

Yoga, Brief History of an Idea

Over the past decades, yoga has become part of the Zeitgeist of affluent western societies, drawing housewives and hipsters, New Agers and the old-aged, and body culture and corporate culture into a multibillion-dollar synergy. Like every Indian cultural artifact that it has embraced, the West views Indian yoga as an ancient, unchanging tradition, based on revelations received by the Vedic

sages who, seated in the lotus pose, were the Indian forerunners of the flat-tummied yoga babes who grace the covers of such glossy periodicals as the

In the United States in particular, yoga has become a commodity. Statistics

show that about 16 million Americans practice yoga every year. For most people, this means going to a yoga center with yoga mats, yoga clothes, and yoga

accessories, and practicing in groups under the guidance of a yoga teacher or

trainer. Here, yoga practice comprises a regimen of postures (āsanas)—sometimes held for long periods of time, sometimes executed in rapid sequence--

often together with techniques of breath control (prānāyāma). Yoga entrepreneurs have branded their own styles of practice, from Bikram’s superheated

workout rooms to studios that have begun offering “doga,” practicing yoga

together with one’s dog. They have opened franchises, invented logos, packaged their practice regimens under Sanskrit names, and marketed a lifestyle

that fuses yoga with leisure travel, healing spas, and seminars on eastern spirituality. “Yoga celebrities” have become a part of our vocabulary, and with celebrity has come the usual entourage of publicists, business managers, and

1

In this introduction, names in [square brackets] refer to contributions found in this volume, while references in (parentheses) refer to works found in Works Cited at the end of this chapter.

2 D a v i d G o r d o n W h i t e

lawyers. Yoga is mainstream. Arguably India’s greatest cultural export, yoga has morphed into a mass culture phenomenon.

Many yoga celebrities, as well as a strong percentage of less celebrated yoga

teachers, combine their training with teachings on healing, spirituality, meditation, and India’s ancient yoga traditions, the Sanskrit-language Yoga Sūtra

(YS) in particular. Here, they are following the lead of the earliest yoga entre-

preneurs, the Indian gurus who brought the gospel of yoga to western shores

in the wake of Swami Vivekananda's storied successes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

But what were India's ancient yoga traditions, and what relationship do

they have to the modern postural yoga (Singleton 2010) that people are practicing across the world today? In fact, the yoga that is taught and practiced

today has very little in common with the yoga of the YS and other ancient yoga treatises. Nearly all of our popular assumptions about yoga theory date from the past 150 years, and very few modern-day practices date from before the twelfth century. This is not the first time that people have "reinvented" yoga in their own image. As the contributions to this volume demonstrate, this is a process that has been ongoing for at least two thousand years. Every group in every age has created its own version and vision of yoga. One reason this has been possible is that its semantic field—the range of meanings of the term "yoga"—is so broad and the concept of yoga so malleable, that it has been possible to morph it into nearly any practice or process one chooses. When seeking to define a tradition, it is useful to begin by defining one's terms. It is here that problems arise. "Yoga" has a wider range of meanings than nearly any other word in the entire Sanskrit lexicon. The act of yoking an animal, as well as the yoke itself, is called yoga. In astronomy, a conjunction of

planets or stars, as well as a constellation, is called yoga. When one mixes together various substances, that, too, can be called yoga. The word yoga has also

been employed to denote a device, a recipe, a method, a strategy, a charm, an incantation, fraud, a trick, an endeavor, a combination, union, an arrangement, zeal, care, diligence, industriousness, discipline, use, application, contact, a sum total, and the Work of alchemists. But this is by no means an exhaustive list. So, for example, the ninth-century Netra Tantra, a Hindu scripture from Kashmir, describes what it calls subtle yoga and transcendent yoga. Subtle yoga is nothing more or less than a body of techniques for entering into and taking over other people's bodies. As for transcendental yoga, this is a process that involves superhuman female predators, called yoginīs, who eat people! By eating people, this text says, the yoginīs consume the sins of the body that would otherwise bind them to suffering rebirth, and so allow for the "union"

(yoga) of their purified souls with the supreme god Śiva, a union that is tanta-

I n t r o d u c t i o n 3

mount to salvation (White 2009: 162–63). In this ninth-century source, there is no discussion whatsoever of postures or breath control, the prime markers of yoga as we know it today. More troubling still, the third- to fourth-century CE YS and Bhagavad Gītā (BhG), the two most widely cited textual sources for "classical yoga," virtually ignore postures and breath control, each devoting a total of fewer than ten verses to these practices. They are far more concerned with the issue of human salvation, realized through the theory and practice of

meditation (dhyāna) in the YS [Larson] and through concentration on the god Kṛṣṇa in the BhG [Malinar].

Indian Foundations of Yoga Theory and Practice

Clearly something is missing here. There is a gap between the ancient, “classical” yoga tradition and yoga as we know it. In order to understand the disconnect between then and now, we would do well to go back to the earliest uses of

the term yoga, which are found in texts far more ancient than the YS or BhG.

Here I am referring to India’s earliest scriptures, the Vedas. In the circa fifteenth-century BCE Rg Veda, yoga meant, before all else, the yoke one placed

on a draft animal—a bullock or warhorse—to yoke it to a plow or chariot. The resemblance of these terms is not fortuitous: the Sanskrit “yoga” is a cognate of

the English “yoke,” because Sanskrit and English both belong to the Indo-European language family (which is why the Sanskrit mātr resembles the English “mother,” sveda looks like “sweat,” udara—“belly” in Sanskrit—looks like

“udder,” and so forth). In the same scripture, we see the term’s meaning expanded through metonymy, with “yoga” being applied to the entire conveyance

or “rig” of a war chariot: to the yoke itself, the team of horses or bullocks, and the chariot itself with its many straps and harnesses. And, because such chariots were only hitched up (yukta) in times of war, an important Vedic usage of the term yoga was “wartime,” in contrast to ksema, “peacetime.”

The Vedic reading of yoga as one’s war chariot or rig came to be incorporated into the warrior ideology of ancient India. In the Mahābhārata, India’s

200 BCE–400 CE “national epic,” we read the earliest narrative accounts of the battlefield apotheosis of heroic chariot warriors. This was, like the Greek Iliad, an epic of battle, and so it was appropriate that the glorification of a warrior who died fighting his enemies be showcased here. What is interesting, for the purposes of the history of the term yoga, is that in these narratives, the warrior who knew he was about to die was said to become yoga-yukta, literally “yoked to yoga,” with “yoga” once again meaning a chariot. This time, however, it was not the warrior’s own chariot that carried him up to the highest heaven,

4 David Gordon White

reserved for gods and heroes alone. Rather, it was a celestial “yoga,” a divine chariot, that carried him upward in a burst of light to and through the sun, and on to the heaven of gods and heroes.

