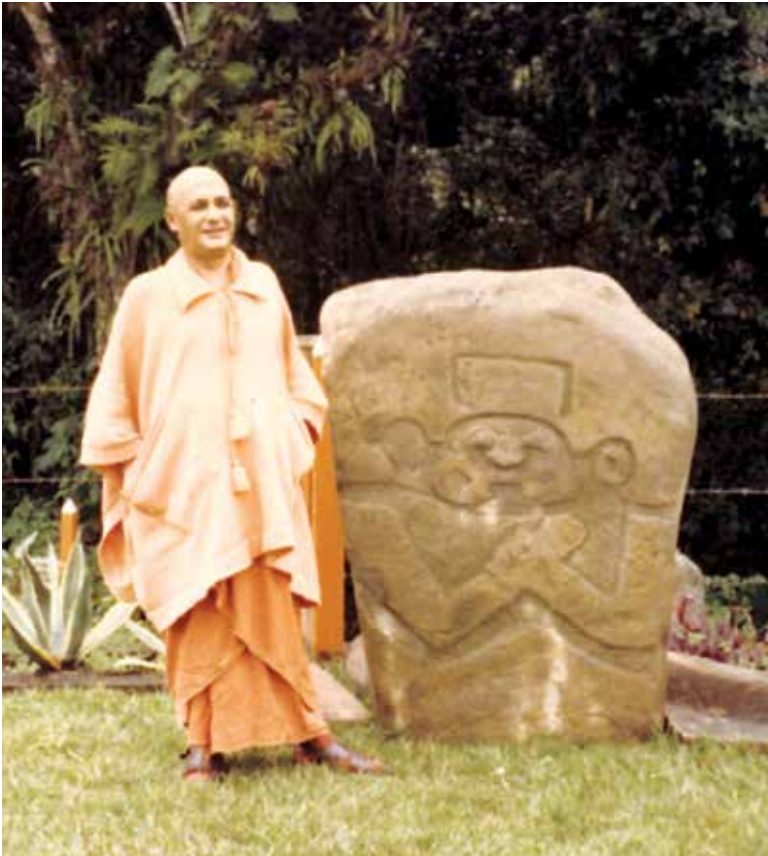


YOGA – WORLD TRADITIONS SERIES

Yoga in Pre-Columbian Cultures 1

Swami Maitreyi Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Nivanyan

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Pre-Columbian and Existing Indigenous Cultures in Colombia

Swami Maitreyi Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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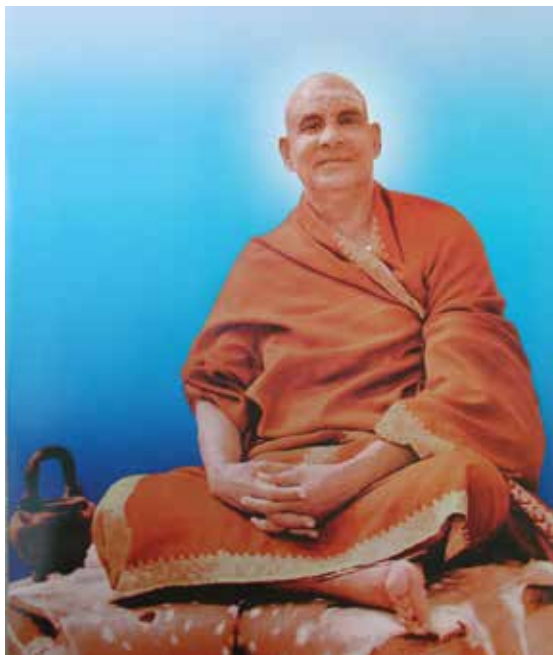
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*



Dedication

*To our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our yogic and spiritual journey.*

This is my humble offering to Swami Sivananda Saraswati, to Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati and to my Guru, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, in gratitude for the guidance and inspiration given to me on my spiritual path, and for their selfless service and love for humanity.

It is also an offering to the Mamos and Elders of the indigenous people of South America, who have been able to uphold their spiritual traditions through the ages and who again are spreading their message of wisdom to make the world a better place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to acknowledge the following people for their contribution to this book:

- Late Carlos Alberto Mamanche Gonzales, the Mhyusca elder of Guatavita, has brought the Mhyusca myth, legends and traditions back to life through his dedicated work.
- Enrique Guatav is the guardian of the sacred lake of Guatavita and the Mayor of the Mhyusca town Sesquile. He is working ceaselessly to revive and protect the Mhyusca traditions.
- Luis Alberto Bustos has been working with the Mhyusca and Arhuaco communities for the last 30 years. He is instrumental in the organization of meetings between the indigenous communities of South and North America.
- Alan Ereira has brought the Koguis message to the world with his beautiful documentaries *The Heart of the World* and *Aluna*.
- Yolanda Obando is contributing amazing work to the revival of the Mhyusca traditions.

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Preface

Yoga is going to emerge as a mighty world-culture. It will change the course of world events. Yoga is not an ancient myth buried in oblivion. It is the most valuable inheritance of the present. It is the essential need of today and the culture of tomorrow.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati, 1964*

Archaeological findings show that yoga existed in ancient cultures of the Indian peninsula as far back as the Indus Valley Civilization 3,000 BCE. The Pashupata seal found at the Mohenjodaro archaeological site, depicts Shiva sitting in the lotus posture. The yoga we know today is rooted in this period: it is the Pashupata Yoga, the yoga of the first known yogi, Shiva.



At the other end of the world in the South American continent existed at the same time another yogic culture. At the archaeological sites of San Agustin and Tierra Dentro in Colombia are similar findings of stone sculptures in yogic postures and carvings showing yantras of the chakras and the

pranic pathways. Many archaeological findings in Colombia give proof that yoga existed as a culture from 3,000 BCE to the time of the Spanish invasion in the 15th century. This yoga is still alive today in the surviving indigenous cultures.

There was a great similarity between the culture of the South American Indians and the people of India. The aboriginals have strange rituals as in tantra, esoteric knowledge comparable to ancient oriental wisdom, and geometrical patterns forming yantras or mandalas very similar to those found in India. There is an amazing parallel between yogic asanas and the positions adopted by early Mayas, Aztecs and Incas. Many great civilizations flourished in South America before the arrival of the Spaniards. Now only ruins remain to attest to these once spiritual cultures, in which social structure was balanced with the divine.

—*Editorial YOGA magazine 1980*

Both Swami Satyanananda and Swami Niranjanananda mention in many of their satsangs the existence of yoga as a world culture. When Swami Niranjanananda lived in Colombia in the early 1970s he undertook research into yoga and the pre-Columbian cultures, which was presented by Swami Amritananda in an exposition during the Convention in Bogotá in 1975. (see Chapter 1, A Yogic Exposition)

In the 1970s I undertook research on the pre-Columbian cultures of Central and South America: the Aztecs, the Incas, the Chibchas and the Mayans. Through research I discovered a lot of yoga-related evidence. In their sacred book, which is known as Popol Vuh, you find references to yogasanas, yoga pranayamas and the chakras. You see the images and the symbols: the triangle, the Shivalingam, the serpent coiled around the stone, the serpent ascending the spine. There are the practices of shatkarmas: trataka, nauli, the practice of kunjla. There are the postures: shoulder

stand, scorpion pose, headstand, thunderbolt pose. One finds so many yoga references to asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha and meditation; and not only literal references, but also statues now found in the reserves and museums which have been carbon-dated to around 3,300 BCE and 1,600 BCE. These statues depict perfect yoga postures.

Similar findings were made in the old cultures of the Scandinavian countries and in the old cultures of Africa. From all this evidence, it seems that once upon a time yoga was a global practice, system and culture. It was not confined only to India. It is speculated that due to geological changes, climatic changes, tribal wars, invasions and migrations, many of these practices were lost; however, they were preserved by the Asian nations, which have retained remnants of the yogic tradition in their cultures even today.

After a gap of many years the present revival of yoga took place from India, and therefore today yoga is seen as coming from India. In India, yoga was protected by and associated with a specific group of people: the renunciates, the recluses, the sannyasins. The sannyasins preserved the knowledge and the tradition, and so yoga became tagged with them and people believed that they used yoga for enlightenment, for self-realization, and for awakening the dormant faculties.

It was from this point onwards that the global society began to conjure up an image of yoga in their minds. More specifically when the British came to India and encountered yoga, they saw people like me in one dhoti and said, "Oh, a fakir . . ." The association of yoga with 'fakirism' is a prominent idea today in the West due to the influence of the British notion that yoga is for renunciates and sannyasins seeking salvation, and is a part of the Indian religion, culture and belief system. As the British were the rulers, their mandates, writings and books were widely read and everybody held that opinion, although the British had no exposure to the culture and the traditions of

India. There are findings that show the existence of yoga in pre-Columbian cultures from the Andes in the south to Mexico in north, in Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Costa Rica and Guatemala. In the ancient cultures that existed long before the Spanish invasion in the mid-16th century, in the civilization that existed at the time of the Spanish invasion but were conquered by the European invaders and in the cultures that survived and still exist today.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

At the time of the Spanish invasion in the early 16th century, five main cultures existed from the Andes in the south of South America to the present-day Mexico in the north:

1. The Inca culture in Peru, Ecuador to the south-west of Colombia in the present department of Nariño, where the Andes mountain range divides itself in three mountain ranges, stretching to the north of Colombia;
2. In Colombia, the Mhyuscas lived on the plains of the eastern mountain range in the present-day departments of Cundinamarca and Boyacá.
3. In Colombia, at the Caribbean coast in the very north, was the Tairona culture. Their home was the the present-day city of Santa Marta on the coast, the Tairona natural park and the Sierra Nevada, a separate pyramid-shaped mountain range, the highest coastal mountain range stretching from sea level up to 5,300 m.
These Chipcha cultures in Colombia were all connected and spoke the same language.
4. In Mexico and Guatemala, the Mayan culture was prevalent. The Mayans abandoned their cities in 900 CE due to drought, but they did not disappear. They moved from the cities into the jungle and high into the mountains and established themselves in little villages which still exist today. The ancient cultures preceding the Mayan culture were the Olmecs, the shaft-tomb cultures, Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima.

5. In Mexico, the Aztec civilization developed, and was met and conquered by the Spanish invasion. The Aztec civilization was inspired by the Mayan culture.

In 1949, two scholars, Gordon Ekholm and Chaman Lal, systematically compared the Maya, Aztec, Inca, and the North American indigenous civilizations with India and the Hindu-Buddhist oriented countries of South-East Asia. They found signs of Hindu civilization throughout the Americas in art, architecture, calendars, astronomy, religious symbols, etc. The zenith of Mayan civilization was reached at a time when ancient India had attained an unparalleled cultural peak during the Gupta Period in 320 CE.

The Incas and Aztecs were conquered during the Spanish invasion, but the Mhyusca, Mayan and the culture of the Sierra Nevada are still alive today. In these three cultures there are many similarities with yoga as well as with vedic thoughts and principles. We see today that yoga was a world culture in the ancient past, a science and wisdom that for centuries has been hidden to modern man. However, the ancient knowledge and tradition of yoga is today not only emerging in India. In South America also there is a revival of the ancient spiritual wisdom in the existing indigenous cultures of the Mhyuscas and the culture of the Koguis and Arhuacos of Sierra Nevada. There the treasure of knowledge, tradition and wisdom never disappeared but has been preserved and protected until today when again it is possible for it to emerge within the society.

In Latin America, yoga is now re-emerging as a culture not only as an imported gift from India but also through the discovery of its roots in the ancient and indigenous cultures of the continent.

In 1982, Swami Satyananda went to the archaeological site of San Agustin and seeing the sculptures, the postures, the mudras, the inscriptions of yantras, chakras, nadis, he said:

This is a complete encyclopaedia of tantra and yoga. And it is proof that yoga existed as a culture in Colombia.

1

Exposition 1975 Yoga and Pre-Columbian Art

INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati described the place of yoga throughout the history of humankind:



Yoga is the universal inheritance of mankind. It is a culture that was known and practised by man in ancient times, perhaps more than forty centuries ago. During those times, the yogic culture existed throughout the whole world, but it was lost in the course of time, it died out.

Recently, however, yoga is coming back to life. The science of yoga is being revived. Lack of insight in man was the cause of the loss, or rather, the disappearance of this ancient yogic culture.

It was put aside, hidden and forgotten. It was replaced by materialism, together with pleasure-seeking. Man wanted more and more possessions, wealth and status.

This materialism has driven man and society to the edge of total collapse.

At this present time, when man is poised on the edge of this crumbling precipice, he is starting to think: 'What have I done?' and it is at this moment that he begins to search within himself and finds that his ancestors, yours and mine, had a way of life, a culture called 'yoga'. We are starting to relive it again. It is nothing new. Neither brought nor implanted from outside, but something that is already in the collective consciousness of all humanity.

—From *Bihar School of Yoga, The Vision of a Sage*

The present publication is proof of his words. It presents the vestiges of a yogic culture found in pre-Columbian art throughout Latin America. Yogasanas and various practices of hatha yoga are portrayed, as well as concepts of introversion or meditation, of chakras and the dual forces which rule human life, and of the possibility to connect and communicate with the Divine.

In 1975, with the research and supervision of Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, Satyananda Ashram, Bogotá, hosted an exposition of yoga in pre-Columbian art. The extraordinary resemblance between the artistic representations and the *yoga vidya*, the science of yoga, speaks of yoga as being a culture deeply embedded in the 'collective consciousness of all humanity'.

A translation of the original catalogue is accompanied by artists' impressions of the illustrations which were displayed at the exposition. Images of yoga practices have also been added where applicable. We hope that this presentation will take the reader not only around the world from India to Latin America, but also from antiquity to the 21st century, as we conclude with a talk given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati in 2005, in Bogotá, Colombia.

YOGA Y ARTE PRECOLOMBINO

EXPOSICION

CATALOGO



PREPARADA CON MOTIVO DE

**LA CONVENCION DEL JUBILEO DE PLATA DE
SWAMI AMRITANANDA**

BOGOTA, OCTUBRE 9 AL 15 DE 1975

Human thought and the realizations of humankind are universal. Time and space are barriers which are not sufficiently powerful to break its unity. The differences that exist between cultures are superficial. Nonetheless, they are all animated by the same great spirit when it comes to the highest realizations of men. The tenacity, profundity, devotion, strength and faith in the men who built the Gothic cathedrals of Europe, are the same virtues without which the Mayan pyramids would not have been possible.

The silent statues, symbolic engravings and hierarchical constructions of pre-Columbian art are the voiceless language of a world with a unique inner wealth. For those who live under the same Andean heights that inspired the Incas, the sight of these testimonies is a call from the past which struggles to emerge again. Only recently a real interest has appeared in preserving these vestiges of pre-Columbian art and in deepening the understanding of their cultural significance. We want to preserve and understand it because it is a part of our past and culture.

This modest exposition does not seek to make any definite statements, yet we have encountered curious and interesting coincidences between the pre-Columbian art and yogic thought and ideas that we wish to make this exposition a contribution to the search for our cultural roots.

Time and space are indeed barriers not powerful enough to break the unity of human thought, which at the base was and will be one and the same. Salomon already said:

History merely repeats itself. Nothing is truly new; it has all been done or said before. What can you point to that is new? How do you know it didn't exist long ages ago? We don't remember what happened in those former times, and in the future generations no one will remember what we have done back here.

Ecclesiastes, Chapter 1, Verses 9–11

ASANAS

The following images show a series of statues in which one can find typical yogic postures or asanas. Are these merely coincidences? Judge for yourself.

Figure 1



Anthropomorphic figure. Made of marble; Mayan origin. The inner figure is a man doing strange acrobatics. If observed attentively, however, it is found that the figure does not denote movement but remains static in its strange position. *Vrischikasana* is the Sanskrit term for an identical posture (or exercise) of yoga. (Photos taken from *Pre-Columbian Art*, Phaidon Press 1957, London, page XV – figure 1)

Figure 2



It is a variation of the previous posture. The face is clearly more static and meditative. (Taken from *A History in Art* by Bradley Smith, Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1968, N.Y., page 28)

Figure 3



Anthropomorphic figure. Zapoteca culture (Mexico). This interesting figure shows a man perfectly still and relaxed in a meditative posture. It is unique in the sense that it contains similarities of three different cultures. Its relationship with Egyptian forms is quite evident. Among yogis this meditative posture is known by the name *Sukhasana*. (Taken from *A History in Art* by Bradley Smith, 1968, page 50)

Figure 4

Anthropomorphic Mayan figure. This curious stone engraving looks more like a Hindu relief or from the early stages of Buddhism, rather than a creation of the Mayan culture. It shows the meditative posture of *Sukhasana*. (Taken from *A History in Art*, page 86)

Figure 5



Anthropomorphic Mayan figure. It shows great similarity with a position for relaxation and meditation called *Bhadrasana*. (Taken from *A History in Art*, page 61)

Figure 6

Anthropomorphic figure from San Agustin (Colombia). It is a variation of the previous posture. (Photograph of the Colombian Institute of Culture, Inventory of Cultural Heritage)

Figure 7



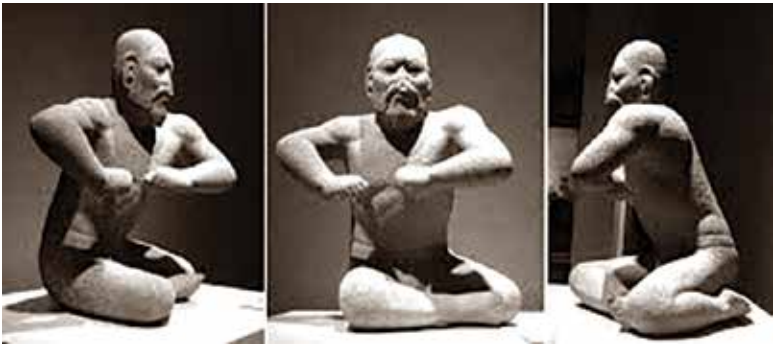
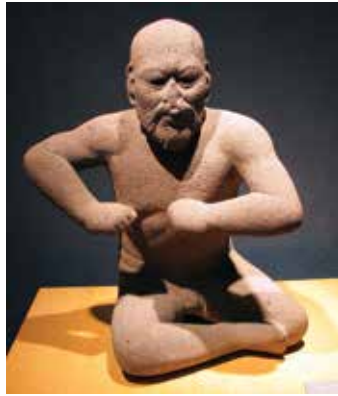
Anthropomorphic container from the Quimbaya. Funeral urn. It represents a person absorbed in deep meditation. The body and the head are upright and they rest on the solid posture of a half lotus. The face denotes complete concentration. Highly suggestive is the association of the funerary urn: the representation of the deceased person with the contemplative attitude that one desires to maintain even beyond death. (Photograph from the Colombian Institute of Culture)

Figure 8



Anthropomorphic statues, Tiahuanaco. These ancient statues are monolithic and in a perfect meditative posture which yogis call *Vajrasana*. (Photograph taken from *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America*, by George Kubler, Editorial Penguin Books, 1962, page 154)

