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SUKHBIR SINGH

Fire, Sun, Moon

Kundalini Yoga in John Updike's S.: A Novel

"I am Kundalini, the energy-serpent that rises."

Sarah Price Worth

Critics have so far responded to John Updike's *S.: A Novel* (1988) by dismissing it as Updike's comic portrayal of a middle-aged WASP woman suddenly caught in the mires of obsolete Hinduistic and Buddhist philosophies (Adams 78; Broyard 7; Schiff 89).¹ However, *S.* is much more than a mere humorous delineation of an American woman in search of freedom from her bondage to the world. It epitomizes a unique aesthetic transmutation of Tantra Yoga, one of India's most complex esoteric disciplines. This branch of Yoga gives radical prominence to the human body and probes deep into the subliminal psychic structures of the self. To appreciate it, one has to know *Tantra-sastras* and tantric philosophy in theory as well as in practice. C. G. Jung therefore cautions the Western yoga enthusiasts, "The spiritual development of the West has been along very different lines from that of the East and has therefore produced conditions which are the most unfavourable soil one can think of for the application of yoga" ("Yoga" 537). Correspondingly, the current critics' opinions about *S.* are rooted in their limited knowledge of this sophisticated physio-psychic branch of Yoga. But, Updike admirably meets the theoretical part of this challenge in his depiction of the protagonist, Sarah Price Worth, as an embodiment of the primal female force or Kundalini Sakti in tantric tradition. The purpose of this essay is to study *S.* in the light of Kundalini Yoga for a comparative evaluation of Sarah's rise to the "Serpent Power" or Kundalini. An attempt will in the process be made to first briefly illustrate the doctrinal intricacies of Kundalini Yoga and then critically examine the evolution of her consciousness through different psychic stages. It will as well be finally indicated whether Kundalini Sarah could find release from her earthly concerns at the end of the novel.



FIGURE 1. Plate I - Ajit Mookerjee. From Kundalini by Ajit Mookerjee. Thames & Hudson Ltd., London.

The radical movements of the sixties such as the New Left and “Counter Culture” captured America’s collective imagination and created a climate of cultural experimentation and metaphysical interrogation. “The decade of the 1960s,” says Sydney Ahlstrom, “was a time [. . .] when the old grounds of national confidence, patriotic idealism, moral traditionalism, and even of historic Judeo-Christian theism, were awash” (3). The consequent spiritual scepticism aroused among Americans an irresistible craving for alternative value systems. As a result, they looked over to the mystical Orient for the much needed spiritual solace and moral sustenance. To many of them, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Islam appeared to offer a variety of viable resolutions for their metaphysical and moral confusions. As a discipline of the universal import, Yoga caught up with Americans quite fast and soon several Indian gurus sprung on the American soil with their respective brands of Yoga. They preached and propagated Hindu spirituality and thereby created a “subculture” that “interfaced with a dominant American cultural matrix” (Forsthoefel 2, 1–14). As a result, several American writers and artists patronised them for their aesthetic or spiritual purposes. Updike knew of Kundalini Yoga from Bhagwan Rajneesh and his Tantra Yoga. In his interview with this author, Updike claims, “When I was a young man, in Oxford especially, but in my New York years also, I read a lot of religious books. Not just Christian, but I did read a little about Hinduism and Buddhism. So I had some knowledge of it. But when I reached it for this book—I mean, yes, Rajneesh was the way in. But then I went back and read a number of texts about both Hinduism and Buddhism and worked them into the teachings and into the novel, which made it a long glossary about *yoga*” (Singh 88).

In fact, Updike has frequently been accused of showing women in a poor light—as mere objects of sexual pleasure (Lanchester 13). In *S.*, he seriously tries to redress this chronic grievance of his readers and critics. For that purpose, Updike reaches out to the ancient *Sakti* cult of the Hindu tantrism to venerate Sarah as an epitome of Kundalini Sakti and an emblem of the mystical female power. *Tantrism* is a “religion of the Mother,” and the *Tantras* elevate an ordinary woman to the level of a goddess, a personification of *Sakti*, the Great Mother or Cosmic Power. Tantrikas worship woman as *Sakti*, says Mircea Eliade, for the vital reason that “Woman incarnates both the mystery of creation and the mystery of Being, of everything that is, that incomprehensibly becomes and dies and is reborn” (203). Besides, *Tantras* support Updike’s own view that sex (body) and religion (soul) can be reconciled to have a glimpse of the eternity. Updike’s earlier works such as *Rabbit, Run* (1960), *The Music School* (1966), *Couples* (1968), *Marry Me* (1976) and *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984) avidly explore the “dark mysteries” and “inexplicable wonders” of woman’s sexuality. Accordingly, Updike in *S.* employs Kundalini Yoga to probe

the elemental mystery of a woman in general and of an American housewife in particular whose heroic determination to liberate herself from the worldly confines deserves absolute admiration. In the interview with this author, Updike further acknowledges, “Yeah, she’s *kundalini*, she’s the essence, whatever you call it—the mystic life, and she ascends in the novel to the highest levels of, what is the Buddhist phrase, disengagement. Yeah, she comes above it all. I like that novel, actually. I was surprised that so many women did not like it. But I meant it in praise of women” (Singh 88–89).

KUNDALINI YOGA

So many women in America did not favourably respond to *S.* possibly because the tantric element in the narrative tantalised them to the point of a weary confusion. Besides, Updike’s intermittent comedic posturing in the portrayal of Sarah perhaps led them to doubt the veracity of his sudden concern for the feminine. Hence, we must first briefly explain the tantric process whereby Sarah rises to the status of Kundalini or Serpent Power. Subsequently, it must be clarified how Updike’s comedic strain relates to Sarah’s growth to enlightenment. To begin with, Kundalini yoga is fundamentally a psycho-physiological process for the arousal of *Sakti* (primal female energy) in a *sadhaka* (practitioner), which lies blissfully quiescent at the base of his/her *merudanda* (spinal cord).² There are various ways and means of such stimulation, depending upon *sadhaka’s kula* or yogic clan. The orthodox Hindus (*Vaisnavas* and the majority of *Saivas*)³ who revere Patanjali’s classical yoga (as enshrined in his *Yoga-sutras*) activate it through proper *mantras* (holy chants or “power words”) and pertinent modes of *dhyana* (meditation) under the guidance of an efficient *Guru* (teacher). Tantric yogis of the *Samayin* sect among the *Saivas* awaken it by meditating on the successive psychic *cakras* or *padmas* (circles/centers/lotuses) situated along the vertebral column under the supervision of an expert *Acarya* (preceptor). And, those of the *Kaula* clan arouse the Serpent Power by the ritual use of the *panchmakras* or *panchtattavas*.⁴ However, the common objective of them all is to attain *moksa*—an eternal release from the *samsaric avagaman* or phenomenal cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Tantrikas believe that Kundalini *Sakti* lies coiled three and a half times around the *Swyambhusivalinga* (self-born phallus of *Siva*) at the centre of *sadhaka’s Muladhara cakra* (pelvic plexus) right from his/her birth. She remains asleep in this pristine position until awakened with the help of suitable psycho-physical exercises. Once aroused, *Sakti* ascends along *Susumana nadi*—a central spinal passage, which originates from *Muladhara* (root base), penetrating through the intervening *cakras* or *padmas*, until She enters the uppermost *Sahasrara cakra* (thousand-petalled lotus over the upper cerebrum). On reaching here, *Sakti* unites (*laya*) in Cosmic Oneness with Her male counter-

part *Sakta* or *Siva*. With their union, *sadhaka's jivatama* (embodied soul) gets absorbed in *Brahama-randhara*—a state of *Mahasunyat* (*Nirvana* or Cosmic Void) where all temporal images of the mortal world recede and a primal state of timelessness succeeds. A successful repetition of this process dawns upon him/her *Tattava jnana*⁵ or an awareness of the ultimate Truth about human life in this woeful world and anchors him/her eternally in the transcendental realms of *Sat* (Eternal Being)—*Cit* (Pure Consciousness)—*Anand* (Bliss).

SIVA & SAKTI

Sat is Eternal Being, *Brahman*; *Cit* is Pure Consciousness, *Siva-Sakti*; *Anand* is Bliss, *Brahmchetna* (Supreme joy of Liberation) in the holy confluence of the First Two. The Cosmic Father or Super Soul, *Brahman*, fulfilled His *Swapan-iccha* (dream desire) to create the *Brahmanda* (universe) from the *aseemsunya* (*Akasa* or Limitless Void) through His *nirupa* (unmanifest or formless) aspect—Pure Consciousness, i.e., *Siva (Cit)* and *Sakti (Cidrupini)*⁶ in a state of Oneness. In this form, both *Siva* and *Sakti* are into each other as One Supreme *Brahman* or *Mahabindu*.⁷ Hence, *Siva* is also depicted as *Ardhnnariswara*—half male and half female. *Siva* and *Sakti* respectively embody the two powers of Pure Consciousness: “Static Energy” (Supportive)—changeless/“positive;” and “Kinetic Energy” (Creative)—changeful/“negative.” However, both are complimentary to each other, and one does not exist without the other. For Her dynamism, Hindu scriptures frequently portray *Sakti* as *Kali* in a dark form, fiercely dancing over the seemingly dead body of *Siva*. Also, She is similarly shown sitting above *Sakta (Siva)* in their creative *maithuna* (sexual union) in reverse of the usual process. The active *Sakti* (*Devi*) gives birth to Mind and Matter (*Prakriti*) of the universe in cohabitation with *Siva (Purusa)* and in accordance with *samskaras* or latent impressions in Her Consciousness of innumerable such creations of the earlier worlds. She withdraws the entire creation back into her womb at the end of each cosmic cycle. The process of Her creation, destruction, and recreation goes on endlessly. Tantrikas therefore know *Sakti* as the Great Mother (*Magna Mater*) or Goddess Mother (*Jagadamba*) or Cosmic Power (*Parmeshwari*) who conceives, creates, and permeates the world born of Her *yoni* (vagina or womb). Whereas *Siva* and *Sakti* are *sachet* (conscious or intelligent), Mind and Matter are *achet* (unconscious or unintelligent). But, there cannot be a world without *chetna* or consciousness; hence, *Sakti* makes Mind and Matter as *sachet* or conscious and *achet* or unconscious simultaneously. *Sakti* creates this paradoxical duality (“world-bewilderer”) with Her *mayasakti* (illusory power). By this man/woman grows *Ahamkara* (*Ego*)—becomes conscious of himself/herself as “I” (*aham asmi*) and treats the rest of the world as “This” (*tvam asmi*). She thus causes a deceptive sense of difference wherein man/woman erroneously sees him-