Warriors were not the sole individuals of the Vedic age to have chariots called “yogas.” The gods, too, were said to shuttle across heaven, and between earth and heaven on yogas. Furthermore, the Vedic priests who sang the Vedic hymns related their practice to the yoga of the warrior aristocracy who were

their patrons. In their hymns, they describe themselves as “yoking” their minds

to poetic inspiration and so journeying—if only with their mind’s eye or cognitive apparatus—across the metaphorical distance that separated the world

of the gods from the words of their hymns. A striking image of their poetic journeys is found in a verse from a late Vedic hymn, in which the poet-priests describe themselves as “hitched up” (yukta) and standing on their chariot shafts as they sally forth on a vision quest across the universe.

The earliest extant systematic account of yoga and a bridge from the earlier

Vedic uses of the term is found in the Hindu Kathaka Upanisad (KU), a scripture dating from about the third century BCE. Here, the god of Death reveals

what is termed the “entire yoga regimen” to a young ascetic named Naciketas. In the course of his teaching, Death compares the relationship between the self, body, intellect, and so forth to the relationship between a rider, his chariot, charioteer, etc. (KU 3.3–9), a comparison which approximates that made in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. Three elements of this text set the agenda for much of what constitutes yoga in the centuries that follow. First, it introduces a sort of yogic physiology, calling the body a “fort with eleven gates” and evoking “a person the size of a thumb” who, dwelling within, is worshiped by all the gods (KU

4.12; 5.1, 3). Second, it identifies the individual person within with the universal Person (purusa) or absolute Being (brahman), asserting that this is what

sustains life (KU 5.5, 8–10). Third, it describes the hierarchy of mind-body

constituents—the senses, mind, intellect, etc.—that comprise the foundational categories of Sāṃkhya philosophy, whose metaphysical system grounds

the yoga of the *YS*, *BhG*, and other texts and schools (KU 3.10–11; 6.7–8).

Because these categories were hierarchically ordered, the realization of higher states of consciousness was, in this early context, tantamount to an ascension

through levels of outer space, and so we also find in this and other early Upanisads the concept of yoga as a technique for “inner” and “outer” ascent. These

same sources also introduce the use of acoustic spells or formulas (mantras), the most prominent among these being the syllable OM, the acoustic form of

the supreme brahman. In the following centuries, mantras would become progressively incorporated into yogic theory and practice, in the medieval Hindu,

Buddhist, and Jain Tantras, as well as the Yoga Upanisads.

I n t r o d u c t i o n 5

Following this circa third-century BCE watershed, textual references to yoga multiply rapidly in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist sources, reaching a critical

mass some seven hundred to one thousand years later. It is during this initial burst that most of the perennial principles of yoga theory—as well as many elements of yoga practice—were originally formulated. Toward the latter end of this period, one sees the emergence of the earliest yoga systems, in the YS; the third- to fourth-century scriptures of the Buddhist Yogācāra school and

fourth- to fifth-century Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa; and the Yogadrstisamuccaya of the eighth-century Jain author Haribhadra. Although the YS

may be slightly later than the Yogācāra canon, this tightly ordered series of

aphorisms is so remarkable and comprehensive for its time that it is often referred to as “classical yoga.” It is also known as pātañjala yoga (“Patañjalian

yoga”), in recognition of its putative compiler, Patañjali.

The Yogācāra (“Yoga Practice”) school of Mahāyāna Buddhism was the

earliest Buddhist tradition to employ the term yoga to denote its philosophical system. Also known as Vijñānavāda (“Doctrine of Consciousness”), Yogācāra offered a systematic analysis of perception and consciousness together

with a set of meditative disciplines designed to eliminate the cognitive errors

that prevented liberation from suffering existence. Yogācāra’s eight-stage meditative practice itself was not termed yoga, however, but rather “calmness”

(śamatha) or “insight” (vipaśyanā) meditation (Cleary 1995). The Yogācāra analysis of consciousness has many points in common with the more or less coeval YS, and there can be no doubt that cross-pollination occurred across religious boundaries in matters of yoga (La Vallée Poussin, 1936–1937). The Yogavāsistha (“Vasistha’s Teachings on Yoga”)—a circa tenth-century Hindu work from Kashmir that combined analytical and practical teachings on

“yoga” with vivid mythological accounts illustrative of its analysis of consciousness [Chapple]—takes positions similar to those of Yogācāra concerning errors of perception and the human inability to distinguish between our

interpretations of the world and the world itself.

The Jains were the last of the major Indian religious groups to employ the term yoga to imply anything remotely resembling “classical” formulations of yoga theory and practice. The earliest Jain uses of the term, found in Umāsvāti’s fourth- to fifth-century Tattvārthasūtra (6.1–2), the earliest extant systematic work of Jain philosophy, defined yoga as “activity of the body, speech, and mind.” As such, yoga was, in early Jain parlance, actually an impediment to liberation. Here, yoga could only be overcome through its opposite, ayoga

(“non-yoga,” inaction)—that is, through meditation (jhāna; dhyāna), asceticism, and other practices of purification that undo the effects of earlier activity. The earliest systematic Jain work on yoga, Haribhadra’s circa 750 CE Yoga-

6 David Gordon White

drstisamuccaya, was strongly influenced by the YS, yet nonetheless retained much of Umāsvāti's terminology, even as it referred to observance of the path as yogācāra (Qvarnström 2003: 131–33).

This is not to say that between the fourth century BCE and the second to fourth century CE, neither the Buddhists nor the Jains were engaging in practices that we might today identify as yoga. To the contrary, early Buddhist sources like the Majjhima Nikāya—the “Middle-length Sayings” attributed to the Buddha himself—are replete with references to self-mortification and

meditation as practiced by the Jains, which the Buddha condemned and contrasted to his own set of four meditations (Bronkhorst 1993: 1–5, 19–24). In

the Anguttara Nikāya (“Gradual Sayings”), another set of teachings attributed

to the Buddha, one finds descriptions of jhāyins (“meditators,” “experientialists”) that closely resemble early Hindu descriptions of practitioners of yoga

(Eliade 2009: 174–75). Their ascetic practices—never termed yoga in these early sources—were likely innovated within the various itinerant śramaṇa groups that circulated in the eastern Gangetic basin in the latter half of the first millennium BCE.