Figure 9

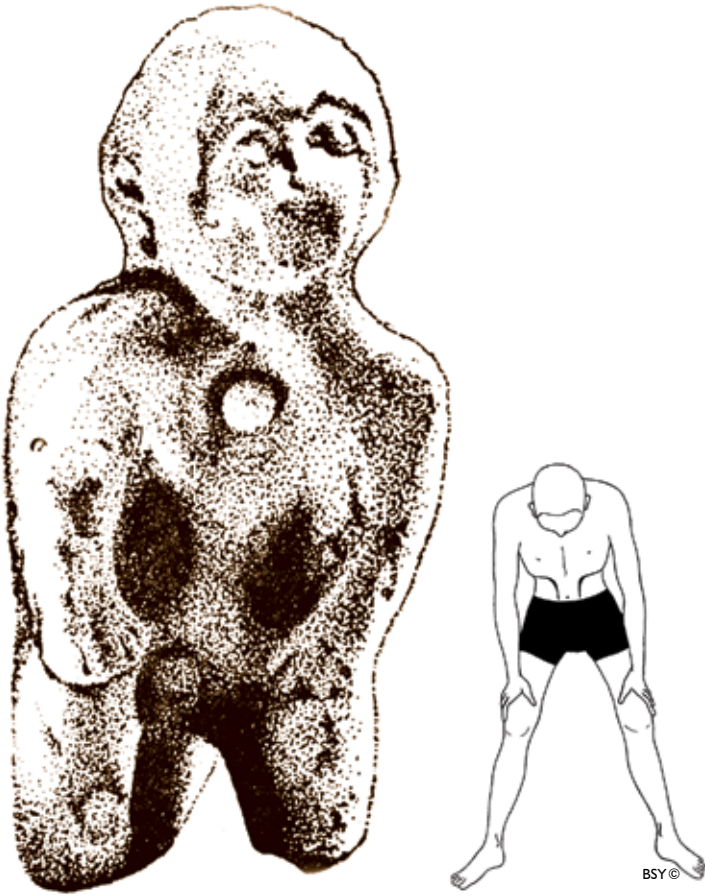


Photograph of a Mayan figure known as 'the Warrior'. It is located in the Anthropological Museum of Mexico. Its anatomical precision and the gracefulness of movement make the object one of the most valuable possessions of the museum. If carefully observed, the name given to it becomes something of a paradox. The posture is the least appropriate for a man who is fighting. Actually it seems more logical to think of a person doing some sort of exercise. In hatha yoga there is one exercise and one of its stages perfectly matches the posture which the figure adopts. The posture is the 'Animal Relaxation', in which one leg is placed forward, with the sole of the foot placed over the thigh of the other



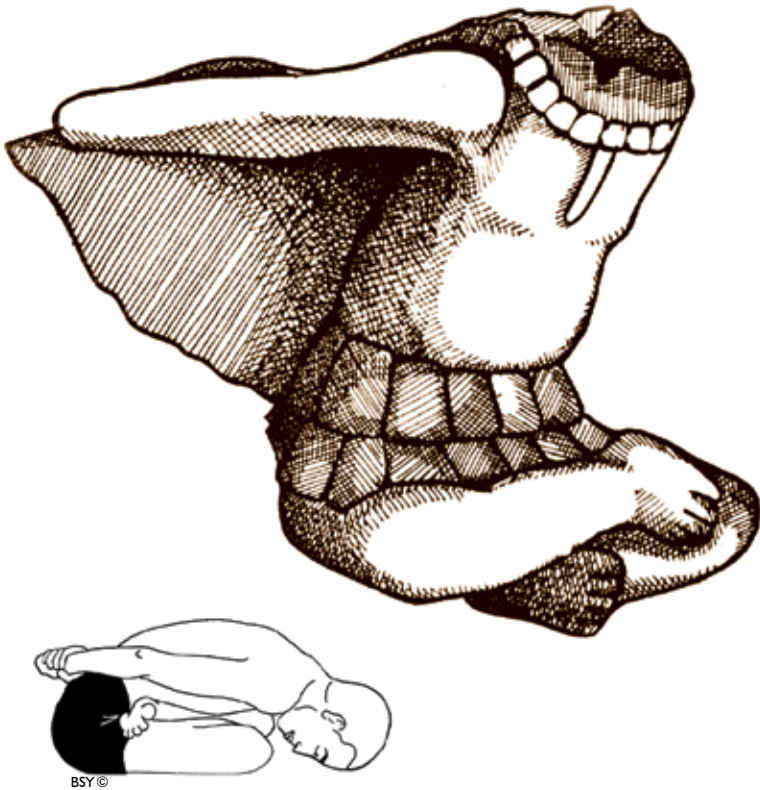
leg. This second leg is bent backwards, with the thigh on the calf and the buttock on the foot, as can be seen in the two photographs that represent the front and back. The exercise consists in rotating the upper body in the direction of the leg that is placed in front and down to the floor. The final position is resting face downwards, with arms stretched out in front and the stomach on the knee of the leg that is in front. In the statue mentioned one can clearly see the rotation of the body downwards and in the direction of the knees. (Taken from the book *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America*, photo No. 36)

Figure 10



Anthropomorphic figure from the Tumaco culture (Colombia). It is a faithful representation of one of hatha yoga's abdominal cleansing technique called *Nauli*, which consists of contracting certain muscles. It is done by standing upright with the hands on the thighs or knees, slightly bending the legs and the body forward. Compare the statue with the afore-mentioned yogic exercises. (Taken from the Colombian Institute of Culture, figure 10)

Figure 11



Anthropomorphic figure of Tumaco (Colombia). The represented person is clearly doing some exercise. It is not a static figure; the movement is implied by the downward inclination of the body and the thrust and direction of the arms. It is bending towards the floor. The final position is that which yogis call *Yoga Mudra*. (Photographs taken from the Colombian Institute of Culture)

Figure 12



Zoo-Anthropomorphic figure of Tumaco (Colombia). It is a person with the head of an animal squatting with its arms extended forward between the knees with the palms facing inside and down. The mouth is open and the tongue is outside. There exists an exercise in hatha yoga called *Simhasana* or lion pose, which clearly corresponds with the figure just analyzed. (Photographs taken from the Colombian Institute of Culture)

SAN AGUSTIN COLOMBIA

The Agustinian culture, seemingly very ancient, talks through stone monoliths of the transcendental problematic of men: life and death, birth, fertility, myth, good and evil. Maybe, when our unstable present civilization comes to an end, the Agustinian culture will continue to transmit its silent but profound message of its millennial stone.

Figure 13

Anthropomorphic figure. In a ritual and priestly activity.
(Photograph by Satyananda Ashram)

Figure 14



This is the back or backside of the previous figure 13. It shows an inverted triangle at the base of the spinal cord. Two lines cut through it and reach to the upper part of the head. It is odd that such strange design has not awakened the curiosity of archaeologists, researchers and scholars. Although many photographs were frequently taken of the front side of the statue, none can be found of its backside. For yogis the inverted triangle at the base of the spinal cord is a representation of the coccyx, where a force known as kundalini lies in a dormant state. Once kundalini awakens, it rises to the top of the head. This process of the rise of the kundalini coincides with the activation of the areas in the brain that remain not utilized by men by a measure of 75%. This force signifies the union of the two opposite energies, polarities, that rule over a man's life: positive and negative; sympathetic and parasympathetic; or ida and pingala in Sanskrit. (Photograph by Satyananda Ashram)



Figure 15



Zoo-Anthropomorphic figure. When have there ever been elephants in America? Ganesha, a Hindu deity, is represented by a man with an elephant's head. It is the God of efficient work. The elephant is a good symbol of strength, tenacity and intelligence which are required for efficient work. (Photograph from the National Tourism Corporation of Colombia)

Figure 16

Anthropomorphic? It is believed that the Agustinian culture clearly distinguished its representations of gods and humans. The latter were given clear features whereas the former were represented by abstract geometric shapes. Hence, this figure is the representation of a god, and this god would be equipoised and serene, like the statue in which some genius artist imprinted his concept of the absolute. From an artistic point of view, this statue is a rare piece of genius. Using geometric lines a human figure is drawn, yet when observed more carefully it comes undone into abstract squares and circles. The perfect and firm interlocked hands are not hands. There is nothing but a simple line zigzagging to make an enigmatic labyrinth. The nose which one sees at first sight does not exist. It takes its shape due to the illusion which the position and solidity of the eyes and mouth produce. But there are no eyes and no mouth. They are all purely abstract geometric shapes. (Photograph from the National Corporation of Tourism, Colombia)

Figure 17

Anthropomorphic figure. It is the figure of a man. Observe the difference with the previous figure, this one has real features. (Photograph by Satyananda Ashram)

Figure 18

Anthropomorphic. Cosmic terror in stone. Maybe it incarnates the universal representation of evil. The ferocity of the face and the selfishness of the hands produce a threatening whole with great simplicity. (Photograph from the National Corporation of Tourism, Colombia)

Figure 19

Zoomorphic. Represents an eagle imprisoning a snake between its claws and beak. Traditionally this has been seen as an allegory of the unity between the spiritual and the material, the timeless and the day-to-day. The eagle,

whose domain is the kingdom of the skies, takes in its claws the serpent, symbol of the earthly, and carries it to the rugged cliffs where it lives. It clearly signifies the unity of the elements that shape human nature. The spirit, like the eagle, searches for the heights; and the body, according to the stage of its existence and development, has the reality of time-space. There is nothing in the serenity of the statue that speaks of the hateful and insurmountable duality between spirit and body, which the Manichean interpretations of life make us believe.

Tantra, an ancient science from which yoga originates, has as its foundation this reality. Tantra seeks to spiritualize or sanctify, if you like, ordinary life. Yoga is meant, not for the ascetics of the Himalayas, but for the common man who only wants to bring order into his daily duties, giving them a spiritual dimension, in order to solve the most basic problems of his life. (Photograph by Jaime Moncada)

Figure 20

Anthropomorphic. Given the halo around its head and the attitude of peace and mystic contemplation it is absorbed in, it could well be a deity or a highly spiritual person. When carefully observed, it can be seen that the eyes are looking upwards. The main action revolves around the flute, which is played with as much devotion as the artist could imprint on the whole. If the music which the statue speaks of has the same qualities as the statue, then it must have been a great moment in the history of art. It clearly suggests music as a method to praise God, or to speak with him, or to express some of the most subtle forms of human thought. Beethoven expressed the same idea when he said, "Music is a revelation much higher than philosophy." (Romain Roland, *Life of Beethoven*) One of the branches of yoga, *nada yoga*, or the science of sound, seeks that revelation through music. (Photograph by Jaime Moncada)

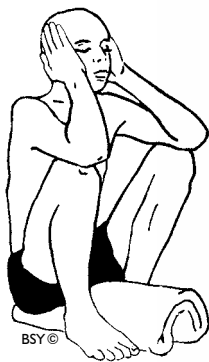


Figure showing *Nadanusandhana*,
a practice of nada yoga.

MANDALA

The following photographs and drawings correspond to engravings and pre-Columbian designs, as they appear on vases, funerary urns, statues and other objects.

These drawings, hugely suggestive, point to an organized, methodical and patient mentality. They were used in religious ceremonies or as objects of daily life, but always made with great imagination. Their variety and richness are an expression of a culture that likes to manifest itself through symbols. Many of them, if carefully observed, cannot be accepted as mere ornaments for they denote a deeper meaning.

The spirit manifests and communicates through the form. This allows us to connect with the thought and soul of the pre-Columbian dwellers of America, deeply rooted in the spiritual realities of men.

The following is a testament of the existence of this symbolic language:

Jorge Isaacs, after copying with a careful curiosity the numerous engravings of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, asked the old sorcerer of the tribe of the Busingos, who accompanied him about the meanings of certain symbols. He replied that the concentric circles represent the sun, the spiral represents eternity, and the monkey-like head with its three little central circles, which detach themselves from some of those swirls or spirals, represents divinity.

—‘La Civilización Chibcha’ by Miguel Triana,
Biblioteca Popular, page 193

These symbolic concepts coincide with certain figurative representations which yogis call ‘mandalas’ and ‘yantras’, and which they use as powerful tools for the exact comprehension of the real phenomenon which is symbolized.

If the spirit manifests itself through the form, then the form is the vehicle par excellence to reach the spirit. Here lies the real purpose of the mandala.

The mandala is then, figuratively speaking, an imprisoned spirit or living experience capable of communicating or suggesting its content. It is a circle of fire which radiates, it is the key to awaken, the management and solution of great internal problems or riddles.

How can that be?

St Agustin said, "Do not desire to go outside of yourself; truth resides inside of men." The previous statement is not a poetic licence by the saint but the right understanding that man is the image and likeness of God, timeless wisdom and knowledge.

There exists in men a series of different levels of which he usually has no awareness and which successively represent realities more deep and absolute.

The Socratic 'Know Thyself' is the path for the search of these inner realities. The deeper they are, the more universal they are and, paradoxically, less subjective, for they are a manifestation of a great single reality. These realities make a language possible which is also universal, which speaks of them – as the word of the idea – and leads to them: the mandala. The cross, the circle, the spiral are all good examples of these symbols of the universal consciousness.

The mandala has in practice one important objective: to serve as the vehicle through which the mind can concentrate completely on the inner reality. Without this complete concentration there is not enough strength to penetrate into the dormant superior centres. The mandala can convert the mind from a dissipated and useless ray into a powerful and unified laser beam.

The mandalas can be statues, drawings, engravings, and when their forms are mostly geometrical they are called yantras. The human figure is obviously a mandala.

Figure 21



Mayan anthropomorphic. The stone is called 'Stella', which the Mayans lifted periodically, every 20 years, in order to do some calculations. These would be on the movement of the stars or historic events. Once the Stella is analyzed, it can be observed that apart from all the greatly rich symbolic representations, it has the singularity that its back is divided into seven parts and two vertical straight lines that join in the upper part. Yogis teach that along the spinal cord, from the coccyx to the top, there are seven nervous centres, which are dormant in men, yet they can be awakened. And according to how much he is conscious of them, man will come to know his true nature, until he will experience the 'Great Knowledge', the reality that transcends time and space, beyond every duality or dialectic process: consciousness of total unity, represented in Stella by its upper undivided centre. (Photograph taken from *Summa Artis*, José Pijoan, vol. X, page 399)

Figure 22

Mexican gold work. Represents a solar disc; in the centre there is the figure of a god whose lower part is a bell. It is a greatly interesting concept of divinity as a unit of light and sound. For yogis primordial sound and light exists, which in certain states of meditation can be perceived as one and the same. (Photograph from *A History in Art*, page 103)

Figure 23

Disc made out of gold, Inca. Shows three concentric circles. The rich decoration based on geometrical shapes makes it serve perfectly the purpose of a mandala. (Photograph taken from *Pre-Columbian Art* by S.K. Lothrop, Phaidon Publishers, 1957, page CXXII, catalogue No. 301)

Figure 24



Chimu silver craft, Peru. Of undeniable artistic value, this piece was extracted from a Chimu burial site. Archaeologists and anthropologists ignored its purpose and aim. Perhaps it could be an Andean yantra. (Taken from *Indian Art* by Frederick J. Dockstader, New York Graphic Society, 1967, figure 150)

Figure 25



BSY ©

Clay figure from Tihuanaco (Peru and Bolivia). It represents a coiled serpent. Yogis symbolize the dormant force that lies in the first nervous centre of the spinal cord, the coccyx, called the mooladhara chakra in Sanskrit, through a representation of a serpent coiled three and a half times. (Photograph from *Indian Art*, 1967, figure 142)

Figure 26

Aztec painting. For the Aztecs the serpent is the symbol of life. The painting would then be a representation of the eternity of life, which does not have a beginning or an end, but is always equal and the same. (Taken from *A History in Art*, page 151)

Figure 27



Aztec sculpture. Once again the serpent coiled three and a half times, but with an additional curious detail: its tongue is split into two parts. This would represent the polarity of the two forces that constitute the dormant kundalini: the positive and negative, the sympathetic and the parasympathetic, ida and pingala. (Taken from *A History in Art*, page XL)

Figure 28



A true masterpiece of pre-Columbian art, this Aztec skull has been carved in crystal. In his book *Summa Artis* (vol. X, page 155), José Pijoan states, “The Aztecs preferred to carve skulls in rock crystals because with its transparency and reflections, it seems to show the activity going on in the skull.” Looking intently and steadily at one of these Aztec crystal skulls, the impression is given that it is looking at us with its bright and sparkling eyes, and that with some effort we would be able to decipher its thoughts.”

One of the hatha yoga techniques for mental concentration is called *Trataka*. This technique consists of gazing at certain objects, whether transparent or not. Objects commonly used are rock crystals. Only one more idea can be added to Prof Pijoan’s bold intuition: it is not the thoughts of the skull that emerge but one’s own thoughts and one’s own subconscious that start to flow and appear with the technique. (Taken from *Summa Artis*, vol. X, 1958, page 156)

Figure 29



Figure 30

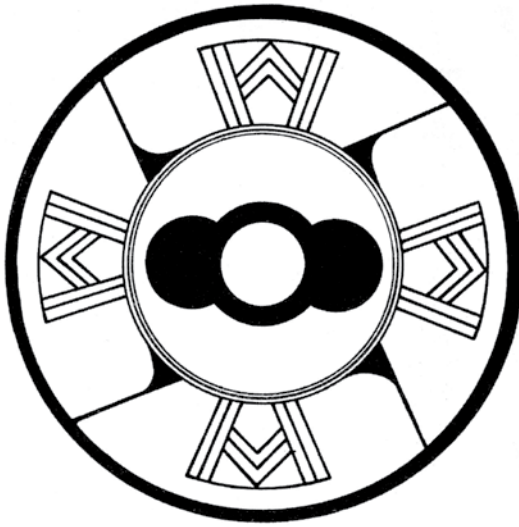


Mayan relief carving (Figure 29). Prof Pijoan states about it: “The reason that plenty of carvings from Yaxchilán are found on door frames, which only the initiated could go through, would suggest that some are almost confidential, indiscrete representations of mental phenomena that can be rarely expressed with clarity. Experiences of the supernatural are universal and relatively uniform. They have been described frequently by those who have lived them yet in a literary and enigmatic way; in an expressive manner as the ones found in Yaxchilán, only very few times.”

The carving represents a priest or devotee ecstatic in the contemplation of the serpent-God which emerges from the sacrificial fire itself. Prof Pijoan draws a parallel between the content of this carving and Bernini’s masterpiece, ‘Ecstasy of St Teresa’. (figure 30) (Photograph 492 and 493 from *Summa Artis*, vol. X, pages 313 and 314)

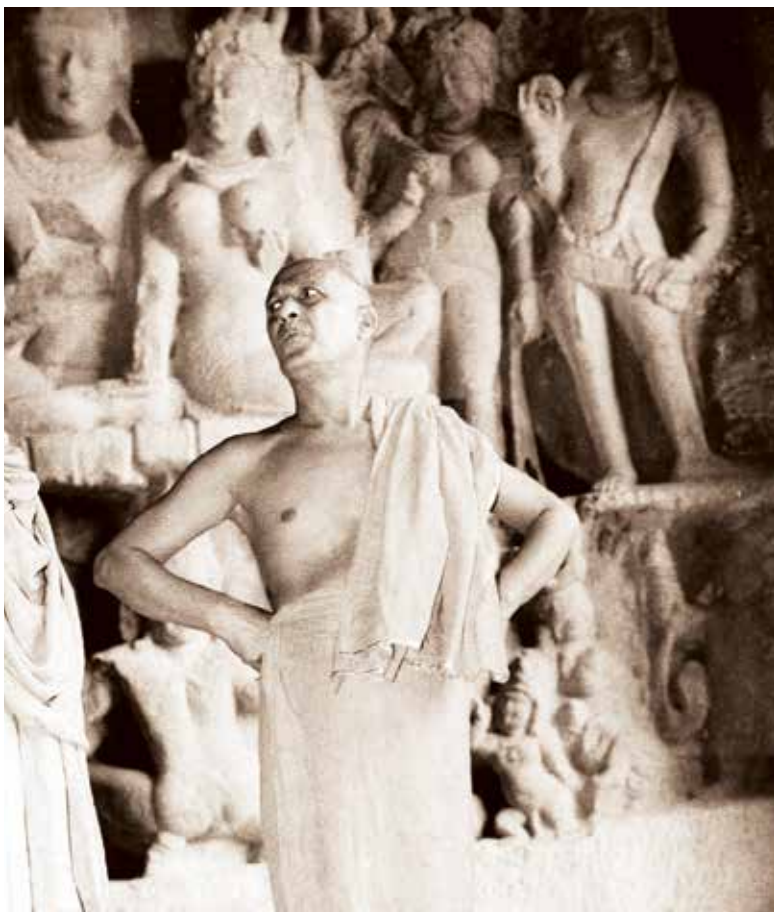
YANTRAS

The following designs (Figures 31 to 50) correspond mainly to drawings found in vases, funerary urns, rollers for dyeing blankets amongst other objects. These are taken from the book, *Pre-Columbian Designs*, Antonio Gross, edited by the Banco de la República, 1972. These drawings are mainly formed by geometrical shapes. They are used and play an important role in the creation of symbols, just as the cross, circle and spirals are elements with which the meditative symbols are formed, known in the tantric tradition as geometric mandalas or yantras.