self/herself distinct from other things and persons in the world. Contrarily, the fact of the matter is that he/she and the rest of the world are one Self (Cosmic Whole), and the same Consciousness (Supreme *Brahman* or *Siva-Sakti*) invisibly pervades everything animate and inanimate as inalienable parts of the Whole. "It is [*maya*] which establishes a dichotomy in what would otherwise be a unitary experience, and is the cause of the dualism inherent in all phenomenal experience. *Sakti* as action veils consciousness by negating in various degrees Herself as Consciousness" (Avalon 32). She *is* in the *mayic* world or *Prakriti*, yet remains dissolved in *Siva* or *Purusa* like oil in an oilseed. This contradiction of *Sakti* concealing (negating) Herself from Herself as Consciousness and revealing Herself as the manifest *Maya* or illusory world confounds the ignorant man/woman in his/her cognition of the Eternal Truth (*Sat*). The confusion carries him/her away from the ceaseless founts of Bliss (*Anand*) in *Siva-Sakti* or Supreme *Brahman*. According to *Tantras*, the purpose of Kundalini Yoga is to show the strayed humanity in *Kaliyuga* (present age)⁸ a way back into the realization of the divine Bliss for an eternal release from the illusory envelopment of *mayasakti*. In *S.*, Sarah (as Kundalini) has to pass through seven successive stages, which are analogous to seven tantric cakras or *padmas* (nerve-plexuses), to taste the transcendental Bliss of the Pure Consciousness.

SEVEN CAKRAS

As progenitor of the universe, *Sakti* invisibly flows through everything from the blinking grain of sand on the earth to the blazing sun in the sky. She exists in Her creation at both micro and macro levels. According to *Visvasara Tantra*, "What is here [microcosm] is elsewhere [macrocosm]; what is not here is nowhere" (Woodroffe, *Intro.* 35, 35–36). Hence, tantrikas search for *mukti* or liberation within the human body (*iti, iti*) whereas other Hindus seek *moksa* or salvation outside of it (*neti, neti*). The former worship it as an abode of *Brahman* (*Brahmpura*) and a source of divine light; the latter negate it as a gross mass of mortal flesh. To achieve *nirvana* or eternal release, *Tantras* urge both men and women, irrespective of their caste, colour, creed and religion, to seek through the propitiation and probing of the human body an eternal release from bondage to the *mayic* or illusory world. For this, *sadhaka* needs to activate the dormant Serpent Power or Devi Kundalini and carry Her upward through the successive cakras (centers) or *padmas* (lotuses) strung along the cerebro-spinal axis in a psycho-evolutionary order (see figure 1).

The cakras in an ascending order are *Muladhra* (pelvic plexus), *Swadhisthana* (hypo-gastric), *Manipura* (solar), *Anahata* (cardiac), *Visudha* (laryngeal), *Ajna* (naso-ciliary), and *Sahasrara* (hanging inverted four fingers breadths above the crown of the head). These psychic centres or circles are actually *suksma* or subtle energy vortices, which cannot be clinically verified in *sthula* or gross body. Ajit

Mookerjee informs, "All the chakras are to be understood as situated, not in the gross body, but in the subtle or etheric body" (11–12).⁹ The cakra actually is a mystical *yantra* (instrument) or *mandala* (pictogram) meant for the propitiation of a particular deity and the evocation of his/her distinct energy. Its sight stirs in *sadhaka* the desired energy, and he/she further intensifies it by his/her apt employment of the four S's, i.e., sight, sound, speech, and *samadhi*. The cakras comprise of distinct *padmas* (lotuses or plexuses), *bhutas* (elements), *varnas* (colors), *bijas* (seed letters/Sanskrit syllables), *matrkas* (Sanskrit mother-letters/syllables), *mandalas* (geometrical figures), *Devis* (goddesses), *Devas* (gods), *Tattavas* (elements), *Tanmatras* (sensations), *prabhas* (rays), *nadis* (nerves or channels), and various major and minor transcendental and temporal symbols of *pasus* (animals) and *paksis* (birds). The *bhutas*, *tanmatras*, *bija-mantras*, *Devis/ Devas* (presiding deities) and the *pasu vahnas* (animal vehicles) of different cakras are respectively as follow: *Muladhara* (*Brahman granthi* or knot): Earth (with self-grown *Swaymbhusiva-linga* at its center), Smell, LAM, Child *Brahman* & *Dakini*, white *Airavat*; *Swadhisthana*: Water, Taste, VAM, *Visnu* & *Lakini*, *Makra* (alligator); *Manipura*: Fire, Sight, RAM, *Rudra* & *Lakini*, Ram (male sheep); *Anahata* (*Visnu granthi*): Air (with *Bana Linga* at its center), Touch, YAM, *Isa* & *Kakini*, Gazelle (black antelope); *Visudha*: Ether (*Akasa* or sky), Hearing, *Sadasiva* & *Sakini*, snow white *Airavat*; *Ajna* (*Rudra granthi*): Void (with *Itara Linga* at its center), intuition, OM, *Paramsiva* & *Hakini*; *Sahasrara*: Cosmic Void (*Mahabindu* or *Mahasunyat*), Cosmic Vision (*Divyadristi*), Divine Bliss (*Sat-Cit-Anand*), *Brahman*, *Visnu* & *Mahesa* or *Siva*. These varied components are so configured in each center as to create an evocative image, which on sighting instantaneously animates a distinct mystical power of the presiding deity. This psychic power is further compounded by meditating on the actual or mental image and simultaneously chanting the relevant *mantras*, based on their individual *bijas* and *matrkas*,¹⁰ with prescribed auditory intonations. Each *padma* makes a distinct contribution in terms of energy addition and ego dissolution. At each level, *sadhaka* incorporates fresh subtle force, cultivates higher occult powers (*siddhis*), and his/her *jivatma* (embodied soul) gets renewed momentum toward *nirvana* or deliverance from the trappings of the illusory world (*mayic samsara*).

AROUSAL AND ASCENSION OF KUNDALINI SAKTI

The cakras make the above redemptive benefaction individually and/or collectively only on their vivification by the upward passage of Kundalini Sakti through *Su-sumana nadi* (central spinal channel). Devi Kundalini, asleep as She is at the base of *merudanda* or spinal cord, needs to be propitiated and awakened through the prescribed procedure as indicated earlier. The awakened *Sakti* craves to cohabit with Her concert *Sakta* and therefore She embarks on the upward journey to His

abode in the uppermost *Sahasrara* cakra. On Her way up, She penetrates through the various *padmas*, stimulates them, and absorbs their latent potencies. As a consequence, these cakras are left inert until Kundalini traverses a reverse journey back to *Muladhara* after Her union with *Sakta* (*Siva*) in *Sahasrara*. While Kundalini is asleep, *sadhaka's cita* (mind), *atman* (soul), and *srira* (body) are in a state of impurity due to his/her carnal engagement with the *mayic samsara*. To enter the tantric world (*tantraloka*), the novice first needs to have *diksa* or initiation from a realised guru from the category or clan he/she wishes to join. The guru gives the initiate new clothes, a secret *guru-mantra*, and a new name, which mark his/her rebirth into a new life. *Tantaras* next seek the disciple to undergo the necessary purification (*cittasuddhi*) process through *nyasa kriya* (foundational course), which requires a rigorous practice of “*yama, niyama, and pratyahara*.”¹¹ These physio-mental exercises foster *virkti* (dispassion) in *sadhaka* and cleanse his/her three *nadis* (*nadisuddhi*), *Ida*, *Pingala* and *Susumana* (chief carriers of Kundalini).¹²

The preparatory course simultaneously stimulates the practitioner's entire system with *prana* energy (life force) and thereby facilitates the upward flow of Kundalini in *Muladhara* cakra. The *sadhaka* then sits in one of the two designated Hatha Yoga *asanas* (body postures), i.e., *Padmasana* or *Siddhasana* and meditates (*dhyana*) on the successive cakras, reciting the appropriate *mantras* woven around their proper *bijas* and *matrkas*. The sacred spinal channels *Ida* (moon) and *Pingala* (Sun) supply cool (static energy) and heat (kinetic energy) respectively to ignite the erotic fire (*kamagani*) around Kundalini. The Serpent Power then rises through the “time devouring” *Susumana nadi* toward *Sahasrara* or *Brahma-randhara*. Kundalini moving upward from *Muladhara* to *Anahata* is Fire Kundalin; from *Anahata* to *Visudha*, it is Sun Kundalini; and from *Visudha* to the end of *Susumana*, it is Moon Kundalini. The *Sivalingas* in the three above mentioned *granthis* (knots) offer psychic resistance due to extra energy accumulation around them and thereby each of them impedes the movement of Kundalini to the next cakra. The duration of *sadhaka's* stay in each center depends on his/her karmic potentials (*samskaras*) in his/her existing and earlier births. Though in S. Updike executes the above tantric ideas quite seriously, it is indeed not his intention to demonstrate the superiority of tantrism over other religious movements. This is evident from Updike's occasional treatment of Sarah with the same ironic smirk as Harry Angstrom in *Rabbit, Run*, Piet Hanema in *Couples*, Rev. Marshfield in *A Month of Sundays* (1975), and Dale Kohler in *Roger's Version* (1985), etc.