Even as the term yoga began to appear with increasing frequency between

300 BCE and 400 CE, its meaning was far from fixed. It is only in later centuries that a relatively systematic yoga nomenclature became established

among Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains. By the beginning of the fifth century, however, the core principles of yoga were more or less in place, with most of what followed being variations on that original core. Here, we would do well

to outline these principles, which have persisted through time and across traditions for some two thousand years. They may be summarized as follows:

1. Yoga as an analysis of perception and cognition. Yoga is an analysis of the dysfunctional nature of everyday perception and cognition, which lies at the

root of suffering, the existential conundrum whose solution is the goal of Indian philosophy. Once one comprehends the cause(s) of the problem, one can

solve it through philosophical analysis combined with meditative practice.

At bottom, India's many yoga traditions are soteriologies, doctrines of salvation, concerning the attainment of release from suffering existence and the

cycle of rebirths (samsāra). The problem of suffering existence and the allied doctrine of cyclic rebirth emerges about five centuries before the beginning of the common era, in the early Upanisads as well as the original teachings of the

Jain founder Mahāvīra and the Buddhist founder Gautama Buddha. The same teachings that posit the problem of suffering existence also offer a solution to the problem, which may be summarized by the word “gnosis” (jñāna or prajñā in Sanskrit; paññā in Pali). As such, these are also to be counted among the

I n t r o d u c t i o n 7

earliest Indian epistemologies, philosophical theories of what constitutes authentic knowledge. Gnosis—transcendent, immediate, non-conventional

knowledge of ultimate reality, of the reality behind appearances—is the key to

salvation in all of these early soteriologies, as well as in India’s major philosophical schools, many of which developed in the centuries around the beginning of the Common Era. As such, these are gnoseologies, theories of salvation

through knowledge, in which to know the truth (i.e., that in spite of appearances, one is, in fact, not trapped in suffering existence) is to realize it in fact.

The classic example of such a transformation is that of the Buddha: by realizing the Four Noble Truths, he became the “Awakened” or “Enlightened” One

(Buddha), and so was liberated from future rebirths, realizing the extinction of suffering (nibbāna; nirvāna) at the end of his life.

In all of these systems, the necessary condition for gnosis is the disengagement of one’s cognitive apparatus from sense impressions and base matter

(including the matter of the body). An important distinguishing characteristic of all Indian philosophical systems is the concept that the mind or mental

capacity (manas, citta) is part of the body: it is the “sixth sense,” which, located in the heart, is tethered to the senses of hearing, seeing, tasting, touching, and smelling, as well as their associated bodily organs. What this means is that Indian philosophy rejects the mind-body distinction. In doing so, however, it

does embrace another distinction. This is the distinction between the mind-body complex on the one hand, and a higher cognitive apparatus—called

buddhi (“intellect”), antahkarana, vijñāna (both translatable as “consciousness”), etc.—on the other. In these early sources, the term yoga is often used

to designate the theory and practice of disengaging the higher cognitive apparatus from the thrall of matter, the body, and the senses (including mind).

Yoga is a regimen or discipline that trains the cognitive apparatus to perceive clearly, which leads to true cognition, which in turn leads to salvation, release from suffering existence. Yoga is not the sole term for this type of training, however. In early Buddhist and Jain scriptures as well as many early Hindu

sources, the term dhyāna (jhāna in the Pali of early Buddhist teachings, jhāna in the Jain Ardhamagadhi vernacular), most commonly translated as “meditation,” is far more frequently employed. So it is that Hindu sources like the

BhG and YS, as well as a number of Buddhist Mahāyāna works, frequently use yoga, dhyāna, and bhāvanā (“cultivation,” “contemplation”) more or less synonymously, while early Jain and Buddhist texts employ the term dhyāna in its various spellings exclusively. Both the YS and the Noble Eightfold Path of

Buddhism also employ the term samādhi (“concentration”) for the culminating stage of meditation (Sarbacker 2005: 16–21). At this stage, all objects have

been removed from consciousness, which thereafter continues to exist in iso-

8 D a v i d G o r d o n W h i t e

lation (kaivalyam), forever liberated from all entanglements. Kaivalyam is

also employed in Jain soteriology for the final state of the fully purified liberated soul.

The BhG, the philosophical charter of “mainstream” Hindu theism, uses the term yoga in the broad sense of “discipline” or “path,” and teaches that the paths of gnosis (jñāna-yoga) and action (karma-yoga) are inferior to the path of devotion (bhakti-yoga) to an all-powerful and benevolent supreme being. However, here as well, it is the constant training of the cognitive faculties—to meditatively concentrate on God in order to accurately perceive Him as the

source of all being and knowledge—that brings about salvation. In this teaching, revealed by none other than the supreme being Kṛṣṇa himself, the devotee

whose disciplined meditation is focused on God alone is often referred to as a yogin. The BhG is possibly the first but by no means the last teaching to use the term yoga preceded by an adjective or modifier (karma-, jñāna-, bhakti-), thereby acknowledging—but also creating—a variety of yogas.

2. Yoga as the raising and expansion of consciousness. Through analytical inquiry and meditative practice, the lower organs or apparatus of human cognition are suppressed, allowing for higher, less obstructed levels of perception

and cognition to prevail. Here, consciousness-raising on a cognitive level is seen to be simultaneous with the “physical” rise of the consciousness or self through ever-higher levels or realms of cosmic space. Reaching the level of consciousness of a god, for example, is tantamount to rising to that deity’s cosmological level, to the atmospheric or heavenly world it inhabits. This is a concept that likely flowed from the experience of the Vedic poets, who, by “yoking” their minds to poetic inspiration, were empowered to journey to the

farthest reaches of the universe. The physical rise of the dying yoga-yukta char-

lot warrior to the highest cosmic plane may have also contributed to the formulation of this idea.

Another development of this concept is the notion that the expansion of consciousness is tantamount to the expansion of the self to the point that one's body or self becomes coextensive with the entire universe. The 289th chapter of the twelfth book of the Mahābhārata concludes with a description of just such an expansion of a yogi's self [Fitzgerald], and one finds a similar

description in the Jain Umāsvāti's fourth- to fifth-century Praśamaratipra-karana. Several Mahāyāna Buddhist sources contain accounts of enlightened

beings whose "constructed bodies" (nirmānakāya) expand to fill the universe; and the BhG's description of the god Kṛṣṇa's universal body (viśvarūpa), through which he displays his "masterful yoga," is of the same order (White 2009: 167–97).