YOGA – AN ANCIENT AND UNIVERSAL CULTURE

Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga has immediate relevance in our day-to-day life, but it has been utterly neglected by other cultures for many centuries. As a result of that negligence, our society has had to pay a heavy cost. Today we are restless and suffering from psychosis and neurosis, which is reflected in the family life, community life and national life.

Yoga is my subject wherever I go. From my study of history, religion and civilization, I have found that yoga is an international culture which humankind has imbibed from ancient times. Only last year, when I visited Latin American countries, I went to a large and famous museum near Bogotá in Colombia. I am personally interested in investigating the possibility of a universal culture, and with that intention, I have visited almost all the museums in the world.

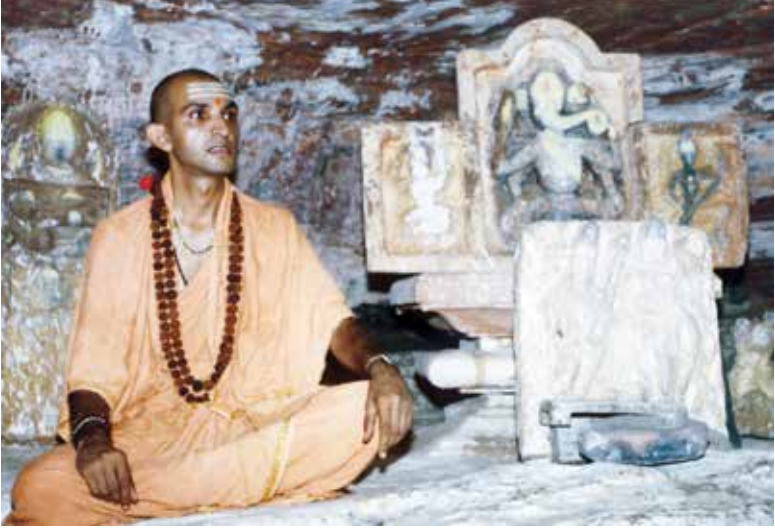
From the paintings, designs and statues of what is called the pre-Columbian era, I realized that before the Colombian nation there existed a completely different culture there, and this ancient culture was based on yoga. In that pre-Columbian art, there are statues of hatha yoga mudras, nadi shodhana pranayama, vajrasana, uddiyana bandha and vipareeta karani mudra. I have found these and many other yogic artefacts in the pre-Columbian culture and in the pre-Christian culture also. Yoga has survived the ravages of time and will survive in coming generations.

—January 1976, Kumardhubi, India
From *Early Teachings of Swami Satyananda Saraswati*,
Volume II



YOGA – A WORLD HERITAGE

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga is global human heritage. The ancient civilizations of the world, which modern civilization calls pagan and primitive, had the knowledge and wisdom to realize the inner self. This understanding can be seen depicted at San Agustin in Colombia. In Colombia it was established that yoga is a global science and not an Indian science but it was preserved in India. When I was in Colombia during 1973–74, I did research into the pre-Columbian civilizations, such as the Aztecs, the Mayans, the Chibcha and the Incas, to see their practices and discuss their spiritual theories. Through this process it was realized that these people had a very strong yoga background.

I lived with various Indian tribes and went to their reservations and looked at their literatures and statues and symbols, discovering that many of them represented yogic symbols, yogic postures and yogic ideas. Then the research continued from Guatemala to Mexico, from Ecuador to

Peru, Chile to Bolivia, looking at the ancient tribes that lived in these countries. The Chibcha tribe of Indians lived in Colombia and had a strong yogic base. From this culture there are statues of people in yogic asanas, practising nauli, practising *vyaghrasana*, the tiger pose, practising *sirshasana*, the head stand, practising *padmasana*, the lotus pose. They can be seen in museums and have been carbon-dated to around 3,300 BCE to 1,600 BCE.

In one of the greatest sanctuaries in Colombia, San Agustin, there are many images of yoga. It is an open-air museum covering many acres of land. There are numerous stone carvings depicting symbols, philosophies and concepts of yoga in relation to energy and consciousness, in relation to vitality, the primordial force and creativity, and in relation to the psychic centres that exist in the body.

There are statues depicting many of the traditional yoga postures which are practised today, such as *vajrasana*, the thunderbolt pose. Concentration and meditation practices are also depicted. There are life-sized statues of people – of warriors and of normal people – and on their backs are carved the symbols of the chakras and the kundalini. There are symbols of kriya yoga, chakra theory and the theory of the nadis depicted on the rocks. According to carbon dating, these images are up to 1500 years old.

Similar findings were made in Scandinavian countries and also in Egypt and North African countries. Ancient Egypt also had a strong yogic and spiritual foundation. The theories of yoga, the practices of yoga and the symbology of yoga, such as the yantras and the mandalas, are found in the old traditions of the Scandinavian countries. These combined discoveries led to the conclusion that once upon a time, yoga was a global culture. These people presented yoga in statues as they didn't have printing presses. Instead of books they used statues. By the time this visual imagery was produced they had refined yoga to a very high level, possibly the same level that it is being practised today, otherwise how would it have been possible to think of kundalini, chakras,

mantras, the symbols, so that uniformity and a level of excellence in theory and in practice can be maintained? It must have taken a couple of thousand years for yoga to evolve to that point of perfection. So a rough estimate of the beginnings would be about 3,500 years ago. That is a rough guess. It may be more, it may be less.

But nothing remains constant. Due to the ravages of time, political changes, natural calamities, the migration of tribes, the invasions of people on horseback and with guns, much destruction and death took place, and the yogic culture in these countries was suppressed. The understanding and the practice of yoga disappeared from other cultures and civilizations, but was preserved in India and integrated in its culture.

—From *Conversations on the Science of Yoga –
Hatha Yoga Book 1: An Overview*



30 YEARS LATER – TOWARDS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MIND

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Talk given during the International Yoga Convention, 20–22 May
2005, Bogotá, Colombia*



Colombia is a country very close to our hearts. Our guru, Swami Satyananda, first came to Colombia in 1970. In the course of time the ashram was established and some of us came to serve the mission and the centre. We also had the opportunity to investigate the ancient pre-Columbian culture and its spiritual traditions. We found ample evidence of yoga in the archaeological park near San Agustín, where there are many thousand-year-old stone statues, some of which depict many of the traditional yoga postures we practise today, such as vajrasana, padmasana, sirshasana, vrischikasana, as well as other aspects of hatha yoga not commonly known in the West, such as agnisar kriya and nauli. Concentration and meditation practices are also depicted. This has led us to believe that yoga was once a worldwide, universal culture.

Today we have taller buildings and wider highways, but we also have shorter temperaments and narrower points of view. We have been able to investigate outer space, but not the inner space. We have more knowledge, but less wisdom. We have more medicines, but poorer health. We have improved our efficiency, but have less time. We have increased our incomes, but lowered our moral values. We have finer houses, but many broken homes.

We live in a society which aspires for progress, and here there seems to be a contradiction between the normal lifestyle of society and our own aspirations. We aspire for something, but we are unable to change our present environment. The main theme of this yoga convention is the discovery of our inner nature, because then it does not matter whether we have lower buildings or narrower roads, as our point of view and abilities are bigger and better. We may have less money, but we will enjoy greater health. We have to be able to discover a process which will help us come into contact with our inner self. The ancient civilizations of the world, which modern civilization calls primitive and backward, had the knowledge and wisdom to realize the inner self. This understanding can be seen depicted at San Agustin. The yoga I am introducing in Colombia is the yoga that was practised in this culture before it was lost to human civilization.

At San Agustin many stone carvings were found depicting the symbols, philosophies and concepts of yoga in relation to energy and consciousness, in relation to vitality, the primordial force and creativity, and in relation to the psychic centres that exist in our body. There are two memorable statues, both of which have an inverted triangle at the base. In one, the figure of a snake ascends from the inverted triangle to the crown of the head and the serpent's head is on top of the human head. The other image is of a triangle with three lines moving from the base of the spine to the top of the spine, where they merge at the eyebrow centre. This is the concept of kundalini, the spiritual and mystical component of yoga.

In this manner, the philosophies of yoga and spiritual life can be seen in the symbols carved in the statues. From this we can infer that the people of this ancient civilization also had the aspiration to discover their connection with the universe and the cosmos. Although we may not understand their methods and philosophies today, they definitely had a way of life, a science and a practice which was very much a part of their culture and civilization. Later this became known as yoga.

When Swami Satyananda came to Colombia in the early 1970s, yoga was seen here more as a spiritual culture, whereas in Europe and Australia people practised yoga to trim their waistlines and to improve the beauty of their body. In Colombia people practised yoga not for the body, but for mental and spiritual development. Paramahamsaji said that in Colombia people understood yoga as a subject of life, not as a physical practice. For this reason we have seen a vibrant tradition of yoga in Colombia. We find the same spirit in the people of this country and on this continent, reflecting the quest for knowledge and for self-understanding.

Teachings of Swami Sivananda

Swami Sivananda used to tell people, “Always strive to expand your horizons of knowledge. Always try to understand your own needs and the needs of other people and always try to extend a helping hand to everyone who needs it.” In Swami Sivananda’s teachings, acquisition of knowledge is the first thing that human beings can do to improve the quality of life. This knowledge is internal, not external, knowing the various dimensions of the personality and mind in order to improve them, so that creativity, peace and contentment become natural expressions and experiences. As a medical doctor, Swami Sivananda understood science, human anatomy and physiology, and the mind. He made an effort to remove the trappings of mysticism from yoga and to teach yoga in a very practical and systematic form so that people could discover themselves.

However, yoga is much more ancient than the teachings of Swami Sivananda that we became exposed to in the last century. The purpose of yoga is to provide a method for the individual to experience physical health, mental awareness and tranquillity, and spiritual upliftment. These are the three main aims of yogic practices. The physical practices are *asana* and *pranayama*, postures and breathing techniques. The mental practices are *pratyahara*, techniques of relaxation and developing awareness, and *dharana*, techniques for developing concentration. The spiritual dimensions of yoga can be experienced when meditation is practised. This is how the system of yoga originally developed. Later, many people added various practices, concepts and theories to this body of yoga according to their discoveries and understanding of human nature, human behaviour and human possibilities.

We all come endowed with qualities and abilities that can make us better or, if misused, make us worse. Everybody has untapped potential, a creative dimension which is not yet awakened. In the absence of awakening the inner creativity of the personality, we experience conflict and confusion. However, yogis believed that although, from birth to death, we go through many different experiences related to the senses and mind, there is the possibility of modifying, improving and transforming the limited expressions of the senses, mind and emotions, and converting the thoughts and feelings into more expansive, outreaching and peaceful expressions. This is the beginning of yoga.

Thousands of years later Swami Sivananda brought the practical aspects of yoga to the public. Prior to Swami Sivananda, many people spoke about yoga, but as theory, not practice. Swami Sivananda and his disciples made yoga available to the public as a practical and scientific subject. Swami Satyananda researched the ancient yogic theories and literature and developed many of the physical, mental and spiritual practices of today, including pawanmuktasana, pranayama, yoga nidra, pratyahara and dharana techniques, and kriya and kundalini yoga. Our tradition emphasizes the

integration of body, mind and spirit. It takes the essence of yoga from the ancient past and develops the practices to enable a better future for humanity. Our tradition exemplifies the growth and application of yoga in the context of modern society.

Globally, however, we still find that yoga teachers and centres are caught up in the physical self, and call that yoga. But stretching the body is not yoga. Yoga is stability of the body, mind, emotions and feelings. A stable life is the requirement of human beings today. From the yogic perspective, a stable life means a balanced and harmonious life, one in which you are the master of your actions and mind and able to direct your energies to become happy and contented. This is practical yoga, not just physical yoga or spiritual yoga, and it can guide the practitioner from body to mind, to emotions and to spirit.

Connecting with spirit

To ensure that the quality of life is strong and healthy, we have to care for the roots of life, the spirit, which is luminous but hidden. We have an understanding of spirit, but we do not know where it is or how to experience it. The body is something tangible that we can touch, feel and experience, so we can identify with it. We experience the mind in the form of thoughts, feelings, desires, expectations and ambitions, and therefore we can accept the existence of the mind. Both Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda, the inspirers of our tradition, have said that yoga allows one to connect with one's spirit. Once that connection has taken place, the quality of the mind changes, the quality of life changes and the wellbeing of the body changes.

Therefore, from this perspective, yoga means union of the individual consciousness with the higher consciousness. In its pure form this higher consciousness is known as God. The word GOD represents the quality of generation and creation, the quality of organization and maintenance, and the quality of destruction and transformation. These are the

strengths of the human spirit. When we experience these three qualities at our level and in our dimension, they belong to the individual self. We have the ability to create, we have the ability to maintain and manage, and we also have the ability to change, transform and destroy. The interactions of the individual spirit in the external world are what make an individual a human being. But experiencing these three qualities at the internal level, with greater awareness, clarity and wisdom, connects one with the all-pervasive consciousness. This is the union yoga aspires for, union of the individual spirit with the cosmic spirit.

Philosophers and intellectuals have used this definition of yoga to create an image of mysticism in the body of yoga. But let me tell you very clearly that yoga is not mysticism. It was the belief of those who did not really understand mysticism and considered anything beyond the senses to be mystic. After all, when you are asleep, you are not aware of the body or the senses, but you dream. If the senses are inactive, if the mind is disconnected from time, space and object, then who is dreaming? Yet you do not call that a mystical experience. How then can meditation, in which you are guiding yourself step by step on a path of self-discovery, be called a mystical experience? Mysticism is a trapping, a label given to certain yogic experiences which people have not yet been able to understand because they do not know the sequence or process.

When the camera was first introduced, there was a belief that the spirit was being captured in the camera. Today, no one thinks in this manner because an understanding or awareness has developed that the camera is not capturing the spirit in the film, but only the image of the body. Similarly, you have to go through a process of understanding yoga and then you will discover that yoga is not mysticism. We cannot define mysticism; it is unknown to us, which is why we say it is something beyond the mind. However, yoga is not mysticism, but rather a simple and sequential process of knowing the body and how it responds to the situations,

stresses and tensions of our normal day-to-day life. Yoga is a system of knowing the mind and how it is influenced by various situations, events and circumstances.

We are influenced by what other people say. If somebody abuses you, it hurts your self-esteem and sense of ego, and you are not able to let it go. When it relates to you, you become the centre of that experience of pain, suffering, joy or happiness, whatever its content. We are also unable to let go of our own headtrips and heartaches, inhibiting the creativity of the mind and consciousness. This is where the mental component of yoga comes in. Find your balance, peace or happiness by observing and understanding the influences of the situations and circumstances that affect you. Once inner mental peace is attained, then spiritual life, the spiritual component of yoga, begins.

Become a winner

In books on philosophy, yoga or spiritual subjects, various authors often say that to be a winner in spiritual life, an aspirant has to be like a warrior who fights and overcomes negativity, shortcomings and weaknesses. However, this idea goes against the spiritual precepts and principles of yoga, which say: “Be a farmer, not a warrior.” It is no use gaining at the expense of death, destruction and suffering, but there is beauty in being a farmer because you plant seeds, care for them, ensure their security and growth, and later on enjoy the fruits. In yoga, spiritual life is becoming the farmer of our own lives. A farmer converts a barren piece of land into a beautiful garden through effort. That is the spiritual aspect of yoga.

You have to look at your life and make it into a garden. Sow the positive qualities, the inner strengths and convictions, willpower, understanding, wisdom, compassion and love, and the desire for service and purification, which define progression in spiritual life. Remember that life is not suffering or survival, but a sequence of moments of happiness, joy, peace and bliss. If you capture these

moments, then you live a full life because you have created a sequence and continuity, but if you think of life as suffering, struggling and surviving, then you do not see the beauty. When you begin to plant positive seeds, they convert the quality of your life, and that makes you a yogi.

In Sanskrit, there are three words: yogi, bhogi and rhogi. A *yogi* is a practitioner of yoga, a *bhogi* is the enjoyer and a *rhogi* is one who is sick. In normal life we are on the middle path, searching for *bhoga*, enjoyment. As long as the enjoyment is balanced, you become a yogi, but if it is unbalanced, then you become a rhogi. A bhogi is one who enjoys, lives and acts, one who is part of the whole world. We are all bhogis, enjoyers. As the drive for pleasure increases, we become more materialistic and move into a state of imbalance, which leads to ill health of body, mind, emotions and spirit. But if we are able to regulate our enjoyment, if we are able to direct our efforts towards balance, then we become a yogi, one who experiences harmony in life.

In the entire system of yoga, the effort is not to make you enlightened or spiritual. Enlightenment or realization is an outcome of a balanced, harmonious personality, which is not in conflict with itself or with other people, situations or conditions, but is equipoised. Enlightenment is not the ultimate goal of life. Mind management is the goal because the rest is just an outcome of the inner harmony one is able to experience through the yogic practices of meditation, awareness and contemplation. This is the aim of yoga, because at this point yoga does not only remain a practice, but becomes a lifestyle.

Living yoga

If yoga is only a practice, something you do in a classroom, you do not carry it with you outside, but if yoga is a lifestyle, it remains within you twenty-four hours of the day, wherever you are or whatever your circumstances may be. You live yoga. That is the culmination, the grand finale we wish to see. We do not wish to see somebody who can practise

meditation for eight hours without moving their body, because that is useless. All you do is waste your time in mental imaginings and fantasies. By applying yourself, you will receive more returns than by simply closing your eyes. Therefore, it needs to be understood that yoga is not escaping from life, but running into life with open arms and an attitude of acceptance, and with the attitude of improving one's ability to perform, to think and to understand.

This is the basic foundation of yoga. We begin with the purpose of improving the wellbeing of the body, attaining peace of mind and experiencing spiritual awakening. These three aims have to be taken together in order for the roots of our life to be strong and able to withstand every kind of storm or tempest that comes our way.

Spiritual and mystical experiences are the outcome of a trained mind, a mind that has been disciplined and awakened by the input of different attitudes and qualities to uplift human consciousness. The general trend is to talk a lot, love a little and hate a lot. Let us talk less, love more and hate less. How long are we going to subject ourselves to the agonies which are self-created by our ego, ambitions and dislikes? We have to connect with the positive self some time. Yoga provides the instruments to connect with the positive, creative self. This creative, positive self is nourished and nurtured by the qualities of love, compassion, purity and understanding. We need to cherish these qualities because they make us a real human being. This has been the teaching of all the spiritual traditions.

Yoga allows us to conquer our inner space. This is the teaching of our tradition and also the teaching we encounter in the ancient pre-Columbian culture. There are many countries in the world where yoga is practised, but only a few that have the potential to experience yoga and live yoga. India is one of these countries, Colombia is another, and possibly other South American countries too, because the yogic culture extends to the Andes and is not restricted to a geographical location. Just as energy moves

El yogui y el maya

¿Qué hay tras la ceremonia que reunió, cerca de Bogotá, a dos importantes líderes espirituales de tradiciones lejanas?

SEGURAMENTE EL lunes 23 de mayo fue para muchos un día como cualquier otro. Pero no para quienes asistieron a una ceremonia muy especial en la sabana de Bogotá, en la cual se reunieron por primera vez los representantes de dos tradiciones espirituales milenarias: la yogui y la maya.