SARAH AS THE “SERPENT POWER”

In S., Updike weaves a “garland of letters” for Devi Kundalini and thereby pays a fictional tribute to the primal feminine power as the progenitor and purveyor of

the universe. Updike aptly chooses to write in the epistolary mode because it provides the author a “wider space” and “an intimate view” of the characters’ ideas, feelings, and thoughts with the “least authorial intrusion.” It is a “celebrative mode” of “writing a woman” in her dynamic self-assertion (*a la* Samuel Richardson) without diluting her femininity. In her letters and audio tapes, Sarah intimately reflects on her shattered life and puts the broken chunks, bits, and pieces into a harmonious perspective—a cognizable whole—for self-remaking and self-realization. As Sarah’s letters remain un-responded by the addressees, Updike here does what in such cases a writer of the epistolary novel normally practices:

A common technique for making the partner “present” is [. . .] that of quotation and paraphrase of his remarks. The partner is represented through his own words. In the novels where we are given only one-half of the dialogue (usually that of the women in novels that trace the development and decline of love), this is a common means of letting the outside reader glimpse the other half of the conversation. (Altman 138)

For that reason, Sarah’s letters/tapes written/spoken from her own angle simultaneously admit other characters’ responses and thereby offer the reader a kaleidoscopic view of her steadily evolving new self. The structural modulation of the novel can be best understood as a carefully “constructed narrative”—an epistolary symphony wherein the varied notes cohere into the moaning melody of a tormented self seeking spiritual solace.

Sarah’s letters and tapes trace her growth from an *obedient* daughter of conflicting parents (Updike 36) to a *liberated* woman in a world of contending material powers (81). Sarah started as Sare to her parents, which in *Samskrit* means “essence”—the maiden mystical power (*Durga* or *Sakti*) as an *essence* of the entire human existence. After her marriage, Sare became Sarah Price Worth to her husband, and later she ended as S.—the Serpent Power Woman or *Sakti* to her guru, Sri Arhat Mindadali. In her youth, Sarah was in love with a “sweet shy boy” Myron Stern, but her parents “squashed” the affair and forcibly got her married to a medical school intern, Charles Worth, even before she could complete her major in French philosophy (3). Sarah abandoned her education in favour of marriage and “slogged” for twenty-two years in *Muladhara* (root base) as a “doting and devoted” wife, “without wages serving as concubine, party doll, housekeeper, cook, bedwarmer, masseuse, sympathetic adviser, and walking advertisement—in my clothes and accessories and demeanor and accent and even in my body type and muscle tone—of [her husband’s] status and prosperity” (53). Nevertheless, Sarah was largely happy in her earthly life of the domestic pleasures and material prosperity. Her present smugness arose mainly from the enveloping illusion (*maya*) or ignorance (*avidya*) wherein one mistakes unreality (material) for reality (spiritual)

and the impermanent (temporal) for the permanent (timeless)—as the popular *Upanisadic* saying goes: “a rope for a snake” in darkness (Prajnanananda 153).

Slowly Sarah’s happiness waned in view of her mother’s late-life love affair with an octogenarian ex-sailor after her father’s death (Updike 187), her husband’s secret bank accounts (2–3) and stealthy sexual escapades with his nurses (4, 7, 54), and her only daughter’s disheartening choice of a “loathsome Dutch” fiancé (142). Ajit Mookerjee informs us that “this level [*Muladhara*] is one in which one may remain content, experiencing no desire to change or to expand into any other state. At the same time, just as the root of a tree implies the possibility of its growth, the earth centre denotes an opportunity to expand the awareness” (49). At last, Sarah’s deteriorating domestic circumstances completely dismantled her illusory veneer of complacency and induced in her a “cosmic gloom”—a sense of *unreality* about everything around her. She found the world of material bondage unreal and felt that the real life beckoned her from beyond the delusory mist of *maya*:

I seemed, like some dainty Japanese [suggestive of Buddha] on the other side of the world with a rice-powdered face and pigeon-toed stockings feet, to be living in a paper house, among miniature trees and gardens [symbolic of the Buddha realm] raked to represent *nothingness* [*sunyat* or *nirvana*]. (Updike 9, emphasis mine)

Sarah’s Buddha-like disenchantment caused in her a conflict between the materiality and spirituality wherein one tends to take precedence of the other. The clash occasionally imparts to the narrative an ironic hue and posits an interface of the serious and the comic. Sarah’s earnest efforts to harmonize the two contrary currents constantly save her tale from turning into a fun house. Her struggle to outlive the ironic tension provides her the necessary resilience to carry forth her quest in spite of all “terrors and temptations.” In Updike’s fiction, Rachel Bruchard notes, “There are hilarious moments [. . .] but the undercurrent of meaning is anything but comic. The bulk of Updike’s work is earnest portrayal of people whose business is the serious business of life” (6). Besides, Sarah’s unsettling disillusionment arises from yet another subtle source: *sadhaka’s sattvic samskaras* or inbred pure latencies of *karma* or actions (*karmasaya*) in the earlier birth(s) are significantly causative of *virkti* or dispassion sooner or later toward the illusory world (Dasgupta 92–1130). Sarah’s innate qualities of “Conscientiousness,” “feminine gentility,” “dignity,” and “devotion” evidence her *meekness* and count (as in the Biblical parlance) for a distinct nobility and durable spirituality. Even earlier, her yoga teacher, Irving, would say, “I’m too hyper [. . .] my subtle [*suksma*] body was tuned up too high for my *sthula* [gross] one” (Updike 101). Such superior qualities speak of her exalted *samskaras* and elevated spiritual sensitivity. Besides, Sarah’s distinctly “dark” (*kala*) color (63, 83), “glossy hair” of a goddess (39, 112), “beautiful dark eyes” (115),

“big black pussy” (14, 36, 38) of the Magna Mater, and splendid limbs like “thick luminous snakes” (158) reflect her divine nature of the dark deity *Kalimayee* (“dark mother,” 12) and the serpent maiden *Bhujangi*, two of the many *rupas* or forms of Kundalini Sakti.

In her state of disenchantment, Sarah’s craving for liberation inherently mounts, especially after her participation in yoga practices:

Midge’s yoga group, that I joined just for the exercises and something to do, gave me a vocabulary. My spirit, a little motionless fleck of eternal unchanging *purusha*, was invited to grow impatient with *prakriti*—all that brightness, all that flow. (8)

Her consequent sense of “sinking” into a “dreadful void,” like Harry in Updike’s novel *Rabbit, Run* and David in his story “Pigeon Feathers” (1962) draws her toward “something beyond and behind these phenomenal manifestations” (8–9). The intimation of “something beyond” (14, 15) or the eternal *Purusa* (*Siva*) spurs Sarah/*Sakti* on a voyage in search of a “Celestial City” or “Buddha realm.” Sarah flies off on a “sudden inspiration” (32) to the Ashram Arhat in the Arizona desert to save her soul from the “consumeristic, materialistic, capitalistic garbage” (96). She also takes her jewellery and the ancestral Price and Peabody silver (4–5) along with her. It sounds ridiculous unless one knows Updike’s art of concealing serious motives under comic coverings and tantric significance of the alchemical metallurgy. In tantrism, lead, gold, and silver are prominently popular metals as they signify purity, longevity, and eternity. Tantrikas believe that “Minerals, metals, and precious stones were not ‘objects’ having a particular economic value, they incarnated cosmic forces and hence participated in the sacred” (Eliade 284). Sarah has lived a life of purity and perseverance before and after her marriage. For that reason, she disliked the impurities (*doshas*) of disloyalty and deception in her husband. Sarah’s act of taking away the jewellery and silver wares marks an outer manifestation of her inner craving for purification from the taints of *maya*. Slowly Sarah’s inherent urge for self-realization swells and suddenly explodes on slight stimulation. She walks out treading over the earthly triangle of her “three-cornered joy”—herself, Charles, and their daughter, Pearl (Updike 12). According to Jung, such a sudden move indicates “a faint stirring of the sleeping beauty [Kundalini]; something which is not to be accounted for starts in the unconscious. Some strange urge underneath forces them to do something which is not just the ordinary thing” (*Psychology* 15).

Sarah’s silent initiation into the process of psychic evolution finds ample testimony in her numinous encounters after entering the Ashram. For instance, on the first night a “wolf snuffling and scratching” just outside her window, “trying to get some lid off something” and “coyotes off in the distance, yipping and yowling, saying something to each other the all night” (Updike 20) make her heart rise in

panic. These “spirits of the desert” signify the “maleficent forces” of the unconscious or the universal void. They represent divine intervention and take form to test the aspirant’s spiritual resilience. *Sadhaka’s* bold confrontation with them lifts the “lid” or “crusty coverings” from his/her psyche for its further expansion into the realms of a new awareness. In Eliade’s view, “Every initiation presupposes passing from one mode of being to another, but this ontological change is preceded by a shorter or longer series of ‘ordeals’ that the candidate must successfully undergo” (221). Also, Sarah’s departure in spring (Easter) recalls Christ’s rise from the dead in astral body. And, it indirectly suggests that Sarah is reborn into a *suksma srira* or subtle body—her “leap into a new life” (Updike 23), to seek *nirvana* (cosmic nothingness) under the qualified guidance of a realised master. She, therefore, writes to Charles from the airplane before “sinking into the great and beautiful blankness” (9), “Let me become truly nothing to you, at last. I will change my name. I will change my being. The woman you ‘knew’ and ‘possessed’ is no more. I am destroying her” (9, 148).