I n t r o d u c t i o n 9

Also in this regard, it should be noted that attention to the breath is a feature of the theory and practice of meditation from the earliest times. Mindfulness of one's breathing is introduced in such early sources as the Majjhima Nikāya as a fundamental element of Theravāda Buddhist meditation. In early Hindu sources as well, controlling and stilling the breath is a prime technique for calming the mind and turning it inward, away from the distractions of sensory perception. Ātman, the term for the "self" or "soul" in the classical Upanisads and later works, is etymologically linked to the Sanskrit verb *an, "breathe," and it is via breath channels leading up from the heart—channels that merge with the rays of the sun—that the self leaves the body at death to merge with the Absolute (brahman) at the summit of the universe. These descriptions of the breath channels also lie at the origin of yogic or "subtle" body physiology, which would become fleshed out in great detail in India's medieval Tantric scriptures. In these and later works, the breath-propelled self's rise through

the levels of the universe would become completely internalized, with the spinal column doubling as the universal axis mundi and the practitioner's own

cranial vault becoming the place of the brahman and locus of immortality.

3. Yoga as a path to omniscience. Once it was established that true perception or true cognition enables a self's enhanced or enlightened consciousness to rise or expand to reach and penetrate distant regions of space—to see and know things as they truly are beyond the illusory limitations imposed by a deluded mind and sense perceptions—there were no limits to the places to which consciousness could go. These "places" included past and future time, locations distant and hidden, and even places invisible to view. This insight became the foundation for theorizing the type of extrasensory perception

known as yogi perception (yogipratyakṣa), which is in many Indian epistemological systems the highest of the "true cognitions" (pramānas), in other words,

the supreme and most irrefutable of all possible sources of knowledge. For the

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school, the earliest Hindu philosophical school to fully analyze this basis for transcendent knowledge, yogi perception is what permitted

the Vedic seers (ṛsis) to apprehend, in a single panoptical act of perception, the entirety of the Vedic revelation, which was tantamount to viewing the entire universe simultaneously, in all its parts. For the Buddhists, it was this that provided the Buddha and other enlightened beings with the “buddha-eye” or “divine eye,” which permitted them to see the true nature of reality. For the early seventh-century Mādhyamaka philosopher Candrakīrti, yogi perception afforded direct and profound insight into his school’s highest truth, that is, into the emptiness (śūnyatā) of things and concepts, as well as relationships

between things and concepts (MacDonald 2009: 133–46).

10 David Gordon White

maintained the subject of lively debate among Hindu and Buddhist philosophers well into the medieval period.

It was a widely held precept among ascetic traditions that extrasensory insight into the ultimate nature of reality, a sort of omniscience, could be attained through meditative practice. Here, there were two schools of thought

concerning the attainment of such insight. The Jains and a number of Hindu and Buddhist schools asserted that the soul, self, or mind was luminous by nature and innately possessed of perfect perception and insight, and that the path to liberation simply comprised the realization of one’s innate qualities and capacities. Others, including Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda Buddhists, maintained that the path of asceticism and the practice of meditation were necessary to purge cognition of its inborn defilements, and that only once this difficult work had been completed could yogi perception and omniscience

arise (Franco 2009, 4–5). In the former case, meditation was the means to realizing the divine within, one’s innate Buddha nature, to see the universe as

Self, and so forth. In the latter, the resulting extrasensory insight allowed the ontologically imperfect practitioner to clearly see and truly know a god or Buddha that nonetheless remained Wholly Other. Through such knowledge

one could, in the parlance of many of the dualist Hindu Tantric schools, “become a god in order to worship god”—but one could never become god,

which is what the non-dualist schools maintained.

4. Yoga as a technique for entering into other bodies, generating multiple bodies, and the attainment of other supernatural accomplishments. The classical Indian understanding of everyday perception (pratyakṣa) was similar to that of the ancient Greeks. In both systems, the site at which visual perception occurs is not the surface of the retina or the junction of the optic nerve with the brain’s

visual nuclei, but rather the contours of the perceived object. This means, for example, that when I am viewing a tree, a ray of perception emitted from my eye “con-forms” to the surface of the tree. The ray brings the image of the tree

back to my eye, which communicates it to my mind, which in turn communicates it to my inner self or consciousness. In the case of yogi perception, the

practice of yoga enhances this process (in some cases, establishing an unmediated connection between consciousness and the perceived object), such that

the viewer not only sees things as they truly are, but is also able to directly see through the surface of things into their innermost being. For non-Buddhists, this applies, most importantly, to the perception of one’s own inner self as well as the selves or souls of others. From here, it is but a short step to conceiving of the viewer possessed of the power of yogi perception—texts often call him a yogi—as possessing the power to physically penetrate, with his enhanced

I n t r o d u c t i o n 11

cognitive apparatus, into other people’s bodies (White 2009: 122–66). This is the theory underlying the Tantric practice of “subtle yoga” described at the

beginning of this introduction. But in fact, the earliest references in all of Indian literature to individuals explicitly called yogis are Mahābhārata tales of

Hindu and Buddhist hermits who take over other people’s bodies in just this way; and it is noteworthy that when yogis enter into other people’s bodies, they are said to do so through rays emanating from their eyes. The epic also

asserts that a yogi so empowered can take over several thousand bodies simultaneously, and “walk the earth with all of them.” Buddhist sources describe the

same phenomenon with the important difference that the enlightened being

creates multiple bodies rather than taking over those belonging to other creatures. This is a notion already elaborated in an early Buddhist work, the *Sāmaññaphalasutta*, a teaching contained in the *Dīgha Nikāya* (the “Longer Sayings” of the Buddha), according to which a monk who has completed the four

Buddhist meditations gains, among other things, the power to self-multiply. Several of the key terms found in this text reappear, with specific reference to yoga and yogis, in the 100 BCE–200 CE Indian medical classic, the *Caraka Samhitā* [Wujastyk].

The ability to enter into and control the bodies of other creatures is but one of the supernatural powers (*iddhis* in Pali; *siddhis* or *vibhūti*s in Sanskrit) that arise from the power of extrasensory perception (*abhiññā* in Pali; *abhijñā* in

Sanskrit). Others include the power of flight, clairaudience, telepathy, invisibility, and the recollection of past lives—precisely the sorts of powers that the

yogis of Indian legend have been said to possess.