Y es que el 23 de mayo no fue una fecha más para los creyentes en las cosmovisiones mayas. No solo había una enorme luna llena, sino que era el día del Wensik, o día de Ibad. Según la tradición fue justamente un día como ese, un plenilunio de mayo, cuando el sabio se iluminó a la sombra de un árbol e inició su camino de enseñanza espiritual. Además, aquella noche el sol se alineó con las Pléyades (en la constelación de Taurus), estrellas que son fundamentales para la cosmología maya, por lo que el evento marcaba un ciclo muy importante para esta cultura. Por si fuera poco, ese mismo día se celebraba el cumpleaños de Shrii Shrii Anandamurti, el gurú más importante del tantra yoga.

El día de Ibad se festeja en todo el mundo. Y en Colombia se reúnen, en una finca entre Tabio y Cajica, el maestro yogui Paramahansa Nirajanananda, director de la Universidad de yoga de Bihar (India) y máximo representante de la academia de yoga de Satyananda, y el abuelo Cirilo Pérez Ojeda, líder espiritual de la tradición maya Quiché y presidente del Consejo continental de ancianos de América. Allí llevaron a cabo dos ceremonias del fuego, que a juicio

del swami (o monje) Dharma Deva, constituyen "más que un encuentro de dos culturas, un evento histórico y trascendental para la humanidad".

LAS CEREMONIAS DEL FUEGO

El abuelo Cirilo inició la celebración con el ritual del fuego sagrado y que según la tradición es más antiguo que las primeras plantaciones mayas. En él se lanzan distintos objetos a una hoguera circular rodeada de flores, como retribución a la madre Tierra por sus dones. El abuelo en este caso ofreció, entre otros, chocolates, galletas, velas de colores e incienso. Cuenta Hebeling Gaviria, quien asistió al evento que "en el momento en que se quemaban las ofrendas los palojos empezaron a caer de una manera sorprendente".

Pero el ritual, además, tiene un objetivo de purificación, pues a través del

Al final de los rituales del fuego que practicaron los dos líderes espirituales, el maestro yogui Paramahansa Nirajanananda (derecha) le realizó tributo al abuelo maya Cirilo Pérez Ojeda (izquierda)

poder transformados del fuego se pueden consumir y convertir en centros los males del mundo. De ahí que todo el que quería podía arrojarse objetos reales o simbólicos a la hoguera con el fin de limpiarse. Y por eso, hacia el final de la ceremonia, el abuelo tomó varios bebés y cargándolos caminó alrededor de la hoguera

con el fin de purificarlos.

El turno para el rito yogui llegó a las 6 de la tarde. Para este se había preparado una especie de vajra mística de forma rectangular con leña en



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in the spine, in the same way yoga has moved through the Andes to the South American countries. Here we find very pure and sincere seekers who, if given the right opportunity, training and teaching, can again live a yogic way of life and experience union with other beings and the cosmos. This union is an expression of love and compassion because union without love and compassion, empathy and oneness, purity and service, is not union. It is an attitude of mind, a selfless, positive and constructive attitude of mind.

In a nutshell, yoga is a process of sublimating the normal and natural behaviour to a point where it becomes universal. Yoga teaches us to come out of the personal shell. Before a seed can sprout, it has to die. Only when the shell of the seed is broken will the sprout be seen. In the same manner, yoga helps us to break the shell of selfishness and egocentricity in order to allow spiritual sprouting to take place where there is beauty, calmness and peace. This is what we look for in our life in today's society.

su interior. Alrededor del recipiente se abalanzan dos hombres y dos mujeres. A continuación se prendió el fuego y el *tsami* Panamihama Naranjaramunda contó 27 muertes (vibraciones sonoras) en 30 días para liberar la miera. "Cada vez que encontraba una muerte, cuando hablo, la gente lo encontraba. Entre cada uno de los muertos el *tsami* lo había oído al fuego".

A los personajes, pre-
históricos, que se le
atribuye para su creación a la
mitología de la región de la
Sierra de la Cruz del mismo
colono, y a todos los señalamientos
que en el entrecerro, El manzan-
cillo, en esta tradición, es el colmo de
la romancía caprichosa. Tras el
canto de los maitines la gente
se acercó al fuego y lanzó flores
que representaban ofrendas,
fuego de lo cual compartieron
problemas, un adorno porfiria-
do, en su mayoría compuesto
por frutas como cocinos, mague-
yos, mandarinas. Entre tanto la
flama ardía en el florilegio. El
acto, evocó como ritual al
fuego sagrado finalizado cuando el
maestro Neri pronunció la frase
comemorativa simbólica respectu-
sa como de flores al albedío
Cristóbal y Francisco Quiroga,
el coautor de representantes de
la cultura maya presente en la
ceremonia.

¿Cuál era el propósito de la reunión entre el maestro Niranjanananda y el abuelo Cirilo? ¿Por qué este acercamiento repentino de dos tradiciones tan antiguas y tan lejanas como la yoga y la maza? ¿Por qué el respeto de los yoguís hacia los mazoos?

Palabras más, palabras menos, la respuesta es que los mayas, entre otras culturas precolombinas, practicaban el yoga. Hay varios pruebas que apuntan a ellos. En primer lugar muchas de las estatuas y figuras pintadas sobre cerámicas de la civilización precolombina, son idénticas a las posiciones del yoga. El mismo swami Nityanagatananda, quien vivió en Colombia en la década del 70, descubrió en los monolitos de San Agustín figuras en

posiciones exactamente iguales a las practicadas por los yogui. Fue entonces cuando surgió mi interés por las similitudes entre las dos tradiciones, un interés que culminó con el encuentro del 25 de mayo y que permite al swami Dharma Deva, un colombiano profesor de yoga en la Universidad de Buzos, afirmar que "en Colombia y Centroamérica había una cultura yóguica que floreció hace 5.000 años".

Hay otras similitudes que han llevado a pensar que las dos tradiciones se guatean en aspectos más que coincidentes. Según el sacerdote maya Francisco Quiroz,

► Muchos estados
mayores y de
otras partes
precoordinadas
muestran posiciones
indiferentes a las
ocurrencias en el agua

estudiosos han encontrado en antiguos manuscritos en sánscrito en la India, palabras que aparecen idénticas a vocablos de los mayas. La misma palabra maya en la tradición yucateca significa "fuerza de la ilusión". Y ciertos símbolos como la serpiente enroscada hacen parte de los dios celstiales.

¿Cómo explicar este sin-
timiento? El famoso Diálogo de
de lo que SEFARSA, que existió
una vez insegura local explicable
que los truenos hayan migrado
al Asia a través de Se Landia
arriba de que los espíritus de Be-
garana América. Fueron ellos
antiguos, quienes
llevaron la
tradición
del yoga a la
India, donde
fue largo este
matizada. Entroplicación
además, que al momento
del descubrimiento los en-
caraban sólo en co-
trans los
vestigios
de la ci-
vilización

◀ El abuelo Cello (en suya) quichu Wakutal (Ulla, a Lahu Errante) no sólo es shaman espiritual de la tradición moga, sino también el presidente del Consejo de naciones indígenas de América. En esta foto, tomada el 27 de mayo de 2005 en la zona de Bogotá, el abuelo lanza una ofrenda de volutas a una hoguera circular rodeada de flores, en el Ritual del fuego solar (Tahli), una ceremonia de purificación.

Pero quizá más que sus posturas y prácticas artísticas es desde donde se aprecian las semejanzas. Al fin y al cabo la obra de los dos artistas busca la unidad del individuo con una conciencia universal o cósmica, y la palabra yoga proporciona la más adecuada para significar una unión así: *yoga* significa "unión" en sánscrito. "Don de los hombres" es el significado en la poesía de la India, y dice que el yoga es el don de la India, y dice que es una religión. Lo que es que el yoga es una tradición que se ha desarrollado en la India. Pero para nosotros es un concepto más amplio de la conciencia. En cualquier caso, si uno puede sentirse, uno puede sentirse un yogi", afirma María José Linares de la casa de Zenit y Yoga en Bogotá.

Centros que las culturas precolombinas practicaban yoga la ceremonia del 23 de mayo representó un hito dentro de un movimiento que cada día toma más fuerza en Colombia. Puro es un secreto que la búsqueda de la espiritualidad por diferentes caminos está cada vez más extendida en el país, bien sea a través de la práctica del yoga, la tona de yagé, la meditación o el Reiki, bien asistiendo a la conexión internacional que el evento Nirajagurama dictó la semana pasada en Bogotá y Cartagena en un ítem total, o bien recorriendo peregrinajes como la fiesta en honor a la Tierra a través del Andino.



2

Introduction

During my stay in Colombia from 2009 till 2019, I have continued the research which was begun by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati and Swami Amritananda Saraswati who was living at the Satyananda Ashram in Bogotá. Yoga did not only exist in the pre-Columbian cultures but is still alive in some of the existing indigenous cultures, the Mayan culture, the Mhyusca culture and the cultures of the Arhuacos and Koguis in Sierra Nevada. Even Colombians do not know much about their cultural inheritance; it has not been a topic taught in schools or one talked about in society. However, in recent years there has been a revival and appreciation of the pre-Columbian cultures and the existing indigenous cultures and communities rooted in the ancient cultures. There is recognition of the ancient wisdom alive in the indigenous cultures today. This can be seen in the following examples:

- In June 2010, before being officially installed, the former President of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, went to the Mamos, the spiritual guides of the indigenous communities in the Sierra Nevada, the Koguis and Arhuacos, to receive their blessings before attending the official ceremony.
- In September 2017, when Pope Francis visited Bogotá, all the elders, Mamos and Shamans of the different indigenous groups were invited.

- In 2017, during the International Day of Yoga on 21st June, a yoga class was conducted at the Gold Museum, Museo de Oro, in Bogotá, the biggest archaeological museum in Colombia, which presented a special exhibition, showing their collections of sculptures in different yoga postures.
- In 1998, an important meeting took place in Bogotá inviting all the indigenous cultures of Latin America, North America and Canada with the aim of restoring the balance of Mother Earth. In the last few years, similar meetings have taken place in various places in Colombia and South America, where all the different communities have been conducting their rituals and dances together not only to help create peace and harmony in South America but for the whole planet earth.
- In 2018, another presidential election was held and the elder of the North-Dakota Indian community in Canada sent a peace pipe to representatives in Colombia to be presented to the new President to help in the peace process in Colombia and South America.

In 2005, when Swami Niranjanananda came to Colombia for the International Yoga Convention another important event took place:

. . . a long-awaited encounter was taking place between Swami Niranjan, the custodian of the paramahansa tradition bequeathed by Swami Satyananda, and grandfather Cirilo Pérez Oxjal, spiritual leader of the Quiché Mayan tradition and president of the Council of Indigenous Elders of America. Two fire ceremonies were performed which represented not just an encounter between ancient cultures but a historical event for entire humankind. Grandpa Cirilo, who is named Wakatel Utiw (the wandering wolf) in Quiché Mayan, started the celebration with Tohil, a solar fire ritual which is even older than the first Mayan pyramids. Different articles were tossed into the circular



fire surrounded by flowers, as a tribute to Mother Earth for her myriad gifts. Grandpa offered amongst other things biscuits, chocolate, colour candles and incense.

As I consumed these offerings, my mind went back to that feeding frenzy in Khandava Vana many millennia ago which had started off the Mayan connection in the first place. Time seemed to stand still, the stillness suddenly broken by the deafening song that all nearby birds burst into as the offerings were fully consumed. It was an auspicious moment indeed. The ritual also had the aim of purification, for I am the ultimate purifier. I consume everything transforming it into pure ash. Everyone present at the ceremony was welcome to throw any real or symbolic objects into me with the aim of cleansing and purification. And for that reason, the grandpa held several babies and walked with them around me. The turn for the yogic fire ritual came at 6 pm that day. Swami Niranjan with a few fellow sannyasins sat around a havan kund wherein he invoked my presence. After the fire had been lit, Swami Niranjan began chanting ancient mantras and pouring oblations at the end of each mantra. After the chanting of mantras was completed, people approached the fire with flower offerings and received the prasad of the havan.



In the meantime, the full moon was starting to appear over the horizon. At that auspicious moment, Swami Niranjana offered a flower crown to grandpa Cirilo and anointed his forehead as a mark of respect. Grandpa Cirilo, his eyes moist with emotion, whispered, “In our sacred books it had been prophesied that one day the fire from the east would meet the fire of the Mayans, fire secrets would be exchanged and the spirit of two ancient civilizations would be reunited. Today that prophecy has finally come true. And with this the sacred fire ceremony symbolizing the grand reunion came to a fitting finale . . .”

—*The Yogi and the Maya*

The meeting between Swami Niranjana and Don Cirilo, the elder of the Mayans, was a very important and significant meeting re-uniting the ancient spiritual tradition of India with the ancient tradition of South America. According to the Mayan tradition, the Mayans descended on earth four times; in China, in India, as the Naga-Mayas, in Egypt and in South America.

This book presents the archaeological findings which are proof of yoga as an ancient culture in Colombia and the existence of yoga as a lifestyle and culture in some of the indigenous cultures present in Colombia today.

3

History, Cosmology and Symbology



Yajna is not just a fire ceremony. It is designed to establish our connection with the cosmic properties abounding in the universe. Yajna has the potential to expand the mind, to launch the consciousness into unknown dimensions and give us the sublime experience of unity with the source of creation.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

The Columbian cultures existing before the Spanish invasion in the 16th century were the cultures of Tumaco-la-tolita, Tolima, Nariño, Valle de Cauca, Calima, Quimbaya, Tardío, Mhyusca, Urabá, Sinu-Caribe, Tairona, Sierra Nevada.

The archeological findings give the following timeline, however, some anthropologists believe that the culture of San Agustin and Tierra Dentro existed long before the creation of the stone sculptures that can be seen at the archeological sites today.

900 BCE–200 CE: Calima

200 BCE–600 CE: Quimbaya, San Augustin, Tairona, Tierra Dentro, Tumaco-la-tolita

200 BCE–1600 CE: Mhyusca

HISTORY

By the 16th century, at the time of the Spanish arrival, the Chibchas, were divided into two main groups: the Mhyuscas, on the plains of present-day Bogota and the direct descendants of the Tairona culture at the shores of the Caribbean coast in northern Colombia and on the slopes of the coastal mountain range Sierra Nevada.



El Dorado – the golden era

This era from 900 BCE to 1600 CE is called 'El Dorado' or the golden era when the different cultures throughout Colombia started to work with gold. Alongside the technical and magical work, the goldsmiths transformed metals into objects that had cultural and spiritual meaning. The gold objects were not made to be ornaments but were used for different rituals, and gold represented the transformation of human nature and its potential, transcending the lower aspects of human nature to become the golden beings we are intended to be.

Gold was given by Mother Nature and was offered back to her when the process was complete. People did not mine gold but used the gold found in rivers. After having been used in their rituals, the gold objects were offered back to the sacred lakes or sacred sites. There they were being absorbed into the water or the earth and through the rivers the process could start all over again. Gold also symbolized the blood of the earth and its life-force; it was also the divine representation in the material world as gold never decays.

Many of the objects in the form of humans, animals and spirits were imbued with the life-force and were alive in the same way that the murtis in India are infused with prana and become alive through rituals. The purpose and function of these gold figures or figurines was to create a link between humans and the divine. They were buried at sacred sites just as human beings are buried. Not only did their energy continue to fertilize Mother Earth but they continued to create bal-



ance and harmony on earth and between the material and spiritual dimensions. Since the Spanish invasions these sacred sites have been plundered of their objects. This, according to today's mamos and shamans, has greatly disturbed the balance of Mother Earth.

Different objects were also offered as payment, *paga-mentos*, for what we as humans receive from the earth and the elements has to be given back in order to keep the balance. In the indigenous religions gold is sacrificing, offering. In the nexus between gold, the supernatural sphere and power, the goldsmith is related to the magician. The goldsmith, like the shaman, is a transformer because when he works the gold and gives it a significant form, matter passes from profane to sacred state. This is the idea of alchemy.

The transformed metal is used to manage the universe. Through the process, the goldsmith discovers the secrets of the cosmos and can thus control the forces that regulate life. Yolanda Obando explains this in the language of the indigenous: 'The Sun is the source of the MYIA or metal



in Mhyusca, gold is his sweat. Gold was not material wealth but a symbol of knowledge and it foreshadowed the wealth of crops. SUA or the Sun is a symbol of light, of the brilliance of knowledge; it directs the consciousness granted to man; SUA represents the intelligence of the world, its central focus of energy'.

In the Tairona culture in the north of Colombia where the descendents still live in the Sierra Nevada, the Mamos of the Koguis talk about gold as the immortal gold that carries the mysteries of life from Aluna (the Great Mother) into matter. Humans could make this journey by meditating on the gold and dancing with the gold.

COSMOLOGY

Pre-Hispanic goldworking societies developed special ways of understanding the world. With these, they gave order to their surroundings and filled them with symbolic content. These cosmologies answered problems that were central to their existence, such as death, illness and the meaning of life. Imbued with a profound spiritual sense, they converted the universe, society and its creation into sacred realities, while establishing a link between man and his ancestors that was essential to the continuity of the traditions.

Metals, particularly gold, symbolized the fertilizing powers of the sun and expressed the divine origin of the power held by the rulers. It also symbolized the inner transformation of human potential. The spiritual connection was still through the elements of nature but not through the animal spirits. The elements of nature also represented different qualities that humans had to develop in order to transform themselves into spiritual beings.



Pre-Hispanic cosmologies told of the origin, evolution and structure of the universe. They gave all beings a place, a meaning and established an order in their relations. The cosmos was depicted in some societies as consisting of various superimposed yet connected and interdependent levels or worlds, and certain colours, smells, animals, plant and spirits were associated with each level. The universe manifested itself in a visible, material dimension, but also in a spiritual, powerful dimension hidden to most people.

Chieftains, priests and shamans had the responsibility of guarding, transmitting and renewing cosmological representations. Endowed with special sensitivities and skills, they were subjected from childhood to a lengthy learning process about mythology, sacred plants, astronomy and ritual practices. With their words, gestures and objects as tools, they symbolized the transformation of the world in order to guarantee not only the wellbeing of society but also the force of reproduction and regeneration of nature.

Candidates for priesthood were trained by wise men and elderly masters. They spent years in temples or caves, where they never saw the light of day and where they were subjected to diets without salt or chillis and to many other restrictions.



SYMBOLOLOGY

According to ancient tradition, the original concept was of man and woman transformed into two snakes. The snakes returned to the source of their origin. Going back to the condition and circumstances of the very beginning is a common feature of myths and can also be seen in the tantric ideas of kundalini pictured as a snake and returning to the source.



The snake with a head at each end appears to be associated with the sun, as a symbol of its eternal movement between opposite points on the horizon. It was from this movement that life originated.

The metamorphosis that occurred in certain animals, such as insects and batrachians represented the never-ending cycle of life, death and rebirth that all beings are subjected to.



Universal symmetry

Symmetry and balance in the shapes and designs were an expression to find equilibrium in properties and forces of the cosmos. The different objects were also meant to create pathways or portals between the material and spiritual world and were used in ceremonies and meditation. During the ceremonies, the discs were spinning and the geometrical

patterns of the spinning motions created a pathway for consciousness to transcend its limitations and bondage to the material dimension. Some of the gold discs that have been found were like the yantras of India and were seen as the geometrical blueprints of the universe. The gold discs found in Pupari Nariño, buried 20 metres deep, contain part of the memory of the universe, its visualization in movement generates states of consciousness that allow us to understand and remember.

Different symmetrical patterns were achieved by moving a basic shape or group of shapes on a plane. The type of symmetry used most commonly in this region was isometry, which is the repeating of shapes through rigid movements: reflection, rotation and translation. Using a combination of these movements, pre-Hispanic artists created a visual language full of meaning.



They were used as tools to understand the visible world. The elements that move to the left point to the internal and spiritual and towards the right to the conscious or action. The circle represents the return to unity and the departure from manifestation. Geometry was associated with the corresponding four cardinal points, the planets, the seasons, the elements, the colours etc.

The eternal is real, the most sacred. In our changing world, all is an illusion.