Sarah, the sleeping Kundalini in *Muladhara*, joins the Forrest Ashram to be fully awakened under the efficient supervision of the Arhat. This energy center has an ecstatic elephant (*Airavat*) as the vehicle of the deities. Hence, it is *heaviest* (elephantine) with the psychic substance, i.e., *Sakti’s* creative energy, ego, passion, and persistence. Sarah therefore declares even before entering the Ashram: “Ego is the enemy. Love is the goal” (9). She finds the Ashram Arhat¹³ “heavenly” (Updike 24) where “[her] real innermost self, [her] *atman*, will be taught to free itself from *maya* and *karma*, from all the trappings of *prakriti*” (19). She begins her participation in the Ashram activities with the arduous job of backhoeing (elephant) the artichokes (earth). While operating the backhoe for “work as worship,” Sarah’s questing soul unfolds like a “newly sprouted shoot,” indicating her symbolic birth in the earth centre. Here, she feels “*liberated*” (33) and realizes the pervasion of the Supreme *Brahman* or Cosmic Soul (30) in her and in everything around there:

There is something in *everything*, its *isness*, that is unutterably grand and consoling. I just feel terribly *full*. I feel—How can I put this?—like I’m carved out of one big piece of crystal [symbolic of purity and cosmic unity] and exactly fitted into a mold of the same crystal. [. . .] I feel *motionless*. (35)

In such a “spiritual and freeing” (24) climate, Sarah’s yearning soul fuses with the hallowed surroundings, and a unique sense of *herself* as a free woman dawns upon her. Consequently, she craves more for deliverance, and practices more seriously *Sirasasana* (Headstand), *Matsyasana* (Fish), *Bhujangasana* (Cobra), *Salabhasana* (Locust), and *Paschimottanasna*, etc. (59–61).¹⁴ Apart from practising *asanas* and *dhyana*, Sarah sleeps with Vikshipta (Fritz) to impersonalise her romantic love for Charles (38–39). It is meant to realise the fact that “he who has known [impersonal] love has passed through the centre of the world and cannot be shaken” (92). Fur-

ther, she participates in the sexo-yogic rite of *cakri puja* or *puṇnabhisheka* (circular worship), another liberating tantric act (36–40), to propitiate the cosmic couple, *Bhairav* (*Sakta*) and *Bhairavi* (*Sakti*). As explained earlier, it is a form of ritual copulation (*Sahaja*) under the guidance of an adept *Acarya* (preceptor). In *cakri puja*, men and women, selected according to the tantric rules and fed with *panchmakras*, position in *vajrolimudra* (an allocated posture) around the idol of *Bhairav* (*Siva*) and copulate chanting prescribed *mantras*, to mark the cosmic union of the two deities (91–93). The opposites (*dvaya*) dissolve and a blissful state of non-duality (*advaya*) ensues. In this ritual, sex is actually not a biological indulgence, but “a spiritual act” (40) of total transcendence: “You have to see them all as motionless puruṣa [below] and your yoni as purifying fire [above]. Midge, it does work! It gets very impersonal [. . .] You become all yoni [*Sakti*] and your spirit gets delightfully unattached” (43–44). Sarah’s wholehearted participation in these preliminary tantric rites terminates her old self into a new, subtle, life. The cold nights (*Ida*/Moon) and hot days (*Pingala*/Sun) provide the spinal *Susumana nadi* with cool and warmth respectively (55). The entire *Muladhara cakra* begins to burn with the creative energy of *Brahman* and *Saraswati* (*Dakini*) and *Kundalini Sakti* fumes with the fire of sexual desire (*kamagni*). The Arhat senses it with his spiritual powers and therefore he re-names Sarah’s subtle body (*sukṣma sraira*) as *Kundalini*:

“You are *Kundalini*.” I *am*? I said blushing—I just went *hot* all over. “Veritably,” he said. “You are she at last. You have come away to burn everything *kliṣṭa*, everything *dushama*. You will save us from our sorrowful impurity.” (63)

The Arhat gives Sarah a new name to formally initiate her into his discipleship. In tantric initiation (*dikṣa*), as pointed out earlier, the chosen guru ritualistically re-names *sadhaka*’s subtle (*sukṣma*) self. It metaphorically marks his/her death to the gross world and rebirth (*dvijātva*) into a spiritual life. With her new birth, *Kundalini* enters the *Swadhithana padma*, leaving behind the earthly world of sensual pleasure and leaden sloth.

Swadhithana (self-existent) is a “white, shining, watery” (*Avalon* 358) region, with a green alligator and a crescent moon inside the pericarp. Here, *sadhaka* feels pure like moonlight and light like clouds after the cleansing of earthly dross from his/her soul. On her arrival here, the abode of *Varuna* (god of waters) gets flooded with the aquatic images of the sea, sailboats and beaches (*Updike* 47, 55, 72), river, irrigation and drainage (51, 76, 101), bathing and washing (77, 83), pearl and lilies (79, 82), soap and germs (76, 96), and a bubbling septic system (105). Sarah feels “empty of impurities” (84), light in “body” (49, 85, 98) and “speech” (86), and feels a surge of “romantic energy” (73) in her “love of the Arhat” (54, 75). Actually, *sadhaka* is physically born in *Muladhara* and is spiritually reborn (like the Christ) after bathing in the baptismal waters of *Swadhithana*. With her elevated spiritu-

ality (46), Kundalini soon becomes the Arhat's finance secretary and interacts intimately with him on esoteric philosophical matters. In spite of it, Sarah steals money from the Ashram treasury and stashes it in her Swiss bank accounts. The ironic incident makes the reader blush and raises serious doubts about her sincerity of spiritual practice (*sadhana*). But, it could be better explained in the context of Updike's paradoxical image of life, which is actually not decisive with regard to human behavior. In his world view, life is "fierce," "contradictory," "complex," "ambiguous," "ambivalent," and "dialectical." Updike says, "everything unambiguously expressed seems somehow crass to me" (Samuels 85). He therefore entertains situations which entail "tension," "clash of extremes," "conflict of contraries," and "sudden surprises." Hence, it is not possible to say anything conclusively about what would happen next or any time in his fictional world. It is in keeping with the "yes, but" (Samuels 100) nature of Updike's work. Updike thereby appears to imply here—*Yes, Sarah renounces the worldly allurements, but the pull of contemporary materialism is not so weak as to be subdued so very easily.*

Nevertheless, Sarah's search for freedom continues unabated despite the occasional *karmic* aberrations. Pleased with her unmitigated love toward him (Updike 54), the Arhat reveals his Siva-like soul (*Purusa*) to Sarah (113–16, 125, 131)—as "the personification of knowledge, non-attachment, and liberation" (Prajnananda 50). Sarah discovers that he embodies or localizes, "purusha to such an extent that it leaches away all the prakriti in the people around him" (Updike 43, 45, 82, 102). Also, during her interaction with the Arhat, Kundalini apparently has "this wonderful feeling of being washed clean inside, of everything klišta, everything impure and painful, having been gently purged" (43). Consequently, Kundalini's fear disappears to a large extent as soon as she comes within the Arhat's energy *mandala*. His *tender* touch infuses her body with instant *prana* energy and thereby duly "cosmicizes" it for their forthcoming mystical *maithuna* (112). It may sound incredible, but in tantric tradition this occult practice is known as *Saktipat* or the yogic transmission of mystical power from one person to the other. "The pure man," informs Vivekananda, "who has controlled Prana, has the power of bringing it into a certain state of vibration, which can be conveyed to others, arousing in them a similar vibration" (45). This actually explains how Krsna, Buddha, Christ and some other enlightened saints healed the sick and revived the dead. The Arhat has "this marvellous gift of taking you in with these enormous sad bulging bottomless eyes, of seeming to be letting you in on some huge unspoken deeply philosophical secret" (Updike 61, 164). He therefore tells Sarah in their very first meeting, "*Perhaps you do not see all. My desire, my kama, is to turn your body into spirit. I have this power. The adept man has this power*" (116). Enclosed within his "personal energy field," Kundalini feels "the gentleness of the *force* that comes off of him, it's like an oil bath, it's like the shot of whisky we used to take working its way into our blood, all churned up,

those first few minutes” (117). As indicated above, *Swadhsthana* is situated right behind the sex organs, which act as its energy suppliers. Consequently, *sadhaka* helplessly undergoes a severe sexual craving when Kundalini penetrates this cakra. The Arhat’s energy transmission acts as an “erotic catalyzer” and, therefore, Sarah brims with “romantic energy” reigning in this region. It arouses her sensual response to the purple “love color” and allures her into a brief “lesbian romance” (118, 146) with Alinga (unviolated) in the role of Alinga’s “dark and stormy prince” (144). By acting as both female and male in her love affairs with Vikshipta and Alinga, Sarah renders herself dispassionate (or neuter) to the gross (*sthula*) biological sexuality. She thus acquires the required inner conformity between the feminine and masculine selves for the subtle (*suksma*) cohabitation with the Arhat. The Arhat senses it all right: “One big appetite, with the energy of appetite. You have this appetite, this energy” (112–13). To suck it (*rajas*) out of her, Arhat suggests to Kundalini a sexual union with him: “OM *mani padme HUM*” — “Nirvana comes with *lingam* or *mani* [jewel] in the *yoni* or *padme* [lotus]” (115–16). In another way, he invites her to “help” him (116)—to draw his semen (*ojas*) out of him as well. It would refuel his depleted energy and keep him in perpetual “play” (115, 131) as *jivanmukta* (*Purusa*): “I mean, the vibe I got was not so much that he needed to fuck me as *feed* on me the way he says we all feed on him” (118).

With the Arhat’s (*Sakta*’s) amorous advances toward Sarah (*Sakti*), a volcano of fiery images explodes, announcing aloud her entry into *Manipura* cakra (abode of lustrous gems) in the solar plexus (see Fig. 2). The inverted triangle in the pericarp grows radiant like the shining sun and the digestive system gets activated. The *lingam* stands erect and hard, and the *yoni* subdues to receive it (66). Sarah therefore feels hot, feels hot flashes (66). The heat of her *maithuna* with the Arhat would burn into ashes the remaining earthly (yellow) impurities. The occurrence of such erotic expressions as “ass” (117), “foreplay” (145), “fuck” (148) and “suck” (131, 135) in Kundalini’s notations outwardly indicates her inherent appetite for sexual consummation with the Arhat. The Arhat too instantly apprehends it, “My inkling has been that you, too, wish to confront the other, the opposite, and thus achieve *advaya* [non-duality]” (155). Here, the Arhat acquaints Kundalini with his *Purusa rupa* (form) like Krsna reveals His *Virat rupa* (Cosmic Form) to Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgita*: “I am *nitya manus*, eternal man [*Purusa*]. I am *sahaja manus*, man unconditioned. I am *ayoni manus*, man unborn. My *linga* is all *lingas*. My mouth is all mouths. My hands are all hands” (157). Simultaneously, he tells Sarah that she is an eternal woman in both gross (*sthula*) and subtle (*suksama*) forms like “black Kali” (of *Siva*, 155), *Satyavati* (of *Santanu*, 156), *Rati* (of *Kama*, 156), and *Radha* (of *Krsna*, 157). Their sexual union would dissolve the *mayic* duality (*dvaya*) and deliver *Purusa* from *Prakriti*: “From the truth of the body, *bhanda* [clay pot], emerges by *lila* [*maya*]



