

# **3rd International Academic Conference: Yoga Darśana, Yoga Sādhana**

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## **Book of Abstracts**



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## Institutionalisation / 5

### A Post-Kantian Patañjali? Surendranath Dasgupta on the Ethics of the Yoga Sūtras

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Drawing upon the work of Surendranath Dasgupta (1887-1952), this paper explores a set of deep and unexpected parallels between the ethical theories of Patañjali and the post-Kantian philosopher J. G. Fichte. In *Yoga as Philosophy and Religion* (1924), Dasgupta claims that Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* put forward two essential requirements for reaching ultimate liberation: (1) an ethical ideal of absolute freedom and (2) a path of action that leads towards this ideal. Dasgupta terms this "yoga ethics"—and he hints at a parallel in the western philosophical canon in Fichte's notion of striving for self-sufficiency. My paper proceeds in three parts: §I examines the evidence of Dasgupta's familiarity with Fichte's *Das System der Sittenlehre* (*The System of Ethics*, 1798), demonstrating his awareness of its systematic affinities with classical Yoga. §II turns to a comparative analysis of the ethical principles of the *Yoga Sūtras* and Fichte's moral philosophy, highlighting their common notions of ethical practice, moral perfection, and freedom. Finally, §III briefly reflects on the significance of such cross-cultural encounters in the history of ethics, recognizing the value of exploring diverse intellectual traditions across geographical boundary lines.

## Introspection / 8

### Postured: Women, Nation and Yoga in Twentieth Century India

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This paper begins with the paradox of women in yoga: how did yoga come to be practiced by women, when prior to the twentieth century physical yoga was primarily a practice for high caste men? The answer suggested in this paper is nationalism.

This paper argues that women, nation and yoga are interdependent, co-constructed ideas. These ideas were shaped in meaning during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yoga, which has always been a generic term, became a practice of health at the same time women became signifiers of nation. Given the need for a healthy nation, women were brought into the practice of yoga to effectively strengthen the nation and produce the next generation of healthy nationalists.

This paper is situated in early twentieth century India and examines the first published materials on yoga which teach āsana (posture) and prāṇāyāma (breath control). These materials focus on health. Examined are Sita Devi's 1934 manual *Easy Postures for Woman*, the first authored by a woman from India and previously not engaged with in scholarship; the magazine "Yoga Mīmāṃsā" from 1924–1925; and the 1929 manual *Sūrya Namaskārs*. This paper examines these sources through the lens of gender and post-colonial theory. It explores the ways in which the demographic of yoga practitioners changed and what that meant for the greater social and national debates. This paper also addresses the current use of yoga in Hindutva politics.

In support, this paper draws upon two extant bodies of historical scholarship: yogic studies and historical analysis of colonial South Asia. It highlights themes of tradition, mother, asceticism, beauty, caste, race and eugenics.

Inspiration / 10

## To meditate, to stretch, to amuse: multiple meanings of āsanās among Indian sādhus

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What is an āsana for a sādhu? And what are the contexts and uses in which āsanās are performed? This presentation aims to unveil the different meanings of āsanās among contemporary sādhus, starting with āsana as the physical place to sit to practice any sādhanā. It will then present three typologies of āsanās –spiritual, physical, tapasic –and the contexts in which they are performed. These different meanings will also be framed historically, showing how distinct uses of āsanās have developed over the centuries and still co-exist today. The aim of this presentation, therefore, is to broaden our approach to āsanās by considering a traditional setting in which they are experienced by practitioners in a variety of ways, depending on their background, age, and goals.

Daniela Bevilacqua is an Indianist, specialized in Hindu asceticism, investigated through an ethnographic and historical perspective. She is currently a researcher at CRIA (ISCTE-IUL) in Lisbon. She worked as a post-doc research fellow at SOAS, for the ERC- funded Haṭha Yoga Project (2015–2020). She authored *Modern Hindu Traditionalism in Contemporary India*, published by Routledge, *From Tapas to Modern Yoga* forthcoming in 2024 published by Equinox, and several articles and book chapters on topics related to Hindu religious tradition, gender, and embodied practices.