—*Mhyusca saying*

Connection between the material and spiritual dimensions



In the department of Cundinamarca outside of the city of Arbelaiz, a 5,000-year-old petroglyph covered with double spirals called synergy was found. The legend says that the shamans used the energy of their fingers to draw spirals on the stone. Facing this stone in the opposite mountain is a doorway which is said to be a portal that the shamans used to transport themselves to other portals.

Even today people living in the area say that they have seen people enter the mountain and never come out again.

Animals

In the shamanic culture the spiritual connection existed through different forces and elements of nature but also through the spirit world. The shamans used different postures to allow consciousness to move their spirit out of the body and into other forms such as birds and jaguars.

The birds were used because the shamans believed that the birds were the closest incarnation to the human incarnation as they could sing and speak. They even thought that once the birds had learnt to speak they had become human. The jaguar represented the force that could move the human consciousness from the lower realm to the higher more subtle realms.





The jaguar was the symbol for the material world and the possibility to transform the material existence into the spiritual transcendental dimension.

Sacred plants

Pre-Hispanic societies handled a vast range of plants, some which had important religious uses. Shamans used sacred plants like tobacco, coca, yagé, yopo and many more to help them immerse themselves in the spiritual dimensions of reality and visit other levels of the cosmos. Consuming these plants, coupled with fasting, sound and light effects and repeated body movements, induced a state of trance that taught the secrets and the powers of the universe and in which the invisible was made visible.

Rituals



An intense communion with the universe and divinities was experienced at collective ceremonies, using fire, dances, costumes and music.

During ceremonies, the hanging plates or ornaments twinkled in the light and gave off metallic sounds which helped transform those



present and enabled them to communicate more easily with the divine.



In the forests of South America I have seen rare sights from the pre-Columbian era. I found that the people of pre-Columbian civilization practised yajna. Archeological excavations throughout the world investigating the Stone age, Bronze age and various ages has given us evidence that they performed a ceremony in which natural herbs were offered into the fire with the chanting of mantras and dance rituals.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

4

Yogasanas and Mudras

In pre-Hispanic cultures there are many archeological sites that show shamans using different yogic postures in their spiritual practices with the purpose of elevating consciousness and connecting the individual consciousness with the universal consciousness.

The sculptures in the following pages are from the collection at the Gold Museum (Museo De Oro) in Bogotá, and the Gold Museum in Pasto, Nariño, Colombia, from the book *Tumaco-la Tolita* and private collections. It is a collection from the various pre-Columbian cultures in Colombia: San Agustin, Tierra Dentro, Quimbaya, Nariño, Calima, Mhyusca-Guane, Tardio, Tairona, Tumaco-la-tolita, Valle de Cauca, Sinu-Caribe and Urabá.

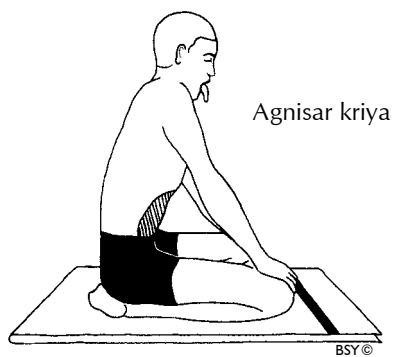
The pictures show yoga postures and mudras with the equivalent postures from *Asana Pranayama Mudra and Bandha* and will speak for themselves. There are however a few postures which require more of an explanation. The posture shown here is from the Mhyusca culture. They called this posture the basket posture as the body was in the position of a basket. The purpose of the posture was to make the body into a container, a basket, to receive and hold the higher forces, and become the recipient of divine forces.



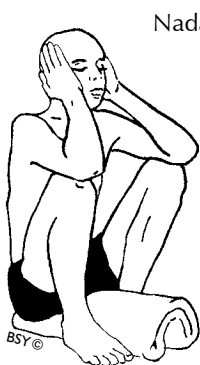
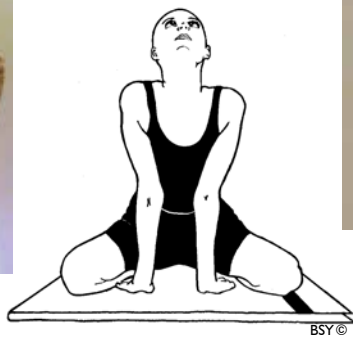


In some of the cultures, the shamans meditated with the purpose of separating the thinker from the thinking process and the thoughts, as in the yogic practice of *antar mouna*. The posture is resembling *veerasana*, the hero's pose, in which the instruction is given – 'become aware of the state of thoughtlessness'. The shamans sat on small meditation stools with the purpose of putting their thoughts into the stools and thereby empty the mind of thoughts and experience the state of complete emptiness, void or *shoonya*. When the shamans died, they had to be buried with their stools as the content of their minds were in the stools. The figures are from the culture of Tumaco-la Tolita, and the stool is from Nariño.



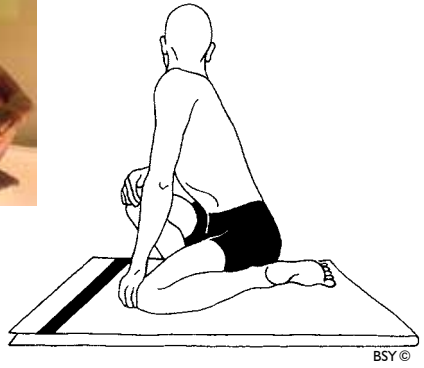


Simhasana

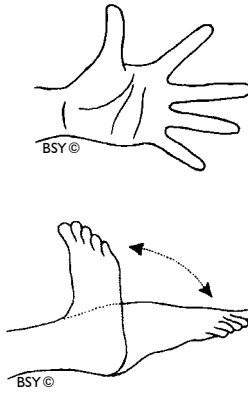


Nadasandhana

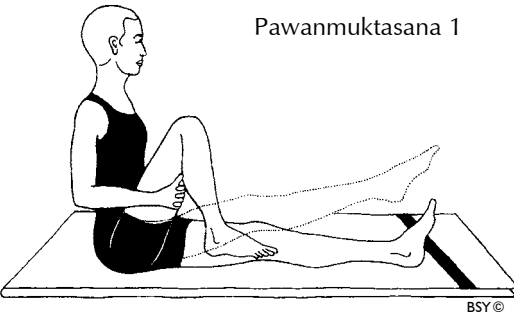


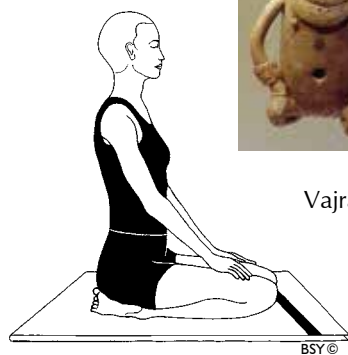


Pawanmuktasana 2

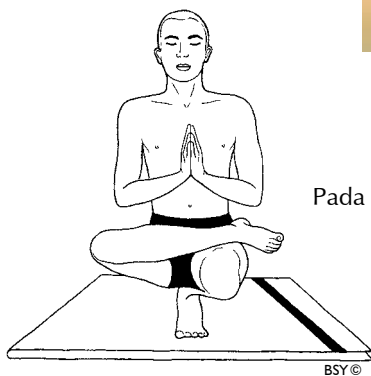


Pawanmuktasana 1





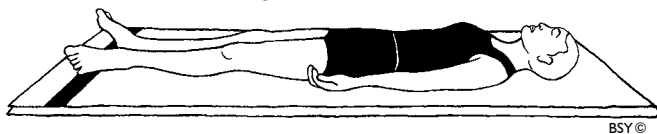
Vajrasana



Pada angushthasana



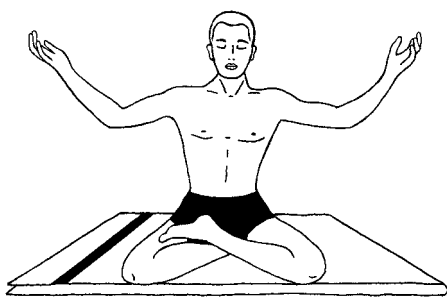
Shavasana





Meditation asana

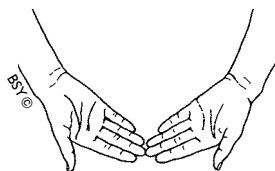




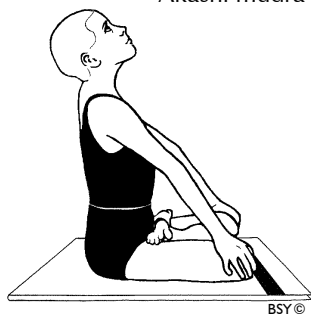
Prana mudra



Hand mudras



Akashi mudra



5

San Agustin

Tantra is a process of sadhana which enables expansion of limited consciousness and freeing conditioned energy. The most ancient science and culture which deals with the transition of human nature from the present level of evolution and understanding to a transcendental level of knowledge, experience and awareness.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Little is known about the communities who built the mythical monuments in San Agustin. What is known is that the oldest remains of the culture stem from 3300 BCE. Around 700 BCE this culture had developed to such an extent that it was able to construct the statues that are its most remarkable remains. Other findings from that time have indicated that this culture was able to uphold high standards of agriculture, ceramics and goldsmithry.





It remains unknown, however, who these people were, where they came from, what the exact purpose of the gigantic sculptures was, and to what extent the culture was connected to other known cultures that lived in the area at the time. Efraín Sánchez quotes: ‘According to the description published by the UNESCO, the archeological treasure of San Agustín represents ‘the largest group of religious monuments and megalithic structures in South America, located in an unspoiled and spectacular landscape.’ And it adds, “These works of art reveal the creativity and imagination of a culture in the Northern Andes which flourished from the 1st to the 8th centuries.’ In the stone inscriptions; in the tall monoliths; in the eyes that gaze at us from unsuspected depths, in the stone carvings of monkeys, frogs, jaguars, birds; in the secret symbolism of rites and ceremonies, cosmologies, and legends, we may never completely understand, lives the souls of Colombia in its most ancient, secret and occult identity’.

Some archeologists believe that the site was a burial site

used by many different cultures. What can be seen in the sculptures are postures, mudras, yantras showing the kundalini triangle, the pathways of sushumna with the three nadis of chitra nadi, vajra nadi and brahma nadi rising from mooladhara depicted as the inverted triangle to sahasrara shown as a rainbow.



Although for the archeologists its symbology holds deep secrets and mysteries, from the yogic and tantric understanding these sculptures may depict spiritual transformations of the human being, the atman and prana leaving the material form at the time of death and entering the spiritual realms.

Many sculptures show another head or body at the heart or at vishuddhi chakra with the tongue protruding out or on the top of the head, which might depict the atman leaving the physical body either through anahata chakra or through vishuddhi or sahasrara chakra. It may though not only refer to the time of death, but may also show how the awareness is being drawn through the pranic pathways from the physical awareness into pranic and psychic awareness and placed in the different akashas and chakras of the psychic body. Sometimes the little body is hanging upside down which might indicate that the prana is leaving through the lower chakras.



Most of the sculptures have faces of the jaguar, symbol of transformation,



or the bird and snake which might symbolize the rise of kundalini, the human spirit being transformed and taking flight, as the phoenix. The bodies are also in the form of a cross with the hands in front of anahata, maybe a symbol for the consciousness and energy united at anahata chakra.

There is also a crocodile with chakras on top of the body and on the sides and a triangle at the head. This corresponds to the knowledge of tantra which states that in the animal realm there are chakras below mooladhara.



This art is full of symbolism – eagles, monkeys, snakes, salamanders, women giving birth and men worshipping the sun. People obviously had a very clear knowledge of yogasanas, pranayama and neti. The monoliths represent human figures performing asanas such as sirshasana, siddhasana, padmasana, dhanurasana, as well as figures clearly performing kumbhaka. Most mysterious of all are tombs situated on top of hills, protected by guardian deities. Representations of the changing planes of existence are everywhere visible. One of the more important statues shows the universal nature of tantric symbolism with its

inverted triangle of mooladhara chakra, out of which arise the three main nadis – ida, pingala, and sushumna. The enigmatic aborigines who left behind these strange and incredible samples of their culture have taken their secrets with them beyond the vale, but they appear to have travelled all around the South American continent practising yoga.

In a way reminiscent of Hindu tradition, the San Agustínians located their civilizations near to where the Andes branch into 3 new cordilleras and where the 3 most important rivers (Magdalena, Cauca, and Patia) begin. San Agustín is flanked by the Magdalena river which runs all the way to the Northwest Caribbean Sea of Colombia and could be compared with the Ganga in India. The latter two could be compared with the Yamuna and Saraswati. Legend claims that the place where these rivers begin and the Andes divide is a sacred place where the forces of life gather to be dispersed to the four cardinal points.

—*Editorial YOGA magazine 1980*

Sculptures included in this chapter are from the site itself, from the Gold Museum in Bogotá, from private collections and from the book *The World of Art in San Agustín*, Efraín Sánchez.





6

The Present-day Mhyusca Culture

To harmonize the energy field of the body with the state of consciousness, mantras are set to music. When mantras are combined with music, they become very powerful tools for awakening the entire personality. Mantra is a force which frees the mind from its normal states of identification and patterns of behaviour and which, when perfected, allows for greater creativity and receptivity.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

HISTORY

According to *Culturas indígenas colombianas* (Indigenous Cultures of Colombia) by Rafael Martín and José Puentes, the Mhyuscas at the time of the Spanish invasion had developed beyond being a primitive civilization, and were ruled by chieftains or Zipas, like the Mayans and Aztecs of Mexico, the Incas of Peru and the Aymaras in Bolivia. The chieftains had the role of being both spiritual and social rulers of the community.

The Mhyuscas had the most advanced pre-Columbian civilization, according to scholar Miguel Triana. Today Chibcha ways survive in the central departments (provinces) of Cundinamarca, of which Bogotá is the capital, and Boyacá, where they have flourished since at least the 7th century BCE.

The Mhyusca or the Chibcha culture existed on the plains around Bogotá. The Mhyusca were highly evolved and lived a life based on the principles of peace and harmony and as such they had no defence system. When the Spanish conquerors invaded Colombia, the Mhyusca thought they were gods descended from heaven. The Mhyusca culture therefore became almost extinct, the people were either killed or enslaved. In order to save the culture, it became the responsibility of two Mamos or spiritual guides in Sierra Nevada, the land of the Koguis and Arhuacos, to preserve the Mhyusca culture.

The Mhyuscas and the cultures of Sierra Nevada had a close connection as they were all related and part of the Chibcha culture. The Koguis and Arhuacos were able to save their culture as they fled high up into the mountains where the Spanish invaders were not able to follow. For over 500 years the Mamos have preserved the traditions of the Mhyuscas, their language, their stories, symbology, rituals and practices. The symbology, rituals and cosmology have been presented in Chapter 3.

Fifteen years ago Mamo Aluka of the Sierra Nevada had a vision that the time had come to restore the culture of the Mhyusca and he started to hand down the knowledge of the Chibcha language, the myths, the symbology and the culture to the Mhyusca elders. Over the last few years there has been a revival of the Mhyusca communities around Bogotá, and in 2016 the community settled close to their sacred lake Guatavita, received independence from the Colombian Government and established their own Mhyusca council. After 450 years the Mhyusca Federation that existed at the time of the Spanish invasion is again being established.

Yolanda Obando states: 'Mamo Aluka, from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia, spiritual authority, who in the late 1990s at age ninety, decided to move to Bogotá, along with Mamo Roberto Nakogi and their families, guided by a dream in which he was given the mandate, on the part of his ancestors, to return to Bacatá to strengthen the sacred

places that exist as the cradle and origin of the culture of their peoples. The focus of his message was to prepare ‘the New Dawn’ that would come with the new cycle that had just begun’.

The purpose of reviving the Mhyusca culture is not merely to re-establish the Mhyusca communities, but the Mhyusca elders say today that society and the world need to receive the knowledge and ancient wisdom of their culture. In the book *Cátedra de la memoria Mhuysqa* it is stated: The contemporary man born on our soil, with Indian heritage and white heritage, should return to the native seed matrix and remember the true purpose of the human being, in order to create a culture of sweet emotions, to live well, without suffering, without conflict, or sadness, learn to be good with the other, to heal mind and emotions. It is a message of Rehumanization to be true people again, return to true life, order the mind, order the emotions and learn to be brothers – “Weaving with love, with strings taken from the heart and thought, this way it is reconstructed, thus the future is woven . . .” We need to contribute to the restoration of ancient cultures, the tradition of the elders, the path of humanization, so that the native seed of the ancestral word is sown in the hearts of men.

Origin of Mhyusca

Mu is a legendary lost continent which existed 12,000 years ago. According to tradition, the Mhyusca are said to have originated from Mu, the first man born on the planet, and from the essence of life, HISKA, and therefore were called Mhyusca.

From then on and henceforth, those people called Mhyusca would take care of the universal water of life, the one that gives life to life. They would be the caretakers of the lagoons and from then on everything would emerge in the lagoons; life would emerge there. There it was keeping the spirit of the mother’s heart.

‘The chair’ of the Mhyusca, the defence of the territory is not only of the indigenous, it belongs to everyone. In addition to being sacred territory, is the storage of water and water, we all need it. The páramos are biotypes that only exist in Colombia above 3,300 m and the plants here draw water from the air into the soil and are a very important freshwater source in Colombia.

—*Abuelo Nemequene, Abuelo Comunidad Mhuysqa Soacha*

The Mhyusca culture was the repository of the MU man’s tradition, the first-born of the planet, she came from the primitive source of humanity. The tradition speaks of the Sasbekia, the first instructors, and MU as a cradle, synonym of uterus, generatrix, Mother. The MU man is the link, the connector between the terrestrial plane and the celestial plane. Yolanda Obando describes the tradition: ‘In the indigenous world, men use objects and natural beings to represent ideas and immaterial things. In trying to interpret indigenous thinking we must take into account its symbolism and its cultural function. The symbol is a visible object that allows knowledge to rediscover and discover a different reality superior to the object itself. The new understanding embraces the changing material reality and the unchanging, immaterial, transcendental, eternal, perfect reality. Therefore, the mind is the container which has the ability to travel from one reality to the other. The quality of perception of those human beings who are prepared to acquire greater knowledge by using their internal senses is instantaneous; it sees, feels and lives the universal spiritual essence of nature in a holistic and implicit way. For this to happen, it is necessary that the mind functions as a container that synthesizes and discovers unifying principles instead of being divisive, analytical and critical, because it is this universal aspect of the mind combined with our intuitive heart, which helps to reveal the deepest meanings of life’.

Language and mantra

As in the vedic and tantric traditions, Mhyusca priests or Mamos use mantras in their ceremonies and believe that the incantations or prayers are based on the universal principle of vibration, according to which the universe is built, modified and preserved. The mantras and the ceremonies are also being powered with love and willpower. The sounds are believed to generate vibrations that model astral matter in certain ways which creates thought forms. These thought forms are directed by the Mamos.

As in the science of mantra yoga, the Mhyuscas refer to four different types of sounds: audible, whispering, mental and transcendental sound, *vaikhari*, *upanshu*, *manasic* and *para*. Yolanda Obando describes the word and its use: 'The word is the link between man and his origin: we exist through the Word, we create through the Word – the unpronounceable Word. Our indigenous languages have four resonators, that is, they are pronounced in four dimensions. There is a language and a way to pronounce it for everyday things and another for communication with the sacred. The chants of the Mamos Kogui are almost inaudible, it is an interior sound that is not transmitted through the air but by ether or emptiness. The sound HI or the aspirated sound in Mhyusca is used as a vehicle of the breath. Among the M, when the same words are spoken with aspiration, they refer to the sacred, hidden sound in each ideogram and its double meaning is discovered. The Mhyusca permanently used apocope and apheresis which suppress letters at the end or beginning of the words to speed up communications, for example ZIPA (chieftain) comes from CHIPABA, pronounced zhipaba, where Paba is Father and Chi the essence'.