Here, it is helpful to introduce the difference between “yogi practice” and “yoga practice,” which has been implicit to South Asian thought and practice since the beginning of the Common Era, the period in which the terms “yogi” and “yogi perception” first appeared in the Indian scriptural record. On the one

hand, there is “yoga practice,” which essentially denotes a program of mind-training and meditation issuing in the realization of enlightenment, liberation,

or isolation from the world of suffering existence. Yoga practice is the practical

application of the theoretical precepts of the various yogic soteriologies, epistemologies, and gnoseologies presented in analytical works like the YS and the

teachings of the various Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain philosophical schools. Yogi practice, on the other hand, concerns the supernatural powers that empower yogis to take over other creatures’ bodies and so forth. Nearly every one of the earliest narrative descriptions of yogis and their practices underscore the axiom that the penetration of other bodies is the sine qua non of yoga.

The cleavage between these two more or less incompatible bodies of theory and practice can be traced back to early Buddhist sources, which speak of a

12 David Gordon White

rivalry between meditating “experimentalists” (jhāyins) and “speculatives”

(dhammayogas). In medieval Tantra, the same division obtained, this time between practitioners whose meditative practice led to gnosis and identity with

the divine on the one hand, and on the other, practitioners—referred to as yogis or sādhakas—whose goal was this-worldly supernatural power in one’s now invulnerable, ageless, and adamant human body. The gulf between yoga practice and yogi practice never ceased to widen over the centuries, such that, by the time of the British Raj, India’s hordes of yogis were considered by India’s elites to be little more than common criminals, with their fraudulent practices—utterly at odds with the “true” science of yoga, which, taught in the

YS, was practiced by none—save perhaps for a handful of isolated hermits living high in the Himalayas (Oman 1908: 3–30).

These four sets of concepts and practices form the core and foundational

vocabulary of nearly every yoga tradition, school, or system, with all that follow the fourth- to seventh-century watershed—of the YS and various foundational Buddhist and Jain works on meditation and yogi perception—simply

variations and expansions on this common core.

Medieval Developments

Yoga in the Tantras

The Tantras are pivotal works in the history of yoga, inasmuch as they carry

forward both the yoga and yogi practices and the gnoseological theory of earlier traditions while introducing important innovations in theory and practice.

On the theoretical side, these medieval scriptures and commentarial traditions promulgate a new variation on the preexisting yoga soteriology. No longer is the practitioner's ultimate goal liberation from suffering existence, but rather self-deification: one becomes the deity that has been one's object of meditation.

In a universe that is nothing other than the flow of divine consciousness, raising one's consciousness to the level of god-consciousness—that is, attaining a

god's-eye view that sees the universe as internal to one's own transcendent Self—is tantamount to becoming divine. A primary means to this end is the detailed visualization of the deity with which one will ultimately identify: his or her form, face(s), color, attributes, entourage, and so on. So, for example, in

the yoga of the Hindu Pāñcarātra sect, a practitioner's meditation on successive emanations of the god Visnu culminates in his realization of the state of

“consisting in god” (Rastelli 2009: 299–317). The Tantric Buddhist cognate to this is “deity yoga” (devayoga), whereby the practitioner meditatively assumes the attributes and creates the environment (i.e., the Buddha world) of the Buddha-deity he or she is about to become.

I n t r o d u c t i o n 13

In fact, the term yoga has a wide variety of connotations in the Tantras. It can simply mean “practice” or “discipline” in a very broad sense, covering all of the means at one's disposal to realize one's goals. It can also refer to the goal itself: “conjunction,” “union,” or identity with divine consciousness. Indeed, the Mālinīvijayottara Tantra, an important ninth-century Śākta-Śaiva Tantra, uses the term yoga to denote its entire soteriological system (Vasudeva 2004). In Buddhist Tantra—whose canonical teachings are divided into the exoteric Yoga Tantras and the increasingly esoteric Higher Yoga Tantras, Supreme

Yoga Tantras, Unexcelled (or Unsurpassed) Yoga Tantras, and Yoginī Tantras—yoga has the dual sense of both the means and ends of practice. Yoga

can also have the more particular, limited sense of a program of meditation or visualization, as opposed to ritual (kriyā) or gnostic (jñāna) practice. However, these categories of practice often bleed into one another. Finally, there are specific types of yogic discipline, such as the Netra Tantra's transcendent and subtle yogas, already discussed.

Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Tantra—and with it, Buddhist Tantric Yoga—developed in lockstep with Hindu Tantra, with a hierarchy of revelations ranging from earlier, exoteric systems of practice to the sex- and death-laden imagery of later esoteric pantheons, in which horrific skull-wielding Buddhas

were surrounded by the same yoginīs as their Hindu counterparts, the Bhairavas of the esoteric Hindu Tantras. In the Buddhist Unexcelled Yoga Tantras,

“six-limbed yoga” comprised the visualization practices that facilitated the realization of one’s innate identity with the deity [Wallace]. But rather than

simply being a means to an end in these traditions, yoga was also primarily an end in itself: yoga was “union” or identity with the celestial Buddha named

Vajrasattva—the “Diamond Essence (of Enlightenment),” that is, one’s Buddha nature. However, the same Tantras of the Diamond Path (Vajrayāna) also

implied that the innate nature of that union rendered the conventional practices undertaken for its realization ultimately irrelevant [Dalton].

Here, one can speak of two principal styles of Tantric Yoga, which coincide with their respective metaphysics. The former, which recurs in the earliest Tantric traditions, involves exoteric practices: visualization, generally pure ritual offerings, worship, and the use of mantras. The dualist metaphysics of these traditions maintains that there is an ontological difference between god and creature, which can gradually be overcome through concerted effort and practice. The latter, esoteric, traditions develop out of the former even as they reject much of exoteric theory and practice. In these systems, esoteric practice,

involving the real or symbolic consumption of forbidden substances and sexual transactions with forbidden partners, is the fast track to self-deification.

However, given the non-dualist metaphysics of esoteric Tantra, which maintains that all creatures are innately divine or enlightened, such practices are

14 David Gordon White

considered ultimately unnecessary. A number of Tantric scriptures and commentaries underscore the complementarity of the exoteric and esoteric approaches, urging that the yogi’s central task is to balance the two: this is the

position taken, for example, by the Buddhist Mahāsiddha Saraha in his analysis of the doctrines and practices of the Yoginī Tantras [Jackson].