FIGURE 2. Plate V. From *Kundalini* by Ajit Mookerjee. Thames & Hudson Ltd., London.

the truth of the universe, brahmanda" (156). Here, it would be appropriate to briefly gloss the tantrico-Buddhist rite of *Sahaja* (smooth) copulation to convey the metaphysical relevance of the Arhat's sexual union with Sarah. According to *Tantras*, man's absorption of the female *rajas* (vaginal secretion) and woman's suction of the male *ojas* (semen) through their respective organs in *Sahaja* copulation causes liberating effects on both of them. The consequent ecstasy transports the participants into the transcendental realms of *nirvana*. The tantric *sadhakas* release and reabsorb the mixture of their sexual fluids during the orgasm, which proliferates in their entire bodies through *Susumana nadi*. Contrarily, the Vajrayana Buddhist adepts withhold their fluids, keep them suspended in their organs and pull them back into their bodies before the ejection (*urdhav-reta*). They do not emit their

semen to maintain the harmony of the three Buddhist jewels, i.e., “breath, thought, and semen.” They are thus sucked into *Mahasunyat*, where the beginning and end of the universe dissolve into Cosmic Nothingness. The couple swims in an ocean of ecstatic joy (*rasa*), both completely liberated (*mukt*) from their *mayic* bondage to the world.¹⁵ As they come out of it, they are reborn into a new life as non-attached and non-conditioned. They have undergone the *samsaric* death and spiritual re-birth, tasted the Supreme Bliss, and realized the Supreme Truth—“*So aham*” (I am He). Mircea Eliade therefore affirms, “During the *maithuna*, the *yogin* and *nayika* [*yogini*] embody a ‘divine condition,’ in the sense they not only experience bliss but are also able to contemplate the ultimate reality directly” (267).

The Arhat has *Sahaja* sexual union with Kundalini in accordance with the Vajrayana ritual, which is a later development over the tantric practice of yore. He concentrates and meditates in *vajrolimudra* step by step on the different parts of her body and on the seven cakras from *Muladhara* to *Sahasrara* (Updike 156–62) while Kundalini strokes her yoni over his *lingam* from above (*viprita rati*), chanting the seed *mantra*, “*Hling kling kandarpa svaha*” (161). In the process, he keeps his *ojas* suspended and reabsorbs it before the emission. He swims in “*samarasa*,” or beatific “experience of unity.” He tells Sarah, “*I have the bliss of vajrolimudra. The energy of the suspended semen enters my spirit and makes me immortal*” (161). Sarah too withdraws her *rajas* into her body and feels it was not her in any case but “a kind of goddess actually” (162). She confides into Midge, “I don’t know how he held it [penis] but it stayed just as hard as a rock [*vajra*]. He was the jewel [*mani*] and I was the lotus [*padma*]. It felt just like that, on and on into eternity” (162). Sarah experiences the bliss of Void and loves the “freedom of the almost *nothingness*” (170, emphasis mine).

Some critics accuse Sarah of committing adultery with her guru and on that count compare her with the celebrated adulteress, Hester Prynne, in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (Schiff 89–121; Greiner, “Body” 475–95). It is well known that Hester’s adultery with Dimmesdale is a secret and conscious act of transgression that entails sin, guilt, and punishment. Contrarily, Sarah’s ritual *maithuna* with the Arhat is an impersonal enactment of *Siva-Sakti*’s Cosmic Oneness for deliverance from the tearing dualities of the temporal life. During the ritual copulation in *Sahaja*, the participants transcend their mortal selves and become ever blameless *Deva* (*Bhairav*) and *Devi* (*Bhairavi*). Both partners, observes Heinrich Zimmer, “attain together a realization of the immanence within themselves of the consubstantiality of the Goddess and the God” (Bhattacharayya 342). In Hawthorne, the body and puritanical soul are in a perpetual conflict, threatening to diminish the further prospects of life. Conversely, in Updike both material and spiritual finally reconcile, admitting further possibility of survival. In Greiner’s view, Updike believes that “body and soul, sex and religion, can unite. The tension in his fiction is often based on efforts to achieve the unity, whereas the dilemma in Hawthorne’s is often deter-

mined by efforts to maintain the separation” (*Adultery* 89). Hence, these critics’ censure ensues from their lack of awareness about the tantric concept of the gross (*sthula*) and subtle (*sukhma*) bodies.¹⁶ Hester’s sexual union with Dimmesdale is on the gross physical plane where the warring body (sex) and soul (religion) induce sin and guilt; contrarily, Sarah’s sexual union with the Arhat is in the subtle astral domain where the temporal laws of morality do not stand valid. For that reason, Sarah and the Arhat neither fear social scandal nor feel guilty over it. In fact, Sarah herself clarifies it to Charles towards the end of her journey, albeit with a pinch of sarcasm over his ignorance, on knowing about his unexpected elopement with her friend Midge Hibbens: “She [Midge] has come between us, hasn’t she? In a way the Arhat never did. He belonged to my subtle body and you to my gross earthly sthula body—my real body, I suppose you’d say” (Updike 228). In tantric cosmogony, *Sahaja* involves no infidelity or sexual immorality and therefore Tillopada, a *Sahajayana* adept of the ancient renown, authoritatively states, “There is no sin and merit in the pure *Sahaja*” (Bhattacharayya 271).

Next, Sarah climbs up *Anahata* (un-struck) cakra behind the heart, a smoky six-cornered region of *Vayu* or wind. Here, *Sakti* rides a black gazelle and shines like ten thousand suns. As soon as Sarah penetrates this cakra, the gems of *Manipura* are put to sale (Updike 196) and the fiery sun turns “bright but not warm” (186). The images of heart and palpitation (185, 189), wind (189), hands (185), fingers (185), touch (189, 194) float all over, and the founts of feelings (194), emotions (195), and dispassionate love (184, 194) open up all around. The subtle sounds (“*soundless sound*”) resonate through the whole region, and soothing peace (193, 195) and joy (189) pervade the surroundings. She now feels soft like a warm touch (*sparsha*), elusive like air (antelope), steady like an undisturbed flame (*Hamsa*), and identifies *Purusa* (the golden *Bana-linga*) for the first time.

In this centre, Kundalini turns emotional and cries over the follies of her daughter, Pearl. However, she feels good about the sublimation of her anguish: “But it felt good to cry” (179). Similarly, she cries to her mother about the true identity of the Arhat: “I am all confused” (184). She thus distances her emotions and the confusion slowly clears out with her awareness of *Purusa*. It is an *impersonal* (untouched) recognition (unlike in *Manipura*) of the elusive psychic substance of “thoughts and feeling.” Mookerjee explains, “This is the first inkling of a being within one’s physical existence that is not ‘oneself’: of a being within whom one is contained, greater and more important than oneself but which has a purely psychic existence” (49). In this cakra, *sadhaka* makes an objective evaluation of his/her feelings and submits his/her emotions to *reason*. The recognition nearly eludes Sarah as she threatens to leave the ashram and expose the American identity of the Arhat. But, the Arhat’s *Siva*-like playfulness brings her around to perceive the cosmic man or *Purusa* in him. Actually, Sarah comes to know from Alinga that the Arhat is not

of the Indian origin (Updike 183–84). Instead, he is an American “Jewish boy” and his “*real name was Art Steinmetz, and . . . he is from Massachusetts—Watertown to be exact*” (183). She is initially disillusioned over the fact of the Arhat’s true identity (182), but soon she thinks of him as *Purusa* (*jivatman*) who exists at the heart of all human beings indiscriminately. Jung informs us that at this stage the recognition of *Purusa* and the consequent detachment from emotions (carried from *Manipura*) initiates the process of “individuation” by ego-filtration. The Arhat/*Purusa* is conceived in “Watertown,” an analogue of *Swadhithana* (water *mandala*); he rests in the “womb of nature” in *Manipura*, and he is perceived by Sarah in *Anahata*. In *Anahata*, Jung observes, *sadhaka* “discovers the *purusa* in his heart, the thumbling, ‘Smaller than small, and greater than great.’ In the center of *anahata* there is again Siva in the form of the *linga*, and the small flame means the first gemlike appearance of the self [*Purusa*]” (*Psychology* 39; for details 38–40). Here, Sarah’s realization of *Purusa* results from her evolved spiritual awareness, which is evident from what she thinks to herself in those moments of dejection: “The Arhat either opened us up and got rid of our ego garbage or he didn’t, and if he did (and he certainly did in my case) who cares about race or place of national origin?—it’s all *maya* anyway” (Updike 184). Kundalini therefore continues to love the Arhat (184) from her “whole heart” (185). Now onward, her inherent attachment to Charles seems to have turned into an apparent aversion: “I can’t stand him” (195).