In the Mhyusca tradition there are also mantras of the different elements. Following are examples of mantras from the book by Mariana Escribano.

ATA-TSIA-SIA-BIOS – water mantra

O – the water of life

OA – the great spirit
TCHYMINIGAGU – the creator
TCHY-GAT – fire mantra
GA-QA-MIQA-HYSTCH – earth mantra
HYE-HY-FIBA-FA-FO-FI-F – air mantra
AQ AMEN MAGÜ – at the end of all mantra invocations

Guatavita – the sacred lake

The Mhyusca were gold workers and used gold to make ornaments and objects as offerings in their ceremonies. Even the ornaments that the chieftains and priests were wearing were offered into the lakes during the ceremonies. The chieftains covered their whole bodies in gold flakes. Gold represented the transformation of human beings, the process of purification so that the inner gold could shine, 'El Dorado'.

The Spanish invaders thought that 'El Dorado' was the lake Guatavita and that all the gold was at the bottom of the lake. There are many legends and stories of how people tried to find El Dorado and the hidden treasures of gold. The Spanish conquerors who reached the plains of the present capital of Bogotá heard about the sacred lake of Guatavita just outside the city and the gold that supposedly was hidden at the bottom of the lake. They tried to empty the lake of its water by using dynamite which created a huge scar in one of the mountainsides. However, they were never able to empty the lake as they could not find its bottom. Of course, they never found any gold, because El Dorado in the Mhyusca mythology and symbology was never about the external gold. El Dorado was to be found within, for it is the divinity within each one of us, the eternal spirit, as indestructible as gold.

According to present-day indigenous groups, gold is also the fertilizing energy of the Sun, the Father, while lakes are the womb of the Earth Mother; when the gilded chieftain throws gold and offerings into the waters from the raft, he was making a pact with nature for life to be renewed.



The lake of the Guatavita is the most sacred lake in the Mhyusca culture. It is situated at 3,300m. The mountains surrounding the lake represented consciousness and the lake itself manifested creation or energy. The ritual was a union between these two forces which took place externally as well as internally.

THE LEGEND OF GUATAVITA

told by the Mhyusca elders

The grandparents told us that many moons ago the Goddess Guatavita, a woman with great wisdom, wanted to transmit to the Mhyusca people her profound knowledge. A night illuminated by the full moon and stars, she came to these lands in the form of a great emerald, and here in the mountains she stayed to live. A long time passed until the mountains decided to open up and show her to the Sun God in the form of a beautiful lagoon dressed in emerald green. From that day on, the Sun decided to end his journey around the world in this place and from here start his journey to where he returns again every year on a special day.

From the union between the emerald lagoon and the powerful hills, love grew and soon bore its fruit in the form of a girl named Guaginasie, water of the mountain, daughter of Guatavita. A few years later, Guaginasie was a beautiful woman with coppery skin and long black hair who went to the edge of the lagoon to talk with the stones, the grandmothers of the mountains, and to learn from the paths of the Sun.

One day the Cacique de Guatavita arrived at the lagoon, a powerful Mhyusca priest who came to do his rituals there and to learn about the immense wisdom of Mother Earth from the lagoon. When the Cacique arrived, he saw Guaginasie on the shore and immediately they fell in love. He came to her to know where she came from. After visiting her for many moons, he invited her to be his wife and live with his people in the Valley of the Tomine River, which today is a sacred river in Colombia, like Ganga in India.

She knew that she would not be able to leave the vicinity of the lagoon and needed permission from her mother. The Mother accepted on the condition that Guaginasie would return when she herself had a daughter and would have completed thirty-seven moons. Guaginasie went to live with

the Cacique de Guatavita in his village where she taught the Mhyuscas what she had learnt from her father the mountain, from her mother Guatavita, from the grandmother stones and from the Sun who showed her his way every day. Guaginasie was very good with her people and she helped them a lot.

Her fame of being full of love and kindness spread throughout the territory. From all places, people came to ask for her favours. After thirty-seven moons, as her mother had asked, she bore a daughter and named her Chutamasie, daughter of water, which marked her return to the lagoon. Cacique Guatavita with all his people, accompanied Guaginasie to the bottom of the lagoon along with her daughter Chutamasie, and left them living with her mother Guatavita and the snake named Zetamosie who was in charge of taking care of them.

Since then and until today, the Mhyusca people remember the need to go to the lagoon to do their ceremonies and rituals in search of the ancestral wisdom of Guatavita and to ask Guaginasie for help when required. In order to always remember these three women, Guatavita, Guaginasie and Chutamasie, the Mhyusca decided one day to leave the lagoon and leave their story on the well-known hill of 'Las Tres Viejas', the Three Old Women.

Zetamasie, the water snake, who never abandoned the women, left her daughters, the small snakes, who we know today as guardians of water and all sacred territory.

In spite of having been torn apart by the Spanish conquerors who dynamited one side of the mountain and drained part of the lagoon to look for hidden gold, the way of return has remained intact due to the presence of an immense treasure in these three women and the water snake at the bottom of the lagoon, where they continue to live with their wisdom, awaiting the rebirth of the Mhyusca people.

*-Told by Senior Warden (Sabedor Mayor) Carlos Mamanche,
published in Messages of Mother Earth*

Guatavita today

For many years the lake of Guatavita has been used as a picnic place with swimming, bathing and polluting it with rubbish. Eight years ago, the son of the elder of the Mhyusca community at Guatavita had a dream or a vision. He had been away from his community for most of his life, in the military, working as a security man, living a quite rough life. In this dream the spirit of Guatavita told him that it was time for him to come home and become her guardian. So he went back and started to clean the lake and the surroundings. He started to do ‘pagamentos’ or payments or pooja, offering crystals, flowers, burning incense and tobacco to different chants and mantras according to the ancient Mhyusca traditions.

Now eighth years later, one can look down into the water and see that the lake itself started to fill up the cut made by the Spanish dynamite. It takes the shape of a stone bridge which is not man-made. As the size of the cut diminishes the water level of the lake will slowly rise again.

The lake of Guatavita is also a portal in Colombia, with an alignment between the material and the spiritual dimensions and a doorway opens between the two. Physically it is felt; the temperature changes, the light changes, it is felt in form of a quietness within and without. There is complete stillness and balance, as if one were in a transparent bubble.

Before one is allowed to enter the lake Guatavita, one has to circumambulate the Tyhyky, the Colombian variety of *Datura*, Shiva’s tree, who protects the lake. In the Mhyusca tradition, as in the Indian tradition, this tree is the plant of consciousness or spirit.

The teaching and lifestyle

What greater undertaking lies before you than purifying your life of all enmity, impurity, hatred, lust, and filling it with love, goodness, peace and purity?

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

The teaching and lifestyle of the Mhyusca is to live in harmony within oneself, with each other in the community, in society and with Mother Earth and Father Sun. The elements: earth, water, fire and air, as well as the mountains, stones, plants and animals have different qualities which humans have to understand and learn from. People have to connect to the elements and their qualities to live in harmony and undergo a positive, spiritual transformation of human nature, overcome the lower tendencies and develop positive qualities.

We talk of the five elements or *tattwas*: earth, water, fire, air and ether, but beyond this there is the sixth tattwa which is the spirit or *atma tattwa*. This element, the spirit, is inherent in all the five tattwas.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

The following quotes are from the Mhyusca Town Council instructing us to learn how the different crystals and stones teach us to develop our head, heart and hands and transform ourselves into positive, creative beings.

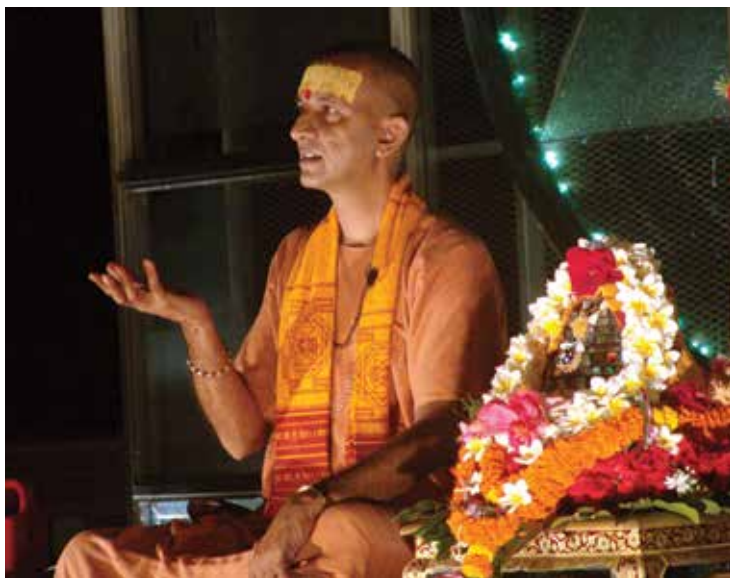
Head, heart and hands

Quartz is medicine, and so should our hearts be. When our heart is at peace, without passing judgment or anything negative, then there is no evil that can harm us, since we are our own medicine.

Emerald is a stone that repays Nature. If our mind is well balanced, like the mountains where every one of life's shapes is sacred and respected for what they are, our thoughts will be like an emerald.

Gold is the sun's beads of perspiration. Our body ought to reflect the good within us, and that will make us shine like gold.

Since our actions will have a heart like quartz, and our thoughts will be like an emerald, we will be the El Dorado, the place of gold, or the golden place of knowledge.



A human being is a composition of the qualities of head, heart and hands. These are the three factors of existence. Yoga begins when you begin to work with your head, heart and hands. The final outcome of developing the faculties of head, heart and hands can be defined as appropriateness, doing the right thing at the right time. Doing the right thing at the right time always uplifts and takes you to a different level of understanding of yourself and your efforts. Appropriate behaviour is related to the heart, appropriate thinking is related to the head and appropriate action is related to the hands.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Creative principle

Life has its origin in thoughts – over and above everything is love. For that reason, we too must be careful of our thoughts. If we think lovingly, we will be creators of a realistic dream that can be integrated into the creative force that rules this world.

Do you really have control over your thoughts?

THE ELEMENTS

The spirit of nature constitutes the channels through which the divine energies operate. These are forces that are expressed through the elements of water, fire, earth, air and ether. In the Mhyusca gnosis, they are governed by different divinities. Their mission is to carry out the activities of each element, according to the living expression of the law. The drawings of the elements in this section are from the Mhyusca Town Council in Guatavita.

Fire



It is the power of love that transforms life by kindling a light in the heart of every individual. This light removes darkness and fear from our heart. By controlling the fire of our passions, we experience peace within which will illuminate the path for us and for those who will one day walk the same path.

With your fire, do you burn or give warmth?

The first mantra of the *Rig Veda* speaks of *agni*, fire, as the *purohit*, as the medium to connect you with the divine. Fire represents a breakthrough, a quantum leap of human consciousness. When primitive man discovered fire, the mind took a big jump. From an unprotected environment, suddenly there was protection, there was food, there was light, there was warmth.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Wind

Breath of life. Everything comes and goes. So the thought that one projects should be full of love, to receive the song and the warmth of the Mother. The messenger of our heart, like the humming bird, gives the flame of life to every flower that he finds in his fleeting flight.

What is the seed of life that you share with other people on your path?



Water

The flow of life which dances in the universe, which is present in each of its manifestations. On his path it purifies the soul and gives fertility to our earth. It accompanies with its song the thought that arises from the heart. Nothing is static, everything is in constant movement, changes, but its essence is still the same.

Do you let things flow or do you expect everything to remain in its place?



Earth

The earth is like the body of a fertile woman, always willing to receive the seed. The earth gives its energy to the seed so it can grow in its search towards sunlight. The earth is the Mother, the giver of food, advice, knowledge and wisdom of the soul. It is the body which expresses our dreams and through which our dreams come true.

How are you with your Mother? With your body?



Profanation

The disorderly: When we violate our life with rage, quarrels, jealousies, we bring disease to our bodies by cutting our creative energy, making impossible our mission as promoters of life, breaking an order, many times offending with our attitude the people who appreciate us.

Guayacán

Distractors are at every step of the way. Confusion appears when pride separates us from the Spirit. The guayacán tropical hardwood tree holds up the world, in the same way when our thought is centred we will find the way of the heart.

On the path you are walking, do you follow the way of the heart?



THE DIFFERENT COMPONENTS OF A YAJNA

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



The first aspect of a yajna is mantra. Mantra is one component that is used for invocation; it is used to create an environment, a power and a field of energy.

The second aspect is yantra or the geometrical figures by which the higher powers are invoked. In each yantra, a mantra and its deity is invoked. These yantras become sentient yantras. They come alive with the invocation of the devata and the mantra.

The third aspect of a yajna is the havan, the fire oblation. Fire, in the vedic tradition of yajna, is the vehicle by which one's intentions reach God. Fire becomes the medium to send an email message from this point to God's mind. Whatever is offered – the mantras, the chanting, the intention, the sankalpa – goes up with the flames to God.

The fourth aspect of yajna is *daan*, giving. Yajna or ya-jana, means production, distribution and consumption. The aspect of giving in yajna is not charity. It is the prasada. The prasada of a yajna brings wellness in everyone's life. That is the art of giving. You are giving and receiving a gift that will open your inner eyes to make you aware of another level of living and existence, where you can be more complete, whole, harmonious, and a little bit more happy than you are today.

Pagamento – payment, offering or yajna

Pagamento is a ritual expressing one's gratitude for what one has received from Mother Earth. We also ask for forgiveness if we have caused any imbalance by taking away from the earth.

It is also a ritual asking permission before any action is taken or performed. Along with the external ritual we are asked to evaluate how our actions and thoughts have been. Have they brought harmony or imbalance?

Different symbols and questions are being used, intended to help us reflect, become recharged and reborn, like a new seed which contains the best to be shared with others. The book *Cátedra de la memoria Mhuysqa*, gives the following explanation of pagamantos: 'Offering and retribution to the forces that make life possible in Mhyusca is ATATÁ. Invisible forces are responsible for sustaining fertility and ensuring the growth of plants. Man has lived on the sacrifice of other beings, has been nourished and reaped the fruits produced by these supernatural forces. With offerings to the intelligences directing nature, man has to repay for the energy which has been spent. This maintains the cyclical movement of production. Man learns of his constant debt towards nature.'

The feeling of obligation and responsibility is implanted in the human soul. From within man receives the thought that he has a duty towards nature. For the wellbeing of man, the fulfilment of sacrifice is necessary. Sacrifice of material goods is offered with the dead body as a sign of obedience and veneration towards ancestors, parents and the elderly. There is a feeling of duty and an understanding of the interdependency of lives.

ATATÁ among the Mhyusca is the principle of reciprocity between man and nature: GIVE and RECEIVE, feed the Earth that gives you sustenance, act from the mind-thought, empowering and nourishing the Earth and Nature, making agreements with the forces and powers that make life possible so that in the visible world things happen in balance and harmony.'

The principle of pagamento or atata is the same principle as that of yajna or sacrifice.



Nowadays we know about the environment, about the greenhouse effect, global warming and so on. Yajna is the remedy for these imbalances. All lovers of the environment, who believe that the atmosphere should be purified, that carbon monoxide must be reduced, should practise yajna, not only on a mass scale but also on an individual scale.

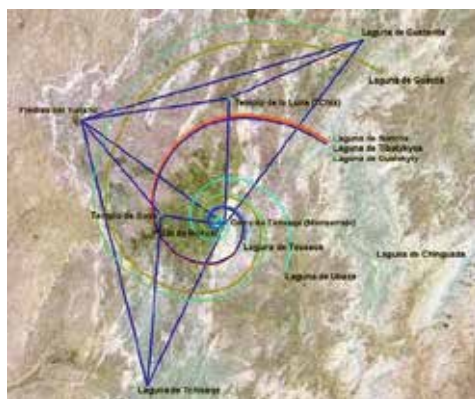
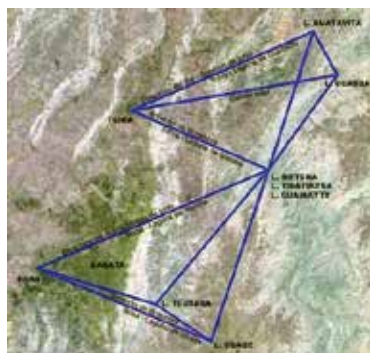
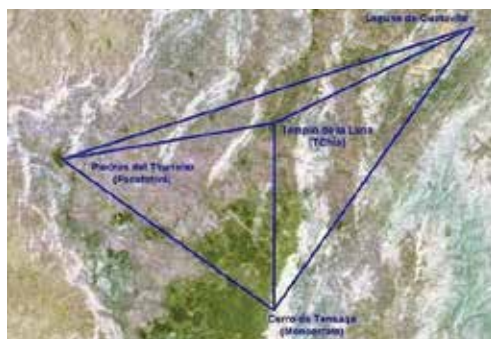
—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

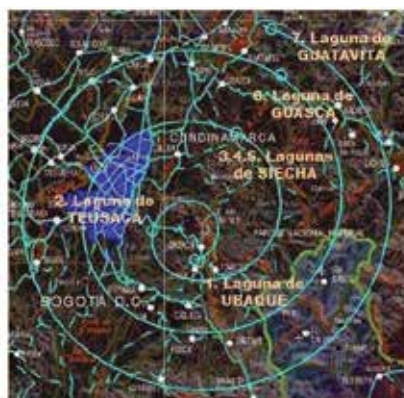
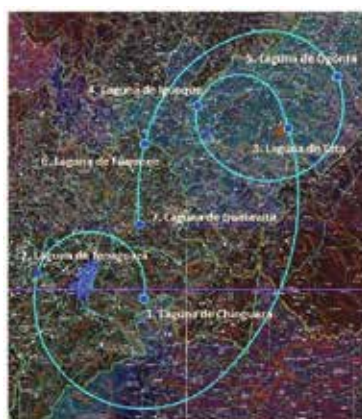
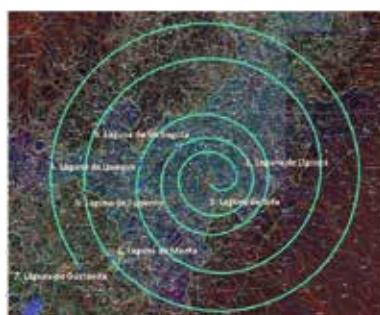
Energy centres and pathways

The Mhyuscas see Mother Earth as a body like our own and the humans have the responsibility to keep her healthy and protect her in the same way as we are keeping our human body healthy. The sacred places are situated along specific energetic pathways like the nadis in our body and they are energy centres like the chakras. The pagamentos maintain and restore the energy and remove energy blockages to uphold order, balance and harmony on earth and to keep the Mother Earth healthy.

The various sites where pagamentos are performed are connected by pathways and lines which when seen from above create perfect geometrical figures.

**Lines drawn on top of Google Earth maps (2014)
connecting the sacred sites**





History of Bogotá, Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, Villegas Editores, Bogotá

7

The Cultures of Sierra Nevada

He is not born nor does He ever die; after having been,
He again ceases not to be. Unborn, eternal, changeless
and ancient, He is not killed when the body is killed.

—*Bhagavad Gita*, 2:20

The same idea of the indestructible nature of the soul is also expressed in the understanding of life of Kogui.

The person never goes, the body yes but not the soul, it is always with us, because that is the spiritual world.

—*Mamo Kogui Roberto Nakogui*

The Andes are like the spinal column along the west coast of South America. Reaching Colombia, the Andes divide into three mountain ranges stretching from the south to the north of Colombia. At the northern tip, at the Caribbean coast is a pyramid-shaped mountain range separated from the three mountain ranges, the Sierra Nevada. It stands alone and is the highest coastal mountain range in the world with its highest peaks of 5,500 metres.