In the exoteric Tantras, visualization, ritual offerings, worship, and the use of mantras were the means to the gradual realization of one’s identity with the absolute. In later, esoteric traditions, however, the expansion of consciousness to a divine level was instantaneously triggered through the consumption of forbidden substances: semen, menstrual blood, feces, urine, human flesh, and the like. Menstrual or uterine blood, which was considered to be the most powerful among these forbidden substances, could be accessed through sexual relations with female Tantric consorts. Various called yoginīs, dākinīs, or dūtīs, these were ideally low-caste human women who were considered to be possessed by, or embodiments of, Tantric goddesses. In the case of the yoginīs,

these were the same goddesses as those that ate their victims in the practice of “transcendent yoga.” Whether by consuming the sexual emissions of these forbidden women or through the bliss of sexual orgasm with them, Tantric yogis could “blow their minds” and realize a breakthrough into transcendent levels of consciousness. Once again, yogic consciousness-raising doubled with the physical rise of the yogi’s body through space, in this case in the embrace of the yoginī or dākinī who, as an embodied goddess, was possessed of the power of flight. It was for this reason that the medieval yoginī temples were roofless: they were the yoginīs’ landing fields and launching pads (White 2003: 7–13, 204–18).

In many Tantras, such as the eighth-century CE Matangapārameśvarāgama of the Hindu Śaivasiddhānta school, this visionary ascent became actualized in the practitioner’s rise through the levels of the universe until, arriving at the highest void, the supreme deity Sadāśiva conferred his own divine rank upon him (Sanderson 2006: 205–6). It is in such a context—of a graded hierarchy of stages or states of consciousness, with corresponding deities, mantras, and cosmological levels—that the Tantras innovated the construct known as the “subtle body” or “yogic body.” Here, the practitioner’s body became identified with the entire universe, such that all of the processes and transformations occurring to his body in the world were now described as occurring to a world

inside his body. While the breath channels (nādīs) of yogic practice had already been discussed in the classical Upanisads, it was not until such Tantric

works as the eighth-century Buddhist Hevajra Tantra and Caryāgīti that a hierarchy of inner energy centers—variously called cakras (“circles,” “wheels”), padmas (“lotuses”), or pīthas (“mounds”)—were introduced. These early Bud-

I n t r o d u c t i o n 15

dhist sources only mention four such centers aligned along the spinal column, but in the centuries that follow, Hindu Tantras such as the Kubjikāmata and Kaulajñānanirnaya would expand that number to five, six, seven, eight, and more. The so-called classical hierarchy of seven cakras—ranging from the mūlādhāra at the level of the anus to the sahasrāra in the cranial vault, replete with color coding, fixed numbers of petals linked to the names of yoginīs, the

graphemes and phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet—was a still later development. So too was the introduction of the kundalinī, the female Serpent Energy coiled at the base of the yogic body, whose awakening and rapid rise effects the practitioner’s inner transformation (White 2003: 220–34).

Given the wide range of applications of the term yoga in the Tantras, the semantic field of the term “yogi” is relatively circumscribed. Yogis who forcefully take over the bodies of other creatures are the villains of countless medieval accounts, including the tenth- to eleventh-century Kashmirian

Kathāsaritsāgara (“Ocean of Rivers of Story,” which contains the famous Vetālapañcavimsatī—the “Twenty-five Tales of the Zombie”) and the Yogavā-

sistha. In the seventh-century farce entitled *Bhagavadajjukīya*, the “Tale of the Saint Courtesan,” a yogi who briefly occupies the body of a dead prostitute is cast as a comic figure. Well into the twentieth century, the term yogi continued to be used nearly exclusively to refer to a Tantric practitioner who opted for this-worldly self-aggrandizement over disembodied liberation. Tantric yogis specialize in esoteric practices, often carried out in cremation grounds, practices that often verge on black magic and sorcery. Once again, this was, overwhelmingly, the primary sense of the term “yogi” in pre-modern Indic traditions: nowhere prior to the seventeenth century do we find it applied to persons seated in fixed postures, regulating their breath or entering into meditative states.

Hatha Yoga

A new regimen of yoga called the “yoga of forceful exertion” rapidly emerges as a comprehensive system in the tenth to eleventh century, as evidenced in works like the *Yogavāsistha* and the original *Goraksa Śataka* (“Hundred Verses of Goraksa”) [Mallinson]. While the famous cakras, nādīs, and kundalinī pre-date its advent, hatha yoga is entirely innovative in its depiction of the yogic body as a pneumatic, but also a hydraulic and a thermodynamic system. The practice of breath control becomes particularly refined in the hathayogic texts, with elaborate instructions provided concerning the calibrated regulation of the breaths. In certain sources, the duration of time during which the breath is held is of primary importance, with lengthened periods of breath stoppage

16 David Gordon White

corresponding to expanded levels of supernatural power. This science of the breath had a number of offshoots, including a form of divination based on the movements of the breath within and outside of the body, an esoteric tradition that found its way into medieval Tibetan and Persian [Ernst] sources.

In a novel variation on the theme of consciousness-raising-as-internal-ascent, hatha yoga also represents the yogic body as a sealed hydraulic system within which vital fluids may be channeled upward as they are refined into nectar through the heat of asceticism. Here, the semen of the practitioner, lying inert in the coiled body of the serpentine kundalinī in the lower abdomen, becomes heated through the bellows effect of *prānāyāma*, the repeated inflation and deflation of the peripheral breath channels. The awakened kundalinī suddenly straightens and enters into the *susumnā*, the medial channel that runs the length of the spinal column up to the cranial vault. Propelled

by the yogi's heated breaths, the hissing kundalinī serpent shoots upward, piercing each of the cakras as she rises. With the penetration of each succeeding cakra, vast amounts of heat are released, such that the semen contained in the kundalinī's body becomes gradually transmuted. This body of theory and practice was quickly adopted in both Jain and Buddhist Tantric works. In the Buddhist case, the cognate of the kundalinī was the fiery avadhūtī or candālī ("outcaste woman"), whose union with the male principle in the cranial vault caused the fluid "thought of enlightenment" (bodhicitta) to flood the practitioner's body.

The cakras of the yogic body are identified in hathayogic sources not only as so many internalized cremation grounds—both the favorite haunts of the medieval Tantric yogis, and those sites on which a burning fire releases the self from the body before hurling it skyward—but also as "circles" of dancing, howling, high-flying yoginīs whose flight is fueled, precisely, by their ingestion of male semen. When the kundalinī reaches the end of her rise and bursts into the cranial vault, the semen that she has been carrying has been transformed into the nectar of immortality, which the yogi then drinks internally from the bowl of his own skull. With it, he becomes an immortal, invulnerable, being possessed of supernatural powers, a god on earth.