Kundalini’s undying love for the Arhat brings her closest to his heart and he further reveals to her his ultimate archetypal identity as *Purusa*. In their next meeting, Sarah repeatedly spurns the Arhat’s sexual advances (untouched of emotions) and instead insists on hearing his unheard (*anahata*) “real voice” (190). Until recently, she had known him only as a man of exalted spiritual awareness. But, now she doubtfully asks him, “Who are you?” (190). Thereon, he makes a spectacular display of his essential self or *Purusa rupa* to her. He tells Kundalini Sarah:

So: spiritually I grew up with nothing, just these ethnic slurs [of the contending parents] and all the time noises from the bedroom. But there was something—a blank little God I carried with me like a tiny teddy bear in my head, this little curved shadow like a husk clinging to the underside of my brain. I mean, it was me, yet something more than me, something I could appeal to—and there wasn’t just input, there was output. (192)

He could feel it at all times and in all places, “*this terrific joy, this gratitude that kept spilling out of me like a thread when the sewing machine goes crazy. But it had no face or name; it had no form*” (192). Later, he knew what it was from this verse in *Katha Upanisad* where the King of Death (*Yama*) tells Nichiketa, “*The Supreme Person [Purusa], of the size of a thumb, the innermost Self, dwells forever in the heart of all beings. That was Him!—my old pal God, the size of a thumb, and with just that*

backward curve, that a thumb has" (193). Hence, behind the persona (Arhat) is the person (Steinmetz), and behind the person is the Supreme Person or eternal *Purusa* without name, form, colour, and birth or death. He dwells in every living being and therefore we fundamentally are all Him and will eternally remain Him in one form (*Siva*) or the other (*Sakti*), depending upon our *karma* or deeds in life after life. By the same irrefutable fact, there *essentially* is neither Arhat, nor Steinmetz, nor Sarah, nor anyone else with name and form. They are all "*secondary distinctions*" (199). He reveals to Kundalini, "*My luff [love] for you wears a million guises. You are Shakti, I am Shiva. I am Krishna and you are Radha, slippery from your own sweat and rajas, your hair all in shnakes and your clothes torn in delirious disharray*" (194). As mentioned earlier, *Siva* exists with *Sakti* and vice versa; one exists not without the other. When Sarah threatens to leave him and reveal his Jewish identity outside, Arhat feels terribly insecure and says, "*I feel frightened, Sarah. All this spiritual responsibility is frightening. I need you to give me some structure*" (197). Though he is the non-attached *Purusa*, still he dwells in the *mayic* world and therefore needs to balance both the transcendental and temporal. He tells her, "*Being a jeevan-mukta [non-attached], you're still a person. You're like the potter's wheel that keeps turning [on the pivot of time], though the pot is finished*" (199). In Hinduism, *Brahman* is also known as *Prajapati* or a potter who created the universe. His wheel symbolises Time (cyclical motion) and Creativity (pot) as a conjugal process. Hence, the Arhat needs Sarah as *Kali Kundalini*, the "goddess of time" (146), to keep his life in proper shape and structure—in harmony with the transcendental realms while living in the temporal universe.

Now Sarah is "on the run" (208) through *Visudha* (pure) and *Ajna* (command) cakras. One might find her flight from the ashram inconsistent with her project of ego dissolution. However, those who know tantrism would look at it from the tantric perspective. Tantrikas and Hindus believe that a yogi must not stay at one place over an unduly long period. Otherwise, he/she might slowly get attached to the place and people there, which is not at all desired of him/her. Hence, *sadhaka* must keep moving on in search of higher truths until he/she has passed beyond all bearings and bondages of *samsaric* life. Also, Kundalini has already come through the *Brahman* (*Muladhara*) and *Visnu* (*Anahata*) *granthis* (knots), which delayed her movement due to the excessive energy accumulation in them. Hence, now she would naturally move faster toward the next cakras. With her knowledge of *Purusa*, Kundalini further rises to *Visudha padma*, the *akasa* or the stainless ethereal region in the laryngeal plexus of the subtle body. This cakra is characterised by purity, peace, sweet voice, and spiritual wisdom in thought, action and adulations. Here, *Siva* (white) and *Sakti* (golden) join as *Sadasiva* in *Ardhnnariswar* (androgynous) form indicating that "No man is just man. No woman is just woman" (68), which means *Purusa/Siva* and *Prakriti/Sakti* eternally coexist with each other at both

micro and macro levels. The *bija mantra Ham* echoes the primal sound OM. On reaching this cakra, *sadhaka* becomes free from “sorrow and long-lived, and like Hamsa [inner flame] the destroyer of endless dangers” (Avalon 390).

The Arhat’s letter to Mahima (praise) symptomizes Sarah’s advent into *Visudha* lotus. He sprinkles his epistolary message (Updike 200–02) with such words and expressions as “space,” “sweet,” “honey,” “pure,” “dispassionate wisdom,” “impregnable benevolence,” “ascetic fire,” and “merrier tune,” which are the hallmarks of *Visudha mandala*. In his letter, the Arhat cordially welcomes Mahima in place of Sarah; he thus creates a space for the nostalgic resurgence of Sarah’s first love for Myron Stern in her new incarnation as Kundalini. Now Sarah (S) sees no difference between the two Jewish boys, i.e., Steinmetz (Arhat) and Stern: “We’re all anyway [...] masks of the archetypes” (171). Both (S’s) are therefore the same—mortal embodiments of the immortal *Purusa*. The innocence, beauty, and purity of Sarah’s first love for Myron are analogous to that of *Siva*’s first love for *Sakti*, which was similarly snapped short by her father, King Daksa. Daksa insulted her husband *Siva* and she jumped into the ritual fires (*havankund*) to take revenge on her father. *Sakti* joined *Siva* in another incarnation as *Parvati*, the daughter of the Himalayas (Demitt and Buitenen 171–79). Kundalini writes to Myron, “I loved you then and would love you now and am truly sorry I didn’t have the courage to defy my family and all that inherited silver and that go off with you and be your woman forever” (Updike 215). She is now bold and benevolent—forgives and forgets the wrongs done by her parents, husband Charles, brother Jerry, and daughter Pearl. In this cakra, the psychic matter has nothing to do with the material facts, and the spoken word becomes “an effective tool of communication of the truth of things as they are in their suchness, i.e., in respect of their unique and distinctive feature” (Mookerjee 56). In her letter to Jerry, Sarah says the *naked* truth about herself and her parents whereby she clearly demarcates the material from the spiritual. For that matter, her earlier concern for the ancestral Price and Peabody silver is now considerably relaxed and she even contemplates eventually giving it to Jerry, the other legitimate heir of her maternal clan. But, she cannot part with this white, stainless (unsullied), metal at this stage of purity and perfection. “Some of the Price and Peabody silver should be yours eventually but I’ll keep what I have for the time being—at least it’s not *tarnishing black as lead* . . .” (Updike 205, emphasis mine). Besides, she also seems to be soft on Pearl’s marriage with the “foppish Dutchman—but who can say what marriage is more foolish than another? All have their merits and demerits and wear out before we do” (207). Likewise, she accepts in a lighter vein the disconcerting fact of her mother’s thrifty love affair with the old ex-admiral: “She said he kept tapping on her hurricane shutters but if I know Mother those shutters were up and all the lights blazing” (207). All this accrues from Sarah’s wisdom of perception

in this cakra, which is abundantly evident from her statement about the role of the Supreme Self in our recovery from emotional injuries:

People get over everything, and that's the secret of all the persisting religions— God or whatever they call it gets credit for our animal numbness and reflexive stoicism and antibodies and healing processes, or else we die and that shuts us up as effectively as an answered prayer. (204)

Further, Sarah enters the moon-white lotus *Ajna* (command), aglow with dazzling moonlight, between the eyebrows. This cakra is also known as the “third eye” or “Cosmic Consciousness” (*divya chaksu*) of clairvoyance or intuitive cognition, which commands the entire reflexive system of *sadhaka's* personality. *Ajna* also means “unborn” and therefore it symbolizes the pre-origin state of primal purity. Here, *sadhaka's* ego further disintegrates and completely dissolves in *Mahasunyat* of the next centre. The inverted white triangle and *Itara-linga* shining like lightning within it, suggest *Yoni* (Vagina/ *Sakti Hakini*) and *Lingam* (Phallus/*Siva Sambhu*) in cosmic unity (*bindu* of *bija OM*) as *Paramasiva* “whose self-luminous consciousness is all-pervading, all-transcending and all unifying” (Mookerjee 42). Here, the absence of the animal vehicle indicates the dissolution of the psychic substance and evolution of a *nirguna* (without characteristics) state of utter purity—the final stage of no return to the material fold.

Sarah arrives at the tiny “green” island (Updike 213), Samana Cay in the Bahamas, which in her view is a pleasant “little paradise” (209). Here, the duality between her (*Sakti/Prakriti*) and Arhat (*Sakta/Purusa*) dissolves into complete lucidity and it is difficult to know guru from the *chela*. Sarah conveys it through a citation from the sacred *Dhammapada*: “I have conquered all, I know all, and my life is pure. I have left all, and I am free from craving. I myself found the way. Whom shall I call teacher? Whom shall I teach?” (217). However, she again has a bad cold before landing the island like she did before her arrival in the Ashram (25). The phlegm is a form of inner impurity and hence symbolically suggests her further need for spiritual purification. She herself says: it is like “prakriti's being extracted from purusha?” (220). The Samana island is blissful like the Buddhist “Land of Bliss” or the tantric “Isle of Gems.” They both represent “a high state of Consciousness in that ocean of nectar which is the infinite all-pervading Consciousness Itself [Devi]” (Woodroffe, *Garland* 186–87; Campbell 304–20, 334–38). On the island, the big food is conch (Updike 208), and there are also tall “palm trees, common as *telephone* poles in this area. Their seeds are *entire coconuts* that ride across the ocean from island to island and take root” (209, emphasis added). The conch shell in the whole of Hinduism symbolizes Siva's “third eye” (*Ajna*) and acts as a means of communication with the divine forces. The Hindu priests blow

a conch during the religious rituals to convey their respectful homage to the elemental cosmic powers through its sound vibrations penetrating far into the heavenly skies. And, they also break the “entire coconuts” in the sanctum sanctorum for a fruitful propitiation of the deity. The devotees even sip the coconut milk as an act of purification and in expectation of their wish fulfillment. However, the symbolism of the whole act goes far beyond the apparent intimations. The “entire coconut” stands for the *Brahmanda* or the entire universe—an illusory (*mayic*) conjunction of *Purusa* (*Siva*) and *Prakriti* (*Sakti*). Here, the holy act of offering suggests that the *sadhaka* can reach *Purusa* and taste the blissful nectar of the void inside (*nirvana*) only by breaking through the outer walls of the *mayic* materiality. Both conch and coconut are sacred to the Hindus and act as the means of conveyance—like a *telephone* in modern society—for *sadhaka*’s devotional feelings to the primal powers.

