

[Kundalini's Rise and Fall](#)

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PARAPSYCHOLOGY

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Has the ancient Hindu science of enlightenment veered off course?

With its charismatic flare, kundalini exploded into Western consciousness in the early 1970s, primarily through the dramatic accounts of Gopi Krishna and Siddha Yoga guru, Baba Muktananda. Intense interest was aroused, and the Kundalini Research Foundation (KRF) was begun in New York to promote kundalini studies, education and awareness. It has been nearly 30 years since that spontaneous awakening. Some say the field has matured. Others dare to say it has stagnated.

Gene Kieffer, 72, President of the KRF, in speaking with Hinduism Today, lamented, "We've never been able to convince anyone with money that this is worthwhile research. In the early '70s, we had a lot of scientists interested. It was then a legitimate topic. But in about 1977 or '78, the scientists turned off. I think it was because of the thousands and thousands of people running around talking about their kundalini. There are so many books out there which list the 'symptoms,' that anybody who has a neurosis, or is a borderline schizophrenic--or is just having mental problems and lost their job--can end up convincing themselves that they're on the spiritual path; that because they have these energies buzzing around their body, they've awakened their

kundalini and now are superior to the run-of-the-mill mortals. Any intelligent person who meets up with these people thinks, 'If that's what kundalini is, don't even come near me!' I have 30 years experience talking to these people. I'm not just pulling ideas out of thin air."

Meanwhile, a diverse group of psychiatrists, psychologists, physical therapists and educators feel that kundalini is forging ahead. They founded the Kundalini Research Network as a separate group from the KRF in 1990. The main focus of the KRN is to maintain among its members a heightened awareness of the kundalini phenomena that occur around the world and to document it as scientifically as possible.

The KRN consists of individual practitioners, such as the Spiritual Emergence Network, in Santa Cruz, California, and the Patanjali Kundalini Yoga Care center, in Tennessee, who administer to a portion of the 1,000 plus people who yearly report some form of kundalini awakening. KRN's first Vice President, Stuart Sovatsky, Ph.D., told Hinduism Today that the actual number of legitimate cases could be higher, but most in the psychiatric community fail to, or are unable to, identify the basic symptoms. For that reason, he teaches a graduate course on recognizing kundalini awakening at the California Institute for Integral Studies, which is attended by other therapists. Bonnie Greenwell, a transpersonal psychotherapist, co-founder of the KRN and teacher at CIIS, explains, "When there is no cultural paradigm for such events, those who are evaluated by therapists and doctors are forced into a medical model. They are considered to have either mental problems, seizure disorders or early symptoms of disease. This has been a major problem for those who are serious about spiritual

practices, but are not with a teacher who is familiar with the phenomena."

The enthusiasm of these young kundalini evangelists stands in stark contrast to the disillusionment of veteran Kieffer. He regrets, "I've pushed so hard now that I've gone over the brink, and I've stirred up a hornets nest of pseudo players. It's a tragedy, and I don't think it will ever come back to where it was. There are too many teachers, and it is now an industry."

But Sovatsky has higher hopes. He speculates, "In the next 10-20 years, more people in the West will be experimenting with it, like they did with meditation and yoga. The deeper elements of those practices are coming to people's attention now, and the deepest element of yoga is kundalini." And despite his dejection, Kieffer admits that "There are genuine spritual masters with disciples who really will sacrifice, but they are rare. The Hindu masters...their tradition is still there. That's why we would send the scholars to India. Where else are the archives?"

Just recently a "Body-Mind-Soul" center was established in Delhi by Bharat Nirman to teach about kundalini. M.C. Bhandari of Mystic India, Calcutta, told Hinduism Today that serious research in India is being done in four places: by Swamy Vidyanandji, of Bharat Nirman, New Delhi; Dr. Dinanath Rai, Yoga Research Institute, Lucknow; the Theosophical Society in Chennai and Dr. H.R. Nagendra of the Vivekananda Kendra Yoga Research Institute in Bangalore.