-emphasis on *tapas* has had its effect on the membership, which seems to be following in a similar direction. In its place, study of Sanskrit and Sanskrit scriptures has become a more common part of the *sadhana* of many Vairagi-s, resulting in a gradual transformation of the order as a whole. The resulting form is much more functionally parallel to the present-day Sannyasi and Ramanuja renunciant traditions, both of which are highly brahmanized. This 'brahmanization' can be seen not only in the order's direction and *sadband* practices, but also in the values being adopted, and even in the Ramanandi dress. The dominant color for Vairagi clothing has traditionally been white. Currently, however, a quarter or more have taken to wearing ochre and related colors, somewhat similar to Sannyasi garments. At the same time, the Tyagi and Mahatyagi subgroups have drastically decreased in numbers, as have the practices they undertake.

Consequently, as the practice and role of *tapasya* gradually diminish in the order, there is a similar effect on Raja Yoga for the Ramanandi-s. Yet, one form of yoga is still strong and will likely always endure, and that is *bhakti* yoga. Devotion to the divine in the aspect of Lord Ram remains central to Ramanandi life, for renunciants and householders alike. As previously mentioned, this coupling of yoga and *bhakti* dates back at least to the time of the *Bhagavadgīta*, and it has been a recurrent theme in various texts and movements ever since. Ultimately, it is this aspect of yoga that most Ramanandi-s see as the highest form of practice. Moreover, even Raja Yoga has often been used in the order as a vehicle for helping to establish one in the path and practice of devotion. For this reason, many Tyagi-s perform deity worship in conjunction with their yoga and other austerity practices. For Ramanandi-s, then, *bhakti* is not only a path, but for many it is also the goal. Devotion to and love of the Divine can take many forms. An elder Tyagi once mused about the ascetic path, 'Devotion to Ram and eating are all that are important. Anyone who does anything else is but a fool.' Tulsidas puts

into the words of Bharat a commonly recited verse from the *Manas* that expresses the view held by many Vair[^]gi-s with respect to their ultimate goal of life:

Wealth, pleasure, religious merit, and liberation, none of these are my aim.
Birth after birth, all that I want is devotion to the feet of Lord Ram.¹³

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¹³ R[^]mcaritmanas (2.204).