The Cay sounds as K—for Kundalini: the one who transcends the *mayic samsara* and enjoys the equilibrium (*samana*) of the three *gunas*. She relishes in the equanimity of thoughts, feelings, senses, and intuition to mark (in the Jungian sense) a completion of her individuation through self-knowledge. For that matter, Samana Cay signifies the *Samana* (or *Samani*) state of “higher consciousness” where differentiation disappears and diversity dissolves into the divine harmony. Sarah therefore writes to the Arhat, “Sattava, rajas, and tamas [three *gunas*], are all in such nearly perfect balance here that the merest smudge in the sky serves for a cloud, a single small yellow-breasted bird for a flock, and a trip to the local bookstore for an adventure, a pilgrimage” (219). Now Sarah knows of her true or subtle self: “I am Kundalini, the serpent energy that rises” (217). Her mind (*manas*) resonates with the memories of her lost love for Myron, and her soul (*atman*) sees the real *jivanmukta* (eternal *Purusa*) in the time-tormented Arhat. In *Ajna*, the five senses are under the mind’s control and therefore Sarah makes an objective assessment of her affair with Myron and realizes a transcendental love for him, which is devoid of all temporal, sensual or sexual predilections. She places her love for Myron in the timeless continuum, turning it into a *nirguna* feeling of neither joy nor repentance. It is a new, *sattvic*, love which in *Ajna* feels “pure and has become free from all self-indulgence, all possessiveness” (Radha 275–76). She compares both of them with the sea-explorer Columbus in search of a new found land: “We were like Columbus in a way, poking from island to island and never reaching the mainland” (Updike 214–15). Metaphorically, Columbus the *Purusa* sailed to America the *Prakriti*, and we cannot think of one without the other as in the case of *Siva* and *Sakti*. But, Columbus went back to his country leaving the new-found continent as a virgin land. Similarly, Myron discovered Sarah and returned to his family leaving her as a virgin woman. She wonders whether they can “ever be *Siva* and *Sakti* for the first time in their lives” (215) and ever be one like them in *Ajna* cakra. Here, her subtle

body, in blissful union with the astral body of *Sakta* (or one in all *Purusa*), constitutes a *Bindu*—the tiny little dot enclosing the seed, source, and the summation of the universe as Pranava sound OM—that is the Samana island.

The island marks the birth of the world as well as of America. America was born with Columbus's arrival to the virgin continent. The universe took birth from Siva's *maithuna* (copulation) with *Sakti* in the primal cosmos, which is *Ajna* (ethereal) centre on the subtle body scale. Kundalini informs Myron that this is where "Columbus *really* landed, [and] not Whiting island . . . Columbus called his island flat and green and that pretty well says it for Samana Cay" (213). As indicated earlier, *Sakti* creates the universe with her intelligence (*chetna*) in *Ajna* center. For Sarah, Samana Cay is the primal cosmos (or paradise) on the subtle plane where *Purusa* weds *Prakriti* (218) and *samsara* borders *nirvana* (219). With the opening of her cosmic eye of discrimination in this center, Sarah humbly accedes to the truth that Arhat is *not* "a fraud" (218) but a fact. Behind his mortal self, he conceals the immortal *Purusa* and therefore he is truly a *jeevan-mukta*, "a living blank who simultaneously sustains the chittavrittis while locating his being beneath them, in that utter indifference which is purusha and the atman. [. . .] You *have* relocated your life, Master, and that is what I am still seeking to do" (218–19). Kundalini's final acceptance of the Arhat's true identity as *Purusa* once again fills her with *nirguna* love for him that she had grown on seeing his posters "before reality intervened" (219). Without the Arhat, now Kundalini fears being sucked back into *Prakriti* (prison, 216) and therefore she wants to remain ever sheltered in his sunshine or energy sphere for her final dissolution in *Sahasrara*: "Master [. . .] do not withhold your abhayamudra. *Fear not!*—what all the gods say, like so many suns burning through the mists of circumstance" (220).

In spite of her spiritual advancement, Kundalini still carries the last trace of ego—gross element of *Prakriti*—to be extracted from her pilgrim soul. At the *Ajna* stage, *sadhaka* still experiences a self "differentiated" from the "object of God;" for that reason, there is "still left in him [. . .] the consciousness of a separate ego" (Mookerjee 54, 75). This residue of ego vanishes on his/her entry into the thousand-petalled *Sahasrara padma*. This ultimate cakra contains the energies, colours, sounds, and lights of all the earlier centres into one harmonious whole. Its thousand petals glow with cosmic energy, radiating it down to the *sadhaka's* subtle body through the thousand *nadis* emanating from each of the lotus petals. Here, *Sakti* and *Siva* unidentifiably dissolve into each other creating a supracosmic transcendental Void or *Mahabindu* at its centre. One is into the other, one is the other, and both together are *Mahabrahman* or *Parambrahman*: *Brahman*, *Vishnu*, and *Siva* all coexistent as One *Paramatma* or *Isvara*. "The *Sahasrara* is the centre of quint-essential consciousness, where integration of all polarities is experienced, and the

paradoxical act of transcendence is accomplished in passing beyond ever-changing *samsara* and ‘emerging from time and space’” (Mookerjee 44). In this *mandala*, Kundalini becomes Kula Kundalini and the aspirant’s soul tastes the nectar (*soma*) of Bliss in union with the Cosmic Soul or *Mahabrahman*. *Sadhaka* consequently enjoys liberation from *maya* (or ego) and the realization of *nirvana*. Now, *sadhaka* knows who he is: “*Aham Brahman asmi* or I am *Brahman*.” This “Self-knowledge, or *brahmajnana*, is the highest form of knowledge bringing complete freedom to the enlightened individual in spite of living in a body composed of elements, and in a world full of duality” (Prajnanananda 121).

Tantras convey that a novice cannot rise to *Sahasrara* without the deft guidance of an enlightened guru. For that reason, Kundalini invokes the image of her Master in all sincerity and devotion as he alone can lead her to the final destination by *Saktipat* from a distance (Updike 218–19). She has painfully overcome her *moha* (attachment) for all other men and women, money and matter, good and evil except a receding concern for Charles. As her soul upwardly unfolds, she expiates the last bit of *samsara* in her closing letter to Charles from the Samana Cay and thereafter loses herself in the Cosmic Void or the Supreme *Brahman*. Kundalini writes this crucial letter over more than three days, unambiguously showing signs of her ultimate arrival to *Sahasrara*. It spectacularly demonstrates the victory of spiritual Sarah over *samsaric* Sarah in her movement from sadness to silence, and from silence to “dushama-sushama” or “Beautifully Sorrowful.” According to the Jainist division of time and ages in *playas* (224–25), the “Beautifully Sorrowful” (227) state is enjoyed only by a *jeevan-mukta* who lives within *samsara* without getting affected by the wily winds of *maya*. The intuitive state of *Sahasrara* lies beyond the reach of human reason and therefore it cannot be expressed in letters and words. Hence, Updike ends the novel with the complete elimination of Sarah’s *samskaras*, i.e., *Prakriti* from *Purusa*. In this letter, Sarah expresses her concern over Charles’s plan to marry her friend and confidante Midge Hibbens. She considers it a betrayal on Midge’s part and therefore tries to dissuade Charles from it. It indeed sounds absurd in the last stage of her quest for *nirvana*. Actually, Sarah’s initial dislike for psychic impurities has now turned into an innate aversion. Sarah resents their marriage mainly because Midge “is crass” (221) and wants to marry Charles for material benefits and a higher level of “socioeconomic energy” (224). In fact, Sarah’s concern for Charles at this stage is not anachronistic; it indicates, in a way, the end of her long harbored hatred for him. She recalls their honeymoon in Marigot minutely—how they copulated in different ways and thereafter she smelt of his semen for days together (226–27). Sarah relives the whole experience as Radha and Krishna in the divine domains and thereby turns an act of gross nature into a sacred ecstasy (Campbell 343–64).¹⁷ Her mental substitution displaces their union into the transcendental realms; it further redeems her rarefied soul and wholly relieves her

bitterness toward Charles. Kundalini, therefore, dispassionately cautions her tormentor against Midge, wishing him well as another creature caught in the vortex of *maya*. If Sarah harboured even the slightest of her earlier contempt for Charles, she should rejoice at his fall into Midge's "grand trap" as a suitable reward for sinning against her. Not to wish so, she acts as a *jivanmukta* and thinks good even of the one who delayed her journey to spiritual recovery for twenty years. Midge symbolizes a "demonic erotic courtship energy" (Updike 224) and Kundalini as a divine power tries to save Charles from her demonism, considering it a matter of her duty toward a fellow human. As a *jeevan-mukta*, she is now related to everyone else by a yogic affiliation to the irrefutable fact of *Brahman* or *Purusa* as the pervasive substratum of the entire *samsara*. Lord Krsna, the Supreme Yogi, says in the *Gita*, "With the heart concentrated by yoga, viewing all things with equal regard, he [yogi] beholds himself in all beings and all beings in himself" (Vyasa 171).

In her letter, Sarah initially seems to be taken aback by the news of Midge taking her place in the bed with her ex-husband, but she does not lose her calm of a yogi and soon conciliates herself to it peacefully: "Charles, I can't express how serene and benign I feel about you and me. Parting is an illusion. Loss is an illusion, just as is gain" (Updike 228). Even life and death do not matter for her now; they are one and the same in the transcendental domain. Hence, it is "a matter of utter indifference" (229) to her whether the divorce goes through. In her present "rarefied condition" (225) of *nirvana*, she is already non-attached and need not do such a mundane thing at all. She tells Charles, "I have taken time to think and meditate and just relax into the space I'm in, and I've decided I don't believe in divorce and will write and tell Ducky to make no terms at all" (224). Besides, her insinuations against both Midge and Charles arise neither from selfishness nor from attachment: "After all, I *did* leave and can't even imagine coming back" (228). So it hardly matters for Kundalini whether she is divorced or not and whom Charles marries. She therefore writes, ridiculing him, "Having known the Arhat's divine love I am not in the market (unlike needy old you) for any further attachments. I need to be still and feel now I have acquired means to be still" (229). Kundalini's ascendance to *Sahasrara* eliminates the last trace of *Prakriti* from her soul and transfers her residual ego to the Arhat/*Purusa*. Jung explains:

The ego is the expression of individual existence. The yogin exchanges his ego for Shiva or the Buddha; in this way he induces a shifting of the psychological centre of personality from the personal ego to the impersonal non-ego, which is now experienced as the real "Ground" of the personality. (*Mandala* 74)

Kundalini roams around in the Cosmic Void where her earthly love "has been sublimated—literally turned into radiant etheric vapour at a location called Sahasrara a few inches above my head. Rare Sarah, I have become now" (Updike 225). Here,

the Serpent makes a “loop” (220) and thereby the beginning (*Muladhara*) and end (*Sahasrara*) of her journey join into an emblem of nothingness or *nirvana*. Tantrikas lay highest premium on material embodiment for liberation and here the emergence of *Muladhara* in *Sahasrara* is a clear expression of it. *Sadhaka* may still do material transaction with the world, but he/she is now above the avaricious afflictions of the earthly exigencies. Here, the presence of *Muladhara* in *Sahasrara* is further evident from Kundalini’s eagerness to retain the “flame-stitch wing chair” in her “lonely cottage by the sea” (230) and her reminiscence of stitching the “three and a half monogrammed place mats” (230), which came as their wedding gift from Aunt Hilda. The “chair” signifies the material comfort, “stitch” stands for the earthly attachments, “flame” symbolizes *Swyambhu linga*, “three and a half” numerical suggests the Serpent’s coils around the *linga*, and the “wings” symptomize an inherent wish to rise from the earthly to the ethereal regions. The spontaneous emergence of *Muladhara* in *Sahasrara* indeed marks a beginning in the end and *vice versa*.