Without a doubt, hatha yoga both synthesizes and internalizes many of the elements of earlier yoga systems: meditative ascent, upward mobility via the flight of the yoginī (now replaced by the kundalinī), and a number of esoteric Tantric practices. It is also probable that the thermodynamic transformations internal to Hindu alchemy, the essential texts of which predate the hatha yoga canon by at least a century, also provided a set of theoretical models for the new system (White 1996).

With respect to modern-day postural yoga, hatha yoga's greatest legacy is to

I n t r o d u c t i o n 17

be found in the combination of fixed postures (āsanas), breath control techniques (prānāyāma), locks (bandhas), and seals (mudrās) that comprise its

practical side. These are the practices that isolate the inner yogic body from the outside, such that it becomes a hermetically sealed system within which air and fluids can be drawn upward, against their normal downward flow. These techniques are described in increasing detail between the tenth and fifteenth centuries, the period of the flowering of the hatha yoga corpus. In later centuries, a canonical number of eighty-four āsanās would be reached (Bühnemann 2007).

Often, the practice system of hatha yoga is referred to as "six-limbed" yoga, as a means of distinguishing it from the "eight-limbed" practice of the YS.

What the two systems generally share in common with one another—as well as with the yoga systems of the late classical Upanisads, the later Yoga Upanisads, and every Buddhist yoga system—are posture, breath control, and the three levels of meditative concentration leading to samādhi. In the YS, these six practices are preceded by behavioral restraints and purificatory ritual observances (yama and niyama). The Jain yoga systems of both the eighth-century Haribhadra and the tenth- to thirteenth-century Digambara Jain monk Rāmasena are also eight-limbed [Dundas]. By the time of the fifteenth-century CE Hathayogapradīpikā (also known as the Hathapradīpikā) of

Svātmārāman, this distinction had become codified under a different set of terms: hatha yoga, which comprised the practices leading to liberation in the body (jīvanmukti) was made to be the inferior stepsister of rāja yoga, the meditative techniques that culminate in the cessation of suffering through disembodied liberation (videha mukti). These categories could, however, be subverted, as a remarkable albeit idiosyncratic eighteenth-century Tantric document makes abundantly clear [Vasudeva].

Here, it should be noted that prior to the end of the first millennium CE, detailed descriptions of āsanās were nowhere to be found in the Indian textual record. In the light of this, any claim that sculpted images of cross-legged

figures—including those represented on the famous clay seals from third millennium BCE Indus Valley archeological sites—represent yogic postures are

speculative at best (White 2009: 48–59).

The Nāth Yogīs

All of the earliest Sanskrit-language works on hatha yoga are attributed to Gorakhnāth, the twelfth- to thirteenth-century founder of the religious order known as the Nāth Yogīs, Nāth Siddhas, or simply, the yogīs. The Nāth Yogīs were and remain the sole South Asian order to self-identify as yogīs, which

18 D a v i d G o r d o n W h i t e

makes perfect sense given their explicit agenda of bodily immortality, invulnerability, and the attainment of supernatural powers. While little is known of

the life of this founder and innovator, Gorakhnāth's prestige was such that an important number of seminal hatha yoga works, many of which postdated the historical Gorakhnāth by several centuries, named him as their author in order to lend them a cachet of authenticity. In addition to these Sanskrit-language guides to the practice of hatha yoga, Gorakhnāth and several of his disciples were also the putative authors of a rich treasury of mystic poetry, written in the vernacular language of twelfth- to fourteenth-century northwest India. These poems contain particularly vivid descriptions of the yogic body, identifying its

inner landscapes with the principal mountains, river systems, and other landforms of the Indian subcontinent as well as with the imagined worlds of medieval Indic cosmology. This legacy would be carried forward in the later Yoga

Upanisads as well as in the mystic poetry of the late medieval Tantric revival of the eastern region of Bengal [Hayes]. It also survives in popular traditions

of rural north India, where the esoteric teachings of yogi gurus of yore continue to be sung by modern-day yogi bards in all-night village gatherings

[Gold and Gold].

Given their reputed supernatural powers, the Tantric yogis of medieval adventure and fantasy literature were often cast as rivals to princes and kings

whose thrones and harems they tried to usurp. In the case of the Nāth Yogīs, these relationships were real and documented, with members of their order celebrated in a number of kingdoms across northern and western India for having brought down tyrants and raised untested princes to the throne. These feats are also chronicled in late medieval Nāth Yogī hagiographies and legend cycles, which feature princes who abandon the royal life to take initiation with illustrious gurus, and yogis who use their remarkable supernatural powers for the benefit (or to the detriment) of kings. All of the great Mughal emperors had interactions with the Nāth Yogīs, including Aurangzeb, who appealed to a yogi abbot for an alchemical aphrodisiac; Shāh Alam II, whose fall from

power was foretold by a naked yogi; and the illustrious Akbar, whose fascination and political savvy brought him into contact with Nāth Yogīs on several

occasions [Pinch].

While it is often difficult to separate fact from fiction in the case of the Nāth Yogīs, there can be no doubt but that they were powerful figures who provoked powerful reactions on the part of the humble and mighty alike. At the height of their power between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, they appeared frequently in the writings of north Indian poet-saints (sants)

like Kabīr and Guru Nānak, who generally castigated them for their arrogance and obsession with worldly power. The Nāth Yogīs were among the first

I n t r o d u c t i o n 19

religious orders to militarize into fighting units, a practice that became so commonplace that by the eighteenth century the north Indian military labor market was dominated by “yogi” warriors who numbered in the hundreds of thousands (Pinch 2006)! It was not until the late eighteenth century, when the British quashed the so-called Sannyasi and Fakir Rebellion in Bengal, that the widespread phenomenon of the yogi warrior began to disappear from the Indian subcontinent.

Like the Sufi fakirs with whom they were often associated, the yogis were widely considered by India’s rural peasantry to be superhuman allies who

could protect them from the supernatural entities responsible for disease, famine, misfortune, and death. Yet, the same yogis have long been dreaded and feared for the havoc they are capable of wreaking on persons weaker than themselves. Even to the present day in rural India and Nepal, parents will scold naughty children by threatening them that “the yogi will come and take

them away.” There may be a historical basis to this threat: well into the modern period, poverty-stricken villagers sold their children into the yogi orders

as an acceptable alternative to death by starvation.