When Sri Swami Satyananda was in Colombia in the early 1970s, he spoke about his understanding of the Andes. He called the Andes the spine or spinal column. The three mountain ranges in Colombia represent ida, pingala and sushumna which unite in the Sierra Nevada, or ajna chakra,

with sahasrara being the peak of this pyramid-shaped mountain range. On its slopes live four separate but related tribes: the Arhuaco or Ika, the Wiwa, the Kogui, and the Kankuamo. Together they number more than 30,000 people.

Rising from the shores of the Caribbean, the lower plains are clad in tropical forest, turning to open savannah and clouded forests higher up. The Sierra Nevada has the shape of a heart and the Koguis and Arhuacos call Sierra Nevada 'the heart of the world'. It is considered by them to be not only the heart of the world but the centre of the universe. Sierra Nevada is the origin, the beginning of the world, the point from where the rest of the world grows in circles.



According to their beliefs, the Koguis and Arhuacos are the guardians of the Sierra Nevada and of the planet Earth. The purpose of their existence is to maintain balance on the planet by keeping balance on Sierra Nevada, the representation of the whole planet. Everything in their life exists for that purpose alone, their lifestyle, their actions, their thoughts. They are born to keep balance on the earth,

nothing else. They call themselves the 'elder brothers' and the people outside of the Sierra are the 'younger brothers'. They have the responsibility to look after the younger brothers, teach them what is right and what is wrong, and how to live.

When there are hurricanes, droughts or famines around the world it is said that they are caused by humans failing to keep the world in harmony. Through deep meditation, ritual offerings, songs and prayers carried out along a network of interconnected sacred sites, the Mamos or Kogui priests follow the law of caring for the Sierra Nevada – thus maintaining the equilibrium of life for their sacred mountains and the entire world. The Kogui are concerned that non-indigenous people, the 'younger brothers', are plundering and dismembering the earth. They see evidence in the prolonged droughts and disappearing glaciers in their own mountains. José de Los Santos Sauna, Kogui Cabildo governor, cautions, "If the sacred sites in the heart of the world are not protected, calamity will befall the entire world. The younger brother is not heeding our warnings."

The Kogui, Wiwa, Arhuaco, and Kankuamo of the Sierra Nevada are working in both the physical and spiritual realms to protect and defend the sacred heart of the world. They are nurturing the life-force of nature, which in turn keeps the world alive in a continuous cycle of reciprocity.

Recently the Kogui and Arhuaco councils have stopped people from entering their territory and nobody is allowed to climb the mountains to avoid any kind of disturbance. For them the mountains represent consciousness or the Father and the water that flows down the mountains is the flow that connects the consciousness with the energy, the Mother Earth. They say, "We have to connect to consciousness, the Father and listen to Mother Earth to keep balance."

The Koguis and the Arhuacos live in small villages which are spread out over the mountain range. They are dressed in white, the colour of the snow-capped mountains, and the men wear white hats resembling the shape of the mountains.



In his documentary, *Aluna*, Alan Ereira describes the life of the Kogui and Arhuacas: 'Here there are still towns without the wheel, farmers without the plough, educators without the written word, priests who have the power of government. They don't wear shoes as that will break the contact with the earth'. (Traditionally, they don't wear shoes, however, today in contact with modern society they have started to wear shoes when travelling.)

HISTORY

Their existence and culture originates from the Mhyuscas culture and from MU, the first man. At the time of the Spanish invasion they belonged to the Tairona culture at the northern coast of Colombia, the present city of Santa Marta. It is believed that around 300,000 people lived on the slopes of Sierra at that time where today only 30,000 indigenous people remain. Many lived in a city in the jungle, more ancient, bigger and more advanced than Machu Picchu of the Inca Empire in Peru. They had to flee their city to hide higher up in the mountains where the invaders could not follow. Many were killed or enslaved, but some were able to

hide and they have been hiding from modern society until recently.

The Kogui were one of only a handful of tribes in Colombia that defied the Spanish conquistadores by moving high up into the mountains to their traditional spiritual centres. During the 500 years since colonization, however, the Kogui and other peoples of the Sierra Nevada have lost most of their ancestral lands. Today they are working to restore the original land of the Koguis.

At one point of time, Catholic missionaries tried to establish themselves in the communities but were not able to influence or change the lifestyle or beliefs. The Kogui allowed the missionaries to come, but there has never been a single Christian convert. They decided what to accept and not, they accepted certain tools, machetes, spades, but they refused to change their clothing. They refused to accept the written word and anything that would damage the organization and the spiritual and intellectual ideas that control their world. As such the Koguis and the Arhuacos have been able to preserve their culture, their belief systems and lifestyle.

Ciudad Perdida – the lost city

In 1973, a lone vaquero, a gold digger looking for hidden valuable religious objects, hacked a path into the dense rain forest, in an area called the inferno or hell, as it was almost impossible to penetrate. There was a rumour that once somewhere was a great city, rich in gold. He found it. The vaquero found the ceremonial, monumental city of the Tairona culture. Today it is known as the 'lost city'. The Tairona culture called the city, Teyuna. On the side of the ridge there are huge terraces covering more than 2,000 acres. The wooden thatched houses are gone, but their stone foundations and stone paths are still there. The city is believed to be more than 1,000 years old.

It was only fifteen miles from the city of Santa Marta on the coast. There were good reasons why it had disappeared,



as the citizens were forced to leave their city in order to save themselves and their culture. For three years the city was plundered of its treasures, gold, precious stones, ceramics and sculptures. Eventually the government put an end to the illegal plundering and archaeologists were led into the jungle and began to recognize that the civilization that had built the lost city had been very advanced.

Visiting the site, Alan Ereira describes the ingenuity of the ancient city builders: 'The city showed that it was possible to have a good density of population in a beautiful environment without destroying it. There are also certain techniques of the Tairona. They were adapting the city perfectly to the topographical condition of the area. They were building the walls in a way that they were not eroded as a result of the running water of the constant and very frequent rain of the area. If the city did not blend with the powerful forces of nature that had shaped the jungle, it would have been broken apart by roots and washed away by rain. But it was abandoned 400 years ago and it is still there. The path and stairways carry away the water without damage and they

also link the city into a network of roads covering the whole mountain. The city was too large to support itself. It depended on supplies from other areas of the mountain. The Tairona treated the whole Sierra as a single system. 300,000 people were able to survive in the Sierra without creating an ecological mess’.

Today the Koguis of the Sierra Nevada have started to again reclaim their old city and their old territory. They have started to travel beyond the borders of their territory to other parts of Colombia and to other parts of the world in order to extend their rituals and offerings as well as their teaching through stories, for today the whole world is in a precarious state and in need of healing and harmony. They are inviting people to carry out their message of healing the world by connecting to spirituality, to positivity, love and compassion.

Natural law of origin

Like in tantra the Koguis and Arhuacos recognize creation as being made up of the principles of consciousness and energy. Everything breathes and is alive, is related and infused with consciousness or spirit.

In indigenous thought the law of origin consisted of principles recognized in this way: Everything that surrounds us is alive. In the universe everything is related. We all have a spirit. The universe is governed by laws that we must know and respect in order to understand the universe.

—*Mejía and Santos*

The original law, like the law of dharma in vedic philosophy, teaches us how to live in order to uphold the positive and constructive. The Mamos call this ‘walk with sweet thinking’ which means: be positive, live, act and behave appropriately, transform anger, resentment, pain, hatred and hostility and open yourself to love, compassion, tenderness and freedom of the spirit.

The law of origin is also a law that seeks to maintain and conserve nature. To stop acting and thinking against nature, to understand that there are sacred places that should be left alone and untouched. We should return to these places alone to make spiritual offerings. An example of a spiritual offering is the following ritual: we begin by greeting the sun, we place one hand on the heart and the other we raise towards the Sun, and then we turn to the left. The important thing is to greet and tune in with the source.

—*Mamo Roberto Nacogui*

Juan Marco Pérez speaks of the indigenous and their commitment to upholding the tradition: ‘Preserving life there is true harmony between day and night, cold and heat, summer and winter, life and death, man and nature and man with man. To maintain balance on Earth, we must comply with the law of origin, the principle and order of all beings’.

In the Sierra are the Fathers and the Mothers of all that exists and the permanence of the world depends on their care. There is the Spirit that is life and thought, manifested in the water of the peaks of the Nevada, the Father, and the sea, the Mother, and that of the rivers that communicate between the snow and the sea. It is the air breathed by all living beings, the universal breath. It is the light and heat of the Sun, which is Father, and of the moon, which is Mother. The tribes of the Sierra are in charge of taking care, saving, conserving the ancestral territory or ‘linea negra’, the black line, free of the invasion of the civilized world.

We, the Iku, believe that the Earth is a mother and as a good mother will take care of us and protect us if we obey the law of origin, the source and order of all living beings’.

FIRST ARHUACO INDIGENOUS CONGRESS

The water that fertilizes the earth to give food to man is a symbol of life. The water present in the snowfall is the symbol of a father and the water of the seas is the symbol of a mother.

The Sierra Nevada is a Sacred House. Here the human family began, it is the father and the mother. Our father Serankwa, as the main Mamo, distributed as inheritance the lands of the world and the seeds that we all have to sow in order to survive. Our father Serankwa also distributed the mines and riches of the world. According to the ambitions of each son, he sent them to more distant lands and gave them the minor laws so that those younger brothers could be governed.

The natural laws were left in the Sierra Nevada by the Mamos, who uphold them peacefully. The younger brothers must know and respect them so as not to violate the Sacred House and the rights of the older brother who is us Arhuacos.

The Sun is the eye of the world and that eye is watching us. The Sun also has his father and mother; he recognizes who are the older brothers and who are the younger brothers. The Sun fulfils his own law, and therefore everyone will comply with the law. Here in the Sierra Nevada, the existence of the world began. Mamo Serankwa handed out the laws. He taught that the minor laws are also made to be fulfilled and that they are taken by the children to the five continents. In this way, the minor laws are to protect the natural laws.

The older brothers were to live in Sierra Nevada and from there, they had to prevent any injustice from entering the Sierra Nevada and violate the Sacred House. All the wealth that exists within the Sierra Nevada is the father and the mother of the riches that exist in the five continents. The Sierra Nevada, from its plains to its snow-covered peaks, rises in the centre and is the guardian of America and the world. The Arhuacos were left with the task of monitoring, with our science, these natural and cultural riches that our younger brothers and sisters have the obligation to respect.

COSMOLOGY AND CREATION

From Ley de Se

First it was Se. There was no earth, there was no time, there was no air, there was nothing, but there was Se. Then he saw that it was good that there was material. In Aluna he created Seizhankua and Seinekun to make the world because he himself could not get up and do it. Then Jaba Se was given a thread of thought to draw the limits of the high parts, then he gave them a longer one to trace the middle parts and at the end an even longer thread for the limits of the lower parts, to the linea negra or the black line, so that in each part lived animals and different plants.

In Se, Seizhankua and Seinekun created an organization among themselves, and thus gave rise to all the norms, laws, songs, dances, the principles of any organization, first spiritually in thought and then materially. In Se, before the material world existed, they found the necessary order for material existence to occur. That original order and the ways to prevent and organize disorder are the Laws of Se.

Alan Ereira recounts the origin and emergence of Aluna: 'In the beginning there was blackness. Only the sea. In the beginning there was no sun, no moon, no people. In the beginning there were no animals, no plants. Only the sea. The sea was the Mother. Mother was not people. She was not anything. Nothing at all. She was what she was. Spirit. She was memory and possibility. She was Aluna'.

The same description of the creation can be found in the *Rig Veda*, which speaks of *shristi* or creation.

Prajapati

Then was not non-existent nor existent: there was no realm of air, no sky beyond it. (Verse 1)

Darkness there was: at first concealed in darkness, this all was indiscriminate chaos. All that existed then was void and formless; by the great power of Warmth was born that unit. (Verse 3)

Madhuchchanda

From fervour kindled to its height, eternal truth and law
were born: Thence was the night produced, and thence
the billowy flood of sea arose. (Verse 1)

Dhatar, the great Creator, then formed in due order Sun
and Moon. He formed in order Heaven and Earth, the
regions of the air, and light. (Verse 3)

At the core of the Kogui spirituality and cosmology is the belief that the mountain range is a living entity, who, before being created by the great creator Sezhanhwa, existed in the spiritual universe. The great creator then birthed the people of the Sierra Nevada and gave the mandate to uphold her Original Law: all creation must be protected and nurtured. Still, before Sezhanhwa was Aluna, the Great Mother.



For us, grave robbing is the same as taking a mother and removing her guts, taking out her teeth and replacing them with dentures, removing an eye and replacing it with glass.

—Mamo Ramon Gil

Aluna – the Great Mother

According to their beliefs and experience, everything comes from Aluna, she created the world. She created humans to protect and care for the earth, for the mountains, rivers, lakes, animals, plants and for other human beings. The Kogui believe that Aluna is the creator principle as well as the mysterious powers of human beings and nature, similar to Hiranyagarbha and Mahat in Indian thought.

Prana is the manifestation of Prakriti, nature. The gross prana is breath, the subtle prana is vital force. The sum total of all pranas is Hiranyagarbha or Lord Brahma. Brahmaloaka is the world of Brahma or Hiranyagarbha. It is also known by the name Satyaloka. Those who perform meritorious actions without expectation of fruits, who lead the life of purity and righteousness, who worship Hiranyagarbha and all realized bhaktas will go to this realm.

—Swami Sivananda Saraswati

In the *Rig Veda*, the source of the creation of the whole universe or cosmos is Hiranyagarbha. The Sanskrit word means golden womb or golden egg. In the *Shiva Maha Purana*, Brahma was given the duty to create. However, he had no idea about how and from which point he should start creation. Lord Shiva sent a cosmic egg to Brahma to help him in starting creation. That cosmic egg is said to be Hiranyagarbha. The Hiranyagarbha floated around in water in the emptiness and darkness of non-existence. Brahma realized that in order to start creation, he had to split the egg in half. From the two halves he created the spiritual realm, heaven or *swarga*, and the physical realm, the Earth or *prithvi*. Mahat is the great principle, and the first product of evolution of *Prakriti* or matter. In its cosmic aspect, Mahat is the source of the cosmos and the universal mind.

Where does the idea of earth come from? Where do we get the idea of water? Why do we have a word for it? These things were conceived in the beginning. Before the dawn of time, water and earth were ideas, we can only have ideas of things that have already been conceived in Aluna, before the dawning, before there was anything, we were conceived in the water of Aluna. So were the trees, the mountains, everything.

—*Mamo Ramon Gil*

What is concrete is only a symbol while true value and essence exist in Aluna. For example, in the ancient city, the lost city, there are mystical map-stones which show the paths of the city. However, these maps have no correlation with the physical paths. They are symbols for paths that exist in Aluna. The act of ‘thinking’ happens in Aluna. The moment of concentration or meditation which is expressed in rites and songs is to be in Aluna and to be attuned to the forces that are invoked for the benefit of the community. In humans, desires, wishes and love come from Aluna and carry something supernatural within.



We worship the eternal Mother who has no particular form, but is in every form. We should not say that she is formless. She has no particular form, even as clay has no particular form, but every pot is a form of clay. It is her glory we see in the sun and the moon, in all forms of life. We worship the Mother whom yogis know as kundalini shakti, Vaishnavas as Lakshmi, Shaivas as Gauri and Amba,

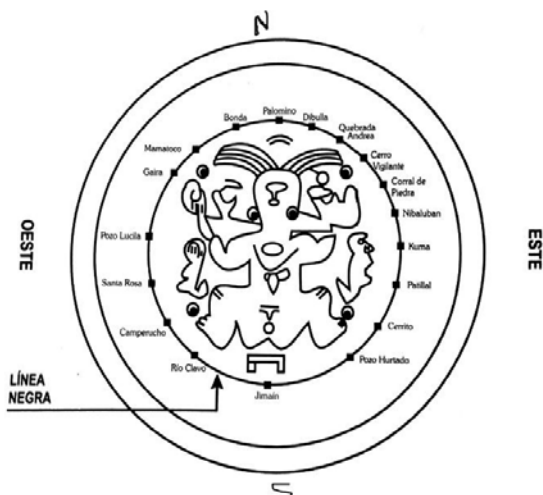


and Christians as Mary. Worship of the Cosmic Mother is a very ancient culture. Who can the original creator have been but the Mother? The Mother is the preserver and also the destroyer. It is by her command that the celestial beings, human beings and all of creation moves.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

The Mamos want to teach how the world was made. They say that we mutilate the world because we do not remember the great mother. She is not a distant god. She is the mind inside nature. Alan Ereira quotes the Mamos describing the presence of the great mother among them and the purpose of human life: ‘The Mother bled. She had her period. She was fertile. And the world was fertile. Her blood is gold. It remains in the earth. It is fertility. Gold and water. Blood and water are necessary for all things. Human beings were made to care for the living things, the plants, the animals. This is why people were made’.

Linea negra and the sacred sites



Around the mountain range is an invisible circle which is called the 'linea negra' or the black line. Within this area the Mamos, the spiritual guides of the community, have to do pagamentos, rituals to maintain the balance.



Along the lines, there are 54 places where the Momos have to do pagamentos, and in the description of these places is mentioned that there are oval-shaped stones that emerge from the earth itself.

The oval-shaped stone emerging from the earth is Javashikaka. The place is the origin of everything. It is the Mother and Father of everything. 'Shikaka' means the black thread, 'Shi' means thread that connects everything.



The Mamos go into deep meditation and are in communion with the Mother Earth who gives them instructions where, when and what rituals they have to do. In 2018, the message given by Mother Earth to the Mamos was: ‘The earth is now in a very critical state and the most important aspect is to remain positive. For the first time in history, the Mamos were given instructions to travel outside their ‘linea negra’ or rather they were told that they had to extend the ‘linea negra’. Some of the Mamos have started to travel to do pagamentos at other places in the world.

Our sacred sites along the black line refer to the invisible line separating the land and the sea. We are eager to protect our sacred sites because they are like the eyes, ears, lungs and arms of nature. Each site is a Being, a mother or father spirit who is alive and has a spirit. If these sites are destroyed, it will bring an end to our indigenous culture; it will destroy us as a people.

—*Mamo Santos*

In the BBC documentary *Aluna* by Alan Ereira, two of the mamos travel to England to obtain a gold thread which they were going to use to show the physical location of the linea negra and how the different sacred sites (esuamas) are being linked. They wanted to show the linea negra using gold thread, because gold is linked to Aluna and it never decays. A meeting was also arranged with a world-renowned astronomer in London to see if the Kogui picture of the universe can make sense and be considered scientific.

The first question the astronomer asked was: How large is the Kogui view of the world and what is its form?

The Mamo replied: According to our ancestors, the universe is very large and we can only see a small part. That is Se, the darkness. Se is the mother and the father – everything. The world of Se, the dark world we cannot see, is linked to the material world. We connect to the darkness in Aluna through thought. We know how to concentrate to connect with the darkness in Aluna through thought.

The astronomer said: Dark energy is a recent discovery, a property of space which we have not yet understood, and which makes the universe accelerate its evolution. It is a mystery which fills space. It could take another one hundred years to fully understand.

The Mamo said: There are objects and places or nodes on a map of earth corresponding to the map in the universe linking the earth with the universe – these places are called esuamas. These nodes are intersections between the material world and the darkness. They show us how we can connect with the darkness.

The astronomer said: I am trying to understand how the Kogui can learn something known only through an instrument like a telescope.

The astronomer shows him a picture of stars that cannot be seen without a telescope. The Mamo picks out one single star and tells the name, Sulabena, and says we cannot

see this star in the sky; only with our inner eyes. This star is produced by a big fire.

The astronomer said: The Mamo has come here not to learn new things but to tell his vision. So, why can't we learn from them?

Pagamentos

Yajna is an ancient practice shrouded in antiquity but as relevant to modern man as it was to the rishis and munis of the vedic era, who conceived the spirit of yajna to express their love, respect and reverence for Mother Nature.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

As for the Mhyuscas, rituals of pagamentos establish balance between man and the planet, man and Aluna and between the material and spiritual worlds. Man has the duty to look after the planet, its animals and plants. Everything that is given to man has to be returned to maintain balance and restore energy. It is the same principle as yajna or sacrifice in vedic thoughts.