Another aspect of the above configuration includes the beginning of Sarah’s epistolary pilgrimage with her first letter to Charles in spring (crescent moon) and ending it with the last one also to Charles in winter (full moon). She thus traces a circle of letters around herself and turns the linear time into circular. She stands at the *still* point of the centre and becomes *nothing* to the ever spinning *samsara*. At the end of the novel, Kundalini’s journey comes full cycle and she eternally rests in the Supreme *Brahman* as a *disengaged soul* (*jivanmukta*) while living in *this material world*. She achieves this transcendental state by the dissolution of her ego and the evolution of her soul into *Mahasunyat*. There in the Cosmic Void exists no trace of *samsaric pravrittis* or carnal propensities and no storm disturbs the steady flame of her soul. She is now a “new Sarah,” a contemporary Eve, who is resilient and resourceful enough to deliver herself from the social sin of the feminine slavery.

Sarah epitomizes the elemental human self and incorporates a lucid confluence of life’s contending dualities such as male and female, wife and mother, daughter and beloved, and master and disciple. In such psychic wholeness, Sarah can transact with the material world without letting its impurities transgress her spiritual threshold. The reader might be amused to see her still engaged in financial deals from Samana Cay. Hence, it needs to be clarified that Sarah as Kundalini enjoys a godly state of mind and not the status of an actual goddess. As a matter of fact, her present existential condition can be appropriately elucidated with the same simile as the Arhat earlier used to explain his own situation as a *jivanmukta*. Sarah is like a potter’s wheel, which keeps turning even though the clay pot (*bhanda*) is complete. She *has* to keep whirling on the wheel of time (*kalacakra*) while living in the material world. But, now no monetary profit can please her, and no social stigma can stain her. Her stainless state of body and spirit admits no bondage in marriage and no separation in divorce, no beginning in birth and no end in death. She be-

longs to the entire humanity or to none except the Supreme Self. In her *essential* self, Sarah exemplifies the idea of a way out for women, i.e., freedom by spiritual evolution through alternative egalitarian belief systems. She further codifies the fact that the knowledge of the timeless truth only can save the modern world from further disillusion and damnation. The tantric truth of “*Soham*” or “I am He,” that Sarah imbibes unlike other Updike characters, binds the entire humanity together in an inexorable kinship and obliterates the illusory separation of one person from the other. Finally, Sarah the Kundalini stands as an emblem of one family, one humanity, one world, and one cosmos. Under such sublime *oneness*, the people are free and peace pervades the entire universe: *Om shantih, shantih, shantih*.

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NOTES

- 1 For instance, Adams in his review of *S.* in *The Atlantic Monthly* calls Updike’s novel “a comedy of illusions and delusions” (78), Broyard in her review in *The New York Times Book Review* finds *S.* “a satire on the jargon of self-realization” (7), and similarly James A. Schiff in *Updike’s Version* assesses *S.* as “the most comic volume” (89) among all Updike’s novels.
- 2 Kundalini in *Sanskrit* means “coiled,” and *Sakti* means “female energy.” Kundalini Sakti (coiled female energy) is the primal creative power with intelligence or consciousness (*chetna*). *Sakti* is symbolized as a she-snake because of Her femininity, magical powers, and mystical characteristics. For more information in this regard, see Gopi Krishna’s *The Ancient Secrets of Kundalini*, 5–29, and 94–126.
- 3 Those tantrikas who do not go the spiritual, meditative, way of arousing Kundalini, adopt the mode of *Mukti* (liberation) through *Bhukti* (indulgence or enjoyment). In their tantric ritual worship, five M’s (*pancmakras*), most forbidden in orthodox Hinduism, are believed to be exceedingly important, i.e., *madya* (wine), *mamsa* (meat), *matsya* (fish), *mudra* (roasted grain) and *maithuna* (copulation). The pentad is used in ritual propitiation of *Sakti-Sakta* strictly according to the guidelines in *Tantras* and under the careful supervision of expert *Acaryas* (teachers). Tantric *puja* (circular worship) starts with feasting on *pancmakras* and sums up with *maithuna* or ritual copulation (*Sahaja*) of the male and female yogis as homologues of *Bhairav* (*Siva*) and *Bhairavi* (*Sakti*). Those yogis who use real *pancmakras* in their realization of the *Sahaja* or *Sunya* or Cosmic Void are known as *vamacaras* (left-handed). Others who use symbolic substitutes in their rite are known as *daksinacaras* (right-handed). *Sahaja* can only be realized and not related in expressible terms. For greater details, see Eliade’s *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, pp. 200–73 and Bharati’s *The Tantric Tradition*, 228–78.
- 4 The Hindu holy gods *Brahman* (*Parampita*), *Visnu* (*Narayana*), and *Maheshwara* (*Siva*) have their specific sects and *sadhakas* all over India. The worshippers of *Visnu* and His *avatars* (reincarnations) are called *Vaisnavas* and those of *Siva-Sakti* and Their *avatars* are called *Saivas*. Among *Saivas*, those who worship *Sakti* as the supreme deity are known as *Saktas*.

- 5 The knowledge of the ultimate Truth: “I am *Brahman*” (*aham Brahman asmi*). This essential awareness dawns upon the yogi only after his conditioned soul becomes unconditioned by its immersion into Pure Consciousness.
- 6 *Cit* and *Cidrupini* are the primal names of *Siva* and *Sakti* before the Creation.
- 7 *Mahabindu* or *Parabindu* is the Supreme Dot (Cosmic Void) in *Sahasrara*, containing everything within it—*Brahman*, *Visnu*, and *Maheshwara* (Holy Trinity) as One (*Sabda-brahman*) in the form of primal vibrations of the Pranava sound OM, which in Hindu mythology is the origin (emission of energy) and end (reabsorption) of the universe.
- 8 Hindu scriptures divide Time into four *Yugas* or Ages: *Satya*, *Treta*, *Dvapara*, and *Kaliyuga*. As we move from the first to the present, man’s/woman’s spirituality, morality, and age decline progressively. The last one is the present period in which the world now is. *Kaliyuga* is believed to have begun 3120 B.C. and to last for 432,000 human years. For further details about *Mahayugas* and *Yugas* see Woodroffe’s *Introduction to Tantra Sastra*, 37–40.
- 9 Mookerjee in *Kundalini* informs: Tantras believe that apart from *sthula sarira* or gross body, each human being has “an ‘etheric double,’ a subtle or *suksma* body” (11–12). For the greater details about all these elements and their symbolism in each *cakra*, see Avalon edited “Sat-Cakra-Nirupana,” *The Serpent Power*, 318–479.
- 10 *Bijas* are the key syllables (*Sanskrit*) generative of the subtle sounds (*nada* or vibrations) for the invocation of the reigning gods and goddesses in the various *cakras*. The principal *mantras* are woven around them for the required sound effect. *Matrkas* are *Sanskrit* letters on the lotus petals and are also essentially sounds around which the supporting *mantras* are conceived. Their sounds are in tune with the *bija* sounds, which add to the key sounds of the *bija mantras* for an effective arousal of the energy. For more information, see Avalon (Woodroffe) edited *Principles of Tantra*, 489–504, Eliade’s *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, 212–19, and Bharati’s *The Tantric Tradition*, 101–63.
- 11 These are preliminary rules of conduct to attain a suitable psychic state for the successful arousal of Kundalini. According to Swatmarama’s *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the ten *yamas* (rules of moral conduct) are “ahimsa (non-injury), truth, non-stealing, continence, forgiveness, endurance, meekness, sparing diet and cleanliness,” and the ten *niyamas* (religious observances) are “Tapa [ardour], patience, belief in God, charity, adoration, hearing discourses on the principles of religion, shame, intellect, abnegation, and fire oblation to gods” (3). *Pratyahara* is simultaneous withdrawal or reversal of the five senses by abstinence for self-control and concentration of mind.
- 12 In *The Serpent Power*, Avalon says, “Purification of the Nadis is perhaps the chief factor in the preliminary stages of this Yoga; for just as their impurity impedes the ascent of Kundalini-sakti, their purity facilitates it” (110).
- 13 The Ashram Arhat in the novel, like “all characters and milieu,” is an imaginary replication of Rajneeshpuram in Oregon as reported from time to time in the *Oregon Magazine* and of ideas concerning “new cultural outposts” with certain “freedoms from taboos” as envisaged in FitzGerald, “Rajneeshpuram,” *Cities on a Hill: A Journey Through Contemporary American Cultures*, 247–381.
- 14 For the theoretical and figurative account of these body postures, see Bhattacharya’s *Basic Education of the Body*, 21–34.

- 15 For more information see Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 261–68, and Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology*, 359–64.
- 16 For detailed information concerning the concept of three bodies in tantrism, i.e., gross (*sthula*), subtle (*sukma*) and causal (*karna*), see Prajnanananda edited *Jnana Sankalini Tantra*, 29–30 and Jung's *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga*, 6–8.
- 17 See Campbell's *Oriental Mythology: Masks of God*, 343–64. Actually, Updike borrows the idea of *rasa* (bliss) as a means of liberation from Campbell who in turn draws it from Jaidev's *Gita Govindam* ("The Song of the Cowherd") wherein Krsna and his consort Radha sweat in the course of their astral love making and swim in the sea of *rasa*.

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