The Yoga Upanisads

The Yoga Upanisads [Ruff] are a collection of twenty-one medieval Indian reinterpretations of the so-called classical Upanisads, that is, works like the Kathaka Upanisad, quoted earlier. Their content is devoted to metaphysical correspondences between the universal macrocosm and bodily microcosm, meditation, mantra, and techniques of yogic practice. While it is the case that their content is quite entirely derivative of Tantric and Nāth Yogī traditions, their originality lies in their Vedānta-style non-dualist metaphysics (Bouy 1994). The earliest works of this corpus, devoted to meditation upon mantras—especially OM, the acoustic essence of the absolute brahman—were compiled in north India some time between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. Between

the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, south Indian brahmins greatly expanded these works—folding into them a wealth of data from the Hindu Tantras as well as the hatha yoga traditions of the Nāth Yogīs, including the

kundalinī, the yogic āsanās, and the internal geography of the yogic body. So it is that many of the Yoga Upanisads exist both in short “northern” and longer “southern” versions. Far to the north, in Nepal, one finds the same influences

and philosophical orientations in the Vairāgyāmvara, a work on yoga composed by the eighteenth-century founder of the Josmanī sect. In some respects,

its author Śaśidhara’s political and social activism anticipated the agendas of the nineteenth-century Indian founders of modern yoga [Timilsina].

20 D a v i d G o r d o n W h i t e

Modern Yoga

In Calcutta, colonial India’s most important center of intellectual life, the late

nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new “holy man” style among leaders of the Indian reform and independence movement. A prime catalyst for

this shift was the 1882 publication of Bankim Chandra Chatterji’s powerful

and controversial Bengali novel *Ānandamath* (Lipner 2005), which drew parallels between the Sannyasi and Fakir Rebellion and the cause of Indian independence. In the years and decades that followed, numerous (mainly Bengali)

reformers shed their Western-style clothing to put on the saffron robes of

Indian holy men. These included, most notably, Swami Vivekananda, the Indian founder of “modern yoga” (De Michelis 2004: 91–180); and Sri Aurobindo, who was jailed by the British for plotting a *sannyāsī* revolt against the

Empire but who devoted the latter part of his life to yoga, founding his famous āśram in Pondicherry in 1926. While the other leading yoga gurus of the first half of the twentieth century had no reform or political agenda, they left their

mark by carrying the gospel of modern yoga to the west. These include Paramahansa Yogananda, the author of the perennial best-selling 1946 publication, *Autobiography of a Yogi*; Sivananda, who was for a short time the guru of

the pioneering yoga scholar and historian of religions Mircea Eliade; Kuvalayananda, who focused on the modern scientific and medical benefits of yoga

practice (Alter 2004: 73–108); Hariharananda Aranya, the founder of the Kapila Matha [Jacobsen]; and Krishnamacharya [Singleton, Narasimhan, and

Jayashree], the guru of the three hatha yoga masters most responsible for popularizing postural yoga throughout the world in the late twentieth century.

Vivekananda’s rehabilitation of what he termed “*rāja yoga*” is exemplary, for its motives, its influences, and its content. A shrewd culture broker seeking a way to turn his countrymen away from practices he termed “kitchen religion,” Vivekananda seized upon the symbolic power of yoga as a genuinely Indian,

yet non-sectarian, type of applied philosophy that could be wielded as a “unifying sign of the Indian nation . . . not only for national consumption but for

consumption by the entire world” (Van der Veer 2001: 73–74). For Vivekananda, *rāja yoga*, or “classical yoga,” was the science of yoga taught in the *Yoga*

Sūtra, a notion he took from none other than the Theosophist Madame Blavatsky, who had a strong Indian following in the late nineteenth century. Following his success in introducing *rāja yoga* to western audiences at the 1892

World Parliament of Religions at Chicago, Vivekananda remained in the United States for much of the next decade (he died in 1902), lecturing and writing on the *YS*. His quite idiosyncratic interpretations of this work were

I n t r o d u c t i o n 21

highly congenial to the religiosity of the period, which found expression in India mainly through the rationalist spirituality of Neo-Vedānta. So it was

that Vivekananda defined *rāja yoga* as the supreme contemplative path to self-realization, in which the self so realized was the supreme self, the absolute

brahman or god-self within.

While Vivekananda's influence on present-day understandings of yoga theory is incalculable, his disdain for the means and ends of hatha yoga practice

were such that that form of yoga—the principal traditional source of modern postural yoga—was slow to be embraced by the modern world. It should be noted here that within India, the tradition of hatha yoga had been all but lost, and that it was not until the publication of a number of editions of late hatha

yoga texts, by the Theosophical Society and others, that interest in it was rekindled. Indeed, none other than the great Krishnamacharya himself went to

Tibet in search of true practitioners of a tradition he considered lost in India (Kadetsky 2004: 76–79). One of the earliest American practitioners to study yoga under Indian teachers and later attempt to market the teachings of hatha yoga in the west, Theos Bernard died in Tibet in the 1930s while searching there for the yogic “grail” [Hackett].

Whatever Krishnamacharya found in his journey to Tibet, the yoga that he

taught in his role of “yoga master” of the Mysore Palace was an eclectic amalgam of hatha yoga techniques, British military calisthenics, and the regional

gymnastic and wrestling traditions of southwestern India (Sjoman 1996). Beginning in the 1950s, his three leading disciples—B. K. S. Iyengar, K. Pattabhi

Jois, and T.K.V. Desikachar—would introduce their own variations on his techniques and so define the postural yoga that has swept Europe, the United States, and much of the rest of the world. The direct and indirect disciples of

these three innovators form the vanguard of yoga teachers on the contemporary scene. The impact of these innovators of yoga, with their eclectic blend of

training in postures with teachings from the YS, also had the secondary effect of catalyzing a reform within the Śvetāmbara Jain community, opening the door to the emergence of a universalistic and missionary yoga-based Jainism in the United Kingdom in particular [Qvarnström and Birch].

In the course of the past thirty years, yoga has been transformed more than at any time since the advent of hatha yoga in the tenth to eleventh centuries (Syman 2010). The theoretical pairing of yoga with mind-expanding drugs, the practice of “cakra adjustment,” the use of crystals: these are but a few of the entirely original improvisations on a four-thousand-year-old theme, which have been invented outside of India during the past decades. Aware of this appropriation of what it rightly considers to be its own cultural legacy, Indians have begun to take steps to safeguard their yoga traditions.