Think hard, guardians of trees, birds and waters. Guardians of all things, consider them and offer them your gifts. Put your offerings, the Mother takes them. The message that the older brothers, the Mamos, bring to the western world, is to understand that Mother Earth is a being who is alive, who feels, possesses wisdom and spirit. She is the higher authority and not man (Mamo Aruawikugumu Yosatana, 2010).

In the same way, an order must be followed for the relationship between the Earth and man. One of his ways of relating is through payment, an offering that takes place in sacred, recognized and established sites for millennia by ancestral cultures.

—*Mejía*

In regard to the purpose of yajna, the *Bhagavad Gita*, expresses the same idea of reciprocity in the following verses (3:11 and 12):

With this (the sacrifice or yajna) do you nourish the gods, and may the gods nourish you; thus nourishing one another, you shall attain to the highest good. (11)

The gods, nourished by the sacrifice, will give you the desired objects. So, he who enjoys the objects given by the gods without offering (in return) to them, is verily a thief. (12)

Protection or Sewa

Another very important concept in the Kogui culture is the concept of Sewa. The Kogui have small magical objects whether stones, threads or shells that we call amulets. These objects, whose function is to guarantee their owner or possessor legitimate success in a certain activity, are called Sewa.

The Kogui translate this term as security. The idea is based on the principle that everything in creation is alive and as such has been born and has a mother and father, or the source of its existence. When planting a seed for example, you have to get permission of its mother, which is to get Sewa from the seed or plant and then you can cultivate. It has been said that an individual who wants to build a new house needs several Sewa, since a house is composed of different elements. This also applies to changes in the life cycle of individuals who are the object of ceremonies, they also need Sewa; the Mamo must obtain them in order to perform the rites of baptism, initiation, marriage or burial. Simultaneously, individuals receive it when they confirm a new status that represents permission to occupy it. The number of possible Sewas is thus practically unlimited since for every activity or phase of life, individuals must be provided first of the corresponding insurance.

This can be compared to seeking the blessings of Ganesha when moving into a house, of Lakshmi for marriage

or any of the *samskaras* in the Indian tradition. The main *samskaras* or rites are: *garbhadhana*, when parents invite a soul, *jiva*, and life enters the womb. *Pumsavana* acknowledges the first movement of the foetus in the womb, and *simantonnayana* the mental faculties of the unborn child. *Jatakarma* happens at the moment of birth, *namkarana* is giving a name to the child, and with the rite of *nishkramana*, the child meets the world and Mother Nature for the first time. It is the first contact with the world it will live in. With *annaprasana* it receives its first solid food, with *chudakarana* its head is shaven for the first time, and with the thread ceremony, *upanayana*, it is born to knowledge. When the child becomes an adult, it receives the *keshanta* rite, the transition to becoming a householder is marked by *samavartana*, followed by the marriage rite or *vivaha*. The life of the individual soul ends with *antyeshti*, the last rites. Thus every moment of maturity and transition is honoured with a special ceremony.

Trasnocho

Trasnocho is a very important practice in the culture of the Kogui. The word ‘trasnocho’ can be translated as ‘during the night’. The purpose of the practice is the spiritual effort of an individual which takes place during the night in their spiritual houses or *malokas*. Different practices are used such as dances, reflections, sacred plants in communion with the *Mamos* who listen, give advice or reprimand to help the spiritual growth of the individual. It can be compared to *satsang* and *swadhyaya*, spiritual efforts within the *vedic* tradition. In his book, *Descripciones de una psicología ancestral indígena*, Leon Romero explains the practice: ‘Trasnocho is done to think and reflect on how each person is to find their individuality, find oneself, be connected to spirituality and wisdom. For this, the culture must be studied at night, looking for a balance between the negative that is acquired during the day because of bad thoughts and actions, and the positive that is the sweet thought that occurs more naturally

at night. This is why we look for order and find balance, and in the words of Mamo Roberto, first I must investigate myself and for that reason, trasnocho is of vital importance to understand the ancestral path’.

The purge – purification

The purge is carried out during the late hours of the night and the Mamo prepares an infusion of laxative herbs and minerals. They are made to heal both the body and mind, as in their thought everything is united and related. The infusion is distributed to all those present who are asked to make a request to be with the Mother, Aluna, and with positive thoughts. Then panela (unrefined brown sugar) water is given, which after a while generates the physical reaction of cleansing.

Singing and dancing

Music has so much power that it can free your ego. Through kirtan you can reach the highest pinnacle of spiritual experience. Not by yoga or by any other means but by kirtan alone can you have the vision of the Divine.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

According to grandparents Koguis, “You have to be happy, so that the negative one believes that you are sad and moves away. When you are sad the negative one sees you as being happy and sticks to you.” (Mamo Roberto Nacogui, 2011).

Through song and dance the positive feelings and attitudes are acquired and the negatives move away. The dance and song rituals are offerings to the Mother Aluna for her to create balance between the individual and the environment, and the material and spiritual dimensions. Dance, songs and magical stones that are used acquire the power to keep the negative or demonical forces at bay by inducing a positive force field.

The Mamos say that through dance the negative ideas and emotions that cause mental problems in a person come out. The purpose of various rituals has been beautifully described: 'To communicate with our source, it is essential to remember that this can only be what is: peace and tranquillity. In the Kogui culture, this moment of freedom can be experienced when you participate sweetly and humbly in the different rituals. The silence of a late night shows the sacred mystery that reconnects with the being, the sounds of flutes and harmonicas connect with the instinct that gives security, the movements of the dances come back to connect people with their body and the energy that they possess, the word of a confession unloads the sorrows, then man leaves aside the values of ego and returns to those inner and previous values derived from a feeling of harmony and connection with the forces of nature and the universe'.

The rituals show that the ego is composed of the connection to the superficial that surrounds us and how this is confused with our interior. The common phrase of the grandparents, 'why mourn over spilled milk', exposes according to them, the dimensions of temporality that bind people to the past and strengthens the ego. The belief of what I am when I am in fear is not real, it does not exist, says the Mamo Roberto. The only real thing is Mother and you have to have the will to go through it, good and bad. Only the forgiveness of what is in the past liberates us, allows us to cool the heart, because the ego heats up and it burns us inside.

Fire rituals

Fire rituals are being used in order to maintain the cyclical movement of production. The fire quickly disintegrates the dense physical matter in the offering which returns to the ether element in the form of ethereal particles which are being consumed by ethereal entities. The Mamos use coca leaves, tobacco, frailejón, an ancient plant that grows in the paramo above 3,200 m, moque, resina equivalent to incense.



Shrauta yajna is a pure and original form of yajna, where only fire is the medium to convey the faith, the oblations, the bhakti, the sankalpa, the invocation, the desire and the expectation, from us, the manifest beings, to the unmanifest cosmic power. It is the original vedic system which did not believe in any images or symbols. The vedic system only believed in the manifest nature of which we are a part, and

the transcendental nature which has to be attained. The medium for the manifest to access the transcendental is the element fire.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

The weaving of clothes

Alan Ereira quoting one of the elders of the Mamos, points out the importance of awareness in daily activities, and the need to be conscientious: 'When you start to weave you should concentrate on what you are doing and not let yourself be distracted by other things. Think hard. Think about the cloth, because you are making the clothes that we wear. The cloth you make is an offering and it says a great deal of what kind of person you are'.

The weaving tradition is transmitted from grandmothers to mothers, from mothers to daughters, from older sisters to younger sisters. It is a work of knowledge and its relation with the life of the community, existence and spirit. It shows the knowledge one has about life and after learning, the women must reflect to be able to teach successors, always remembering the ancestors and their identity with spirituality.

In their weaving, the Kogui have nine threads. The colours used to weave are orange and red, which mean life and blood; black, which means darkness, the beginning of the universe; and white which means light. The fabric hides in the wool the need to yield the emergence of certainties of the deep psyche and the great art of transrationality, where the parts of the great whole are intertwined, it is transpersonally talking where the great web of life, the emotion, the sensation, the feeling, reason, compassion, where the process of differentiation and integration allows each part of the whole to develop and integrate in a more profound way.

The mochilla

When the girls reach puberty they undergo an initiation for two weeks, where they are given a mantra and symbol to weave into their bags or mochila. They weave the same symbol throughout their life, for their spiritual evolution. They weave their mochillas all the time whenever they don't have to use their hands for other work. It is a meditation where they put their thoughts into the mochilla. It is also a means to maintain knowledge, the ancient wisdom and the law of origin.

The mochila pictured here is a mochila of a Mamo and the symbol is the seal of the mamus and the meaning is unity.



The poporo

Reaching puberty, the boys undergo a type of initiation where they are initiated to the chewing of the coca leaves, which is a sacred plant, the plant of protection of the



culture and the society. They believe that natural coca civilizes men. They mix coca leaves with crushed seashells which is then chewed. The chewing of the coca leaves gives a heightened state of awareness. The form of the container, the poporo, resembles the womb which is necessary for men to be complete. They refer to the poporo as both a safeguard and a woman. The lime covered stick representing the male part is wiped on top. Unbalanced masculinity without these two parts working together would be dangerous. The poporo is the mark of civilization. Eating from it reminds a man of what he is, and keeps him in harmony with the Great Mother. The men have a little stick which they use to mix the coca leaves, but they also move the stick on the outside of the poporo. This movement serves to put their thoughts into the poporo and thus empty their mind from useless thoughts.



Whenever they need to access whatever they have put there, they again stroke the stick on the outside of the poporos and bring the content back into the mind and when they don't need it anymore, back into the poporos it goes again, like an USB memory stick.

The picture here is of a poporo from the pre-Columbian cultures made out of gold. Today the Kogui are using more simple ones made out of the hard shell of the calabas fruit.



Think of the Great Mother. Ask for your poporo in spirit, concentrate and think about it, ask for it, ask for the spirit guardians to grant these, the guardian of the poporo and the stick, the guardian of gourds. You must not give up using the poporo and eating the coca now or in the future, otherwise you are not a man and cannot get married. You should think about all this. About the poporo and what it means. It is a woman. Now that you can use it, you can take a wife. You can take a wife, but you have to think carefully. When you are married, you have a woman, you have to look after her, you have to work for her. You must not ever hit her or mistreat her. At night before you sleep, chew the leaves, chew four times at least, to help you think clearly. Think what you are going to do next day. What things need to be done and how you are going to do them. Think it through.

—*Mamo Bernardo*

Now the young man will be admitted to the spiritual house the nhuye, where only men are gathered. He will sit with his face to the wall for four days and nights. He will neither sleep nor eat. He must listen to the teaching of the town officials and elders.

Now you have to pay attention and think carefully of what the Mamos have to say. You must listen to their words and remember what they tell you and you must think about it very carefully. In that way you will behave well. You cannot just cut banana trees, because banana trees are like your father, your mother, you must respect them as much as any person. You must be respectful. You should not cut mango trees, avocado trees or guayaba trees. All growing trees are like human beings. They hurt and feel the pain just like you feel when you are cutting off your own leg. Nor should you disturb stones.

—*Mamo Bernardo*

Training the Mamos

‘Mamo’ means the sun. The Mamos are the enlightened ones. They watch over the community and maintain its purity.

The Mamos are being trained from birth and for the first nine years of their life, they live in isolation, without any sensory distractions, in complete darkness. Not even the light of a fire is allowed. The mother goes there to feed the child; she is allowed to eat only white food, which is pure. The new-born child is taken to the nhuye, the spiritual house, or a cave where the child is being educated. It learns how to meditate on the Great Mother and on other spirits who come from the Mother, the guardians of all living things. These must be helped and cared for because they nurture the world. They must be given nourishment through offerings of fragments of thread, leaves and stones. When the child is nine years old he or she is taken high up into the mountains and is allowed to see the outer world for the first time. Until



then he or she has learned to see the world with the inner vision and from the spiritual dimension. He is told that the splendour of the outer world is a reflection of the inner vision of the world and he now has to live in the outer world but continue to see the world with the inner vision. They learn how to live in the two dimensions simultaneously, the spiritual and the material dimensions and to be in constant communion with Mother Earth and with Aluna, the Greater Mind. During this time, they receive education and learn from memory the entire religious tradition of the group.

In a sense, the student Mamo has been kept in a second womb, to nine months has been added nine years. The child has only known the world as an idea. His physical senses have been kept alive but only just. Just enough light to avoid blindness, just enough food to avoid starvation, but no meat, no salt. Only lukewarm water to drink. And now instead of the imaginary world created he sees the world created by the Mother.

Their training is completed at the age of forty. When the Mamos die and leave their bodies, they do so sitting in

padmasana and they are buried sitting in the same posture. All the other members of the community are buried in the lying position.

There is one Mamo who is the guardian of the fire and he cannot move from his place. The fire is constantly burning and the duty to keep the fire burning is handed down from generation to generation. In the same way as in the ancient tradition of Agnihotra in India.

Yogic lifestyle

The Kogui live a simple life. It is an example of a whole community of 30,000 people living a yogic life. The Mamos are the spiritual guides, who have the responsibility to commune with Mother Earth and the spiritual world, to keep balance, peace and harmony of the whole planet and to guide the community.

The Mamos see at the birth of a child what its destiny is and what is best for the child's spiritual growth: some become Mamos, others weavers, farmers, commissioners or guardians of the community. The commissioners have the responsibility to organize and uphold the community, and the guardians to manage the daily work and protect the community.

Farmers maintain a variety of farms in different climate zones all over the mountain. They do not permit fields of a single crop. Farms must be carefully balanced plots and include planting under the trees. The women do the planting. It is part of the relationship between the mother of the family and the Mother Earth. They insist that the secret of fertility does not simply lie in planting and harvesting.

Alan Ereira quotes the Mamos speaking: 'Everything we plant must be blessed. They must be helped to grow. Beans, corn, they all have guardians. Fruit trees too. They all have guardians. We must ask the guardians permission. If we didn't do that then if crops are not blessed, how can they grow properly. They dry up and rot without it. That is how it is'.

Everybody lives according to the laws of nature and working together as a whole for the community, the Sierra and the whole planet earth. If somebody is not able to follow the rules of the Sierra, is stealing, abusing somebody, trying to seduce somebody else's wife, there is no punishment, but the person is kept in isolation to reflect and meditate until he has understood what was wrong and has reconnected with what is right.

Hildebrand von Martin has been witness to the far-reaching effects of the lifestyle lived in the Sierra: 'The Mamos of the Sierra tell us that to take care of nature is not simply weeding, or avoiding the throwing of trash, singing is also food, with it they keep the water sources alive. The ritual of Yurupary, where a dance accompanied by flutes made of palm, is performed annually for three days and nights during the equinox in the towns of Vaupés. It seeks to invoke the spirit of the trees and it has been shown that these rituals have a significant effect on the regeneration of affected ecological areas'.

Thus, the indigenous practices and rituals of the Kogui culture provide a roadmap of possibility that should be recognized, for the growth and the psychic evolution, the road to transcending life through living it.

Recuperating ancestral territory

Since the 1970s, the Kogui, Arhuaco, Wiwa, and Kankuamo have struggled to secure legal recognition to some 6,500 square kilometres of their ancestral territories in three resguardos, indigenous reserves, collectively inhabited by about 90,000 people.

Named after the tallest and most sacred peak of the range, the Gonawindua Tairona Organization (OGT) was established in 1987 to defend the traditions and cultures of the peoples of the Sierra Nevada. Today the OGT is mostly focused on the direction, organization, administration, and management of the Kogui reserve, while the other three tribes have established similar organizations. In 1999,

the four tribes formed the Territorial Council of Cabildos (CTC) to speak in one voice to better govern their ancestral territory and maintain autonomy. The CTC addresses the protection of sacred sites, the unification of their ancestral territories, and threats from mining, dams, and other major projects. Another concern is the defence and recuperation of their sacred sites; in particular, the 54 important sites that form an invisible 'black line' encircling the base of the mountain massif.

Luis Eduardo and Leon Romero sum up the vision of the Mamos for their younger brothers: 'The mamos affirm that the only way to care for Mother Earth and awaken the consciousness of the younger brother is through spirituality, not science and technology. Precisely this wisdom is found in the cosmogonic principles, his late nights, *trasnochos*, and payments or *pagamentos*'.



THE MESSAGE OF THE MAMOS TO THE WORLD

From the documentary Aluna, by Alan Ereira

You take out so much gasoline and minerals that the earth is becoming steadily weaker. So the Mamo has been thinking what can we do so that the younger brothers fully understand. The Mamo says that it is very difficult for the younger brother to listen well and to hear. It will be even harder for him to give up things. He is going to have to learn. Younger brother must listen carefully to the history of the Mamo, the law of the Mamo, and the beliefs of the Mamo.

Humans need water to live. The earth is the same. It was made perfect by Saranqua. Now it is weak, diseased; the animals die and the trees dry up and become ill. Many new illnesses will appear and there will be no cure and medicine for them, because the reason is that the younger brother is continuously violating the fundamental principles by drilling, mining, extracting petrol, minerals, and stripping the land and seas of their wealth. This is destroying all order and damaging the world. Tell the younger brother: Open your eyes. Hear about the Mamos' laws and stories of how things really are.

We must explain these things. We shouldn't threaten or insult. But it is good that we speak. We must show them how we work and we are offering our great tribute to the Mother. So that they know that we are here working for the younger brother too. The Mamos work not only for the Koguis but for all the people of the world. The Mamo stands up, he isn't angry not even with the younger brother even though he did harm. The Mamo must look after the younger brother and the elder brother, the animals, plants and all that is natural, because the Mamo has a duty to care for the future of all creatures and all peoples.



A revolution is taking place not only in this land, but all over the world. In the future, cultures, communities and religions will not be able to resist the influence of bhakti. They will return to it for guidance.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

8

Conclusion

Yoga has been preserved in the Indian subcontinent for thousands of years and since the late 19th century has again been exposed to society by the great gurus and masters of India, such as Swami Vivekananda, Swami Sivananda, Paramahansa Yogananda and in recent years our paramguru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, and Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati. Yoga has also been preserved in Latin America for thousands of years and in recent years it has been revived by the spiritual masters, the Mamos and elders of the existing indigenous cultures.

The reason for the global revival of yoga and the revival of the yogic spiritual traditions in South America are the same – society today is in great need of yoga. The Koguis and Arhuacos have lived in complete isolation without any interference from the outside world and modern society until the early 1990s. In those years, Aluna, the Great Mother, told them that the world was in a crisis and that it was time for the elder brothers to teach the younger brothers how to look after Mother Earth by changing and mending their destructive ways.

In Colombia the Mamos of the Sierra Nevada, the shamans of the Amazon and the elders of the Mhyuscas are facing the same problem as the true masters of yoga are facing today in keeping the tradition and the teachings pure. The practices, ceremonies and rituals have become a fashion

and are used without spiritual intent or spiritual guidance, often for commercial gain or entertainment.

In 2018, Aluna gave the Mamos the mandate to spread all over the world the message that the most important teaching in this precarious time is to be positive and happy. This echoes the teaching of yoga which makes happiness, a positive attitude and positive behaviour the foundation of change and transformation of the individual, society and Mother Earth.



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SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

The aim of the *Yoga – World Traditions Series* is to draw parallels between cultures and traditions around the world and to *yoga vidya*, the complete knowledge of yoga, and thereby emphasize the universality of knowledge and wisdom. It reminds all aspirants that truth is only one, it is lived around the world in various manners, yet always with the same aim of uplifting the human condition and deepening the connection to the Divine.

Yoga in Pre-Columbian Cultures I, is a journey into the indigenous cultures of modern-day Colombia. The teaching, philosophy, the rituals and practices, and the way of life have changed little over time. The commitment to uphold the original intent and purity of their culture is alive, vibrant and more relevant than ever, not only for the indigenous tribes but for humankind.