Inspiration / 11

## For the Purpose of Awakening Ignorant People: The Incorporation of Yoga into Advaita Vedānta in the Aparokṣānubhūti

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The *Aparokṣānubhūti*, attributed to Śaṅkarācārya, although probably written closer to the early sixteenth century, emerged as part of the growing response to the increased output of *haṭhayoga* texts. It incorporates a unique fifteen-part path of *rājayoga*—including a redefined, brahman-centric version of the *aṅgas* of Patañjali that similarly culminates in *samādhi*—into the Advaitic core of the text that ultimately leads to direct awareness of the self, as the name of the text suggests. It justifies this inclusivity through a widening of the definition of key terms, such as *nididhyāsana*, contemplation—considered by some of the commentaries to be synonymous with introspection (*anusandhāna*)—to incorporate these practices, in order to address the *prārabdha* (ripe) *karma* of ignorant people (*ajñānījanabodhārtham*). By subverting its competing claims into its domain, this allowed for the incorporation of the dualistic system of Yoga/Sāṃkhya into nondual Advaita, which contributed to its growing appeal, and reciprocally played a big role in the success of modern yoga.



**Inspiration / 12****Yogic Body in Ālāol's Padmābatī****Author:** Lubomír Ondračka<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup> Charles University**Corresponding Author:** ondracka@ff.cuni.cz

Malik Muḥammad Jāyasī's poem *Padumāvāt*, composed in Old Awadhi in 1540, is the most famous Sufi composition of the *premākhyān* genre. Due to its popularity, it has been adapted into Persian and several South Asian languages. The Middle Bengali version, called *Padmābatī*, was produced by the excellent poet Ālāol in 1651. He not only retained most of the yogic elements from Jāyasī's work, but added a number of others, such as a rather extensive description of the yogic body, which has no counterpart in the Awadhi original.

In my presentation, I will first briefly compare the yoga material of the *Yogi-khaṇḍa* section in both works and then focus on Ālāol's additions, especially his description of the yogic body. I will try to answer two main questions. First, whether it is possible to identify the source of the Ālāol's concept of the yogic body. Second, and most importantly, why in fact this Muslim poet, educated in Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic literature, kidnapped by Portuguese Christian pirates, sold into slavery in the Buddhist kingdom of Arakan, writing in its capital Mrauk U for a Muslim Bengali audience, felt the need to incorporate rather technical passages of tantric yoga into his adaptation of this famous Sufi romance. Does this have any significance for the history of yoga? In other words, what can we learn from this fact?

**Introspection / 13****THE ROLE OF ABSORPTION: THE KEY OF SPIRITUALITY IN MODERN POSTURAL YOGA****Author:** Adriana Maldonado<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup> Open University**Corresponding Author:** maldonado.adri@gmail.com

This paper explores the Role of Absorption in Modern Postural Yoga (MPY). Yoga as a modern and secular practice is often linked with spirituality; the paper argues that the key to this association is mental absorption and a person's ability to control their attention for a period to access, deep or light, Altered States of Consciousness (ASCs). Certain techniques, practices and modern rituals allow individuals to experience spirituality through ASCs; this is not necessarily limited to seated meditation but can involve movement, sometimes vigorous, and breathing practices. A key aspect that characterises MPY and influences ASCs is the mixing of concentration techniques and philosophical teachings with physical practices through the legacy and the innovation of key figures of yoga and their influence in secular settings. This study would aim to bring clarity to the role of absorption within the practice of yoga, it would highlight the ongoing development of new practices and rituals and discuss how these have evolved into its modern westernised postural yoga versions. It would also discuss the ways absorption induced by yoga practices can support mental and physical health.

The paper draws from my MA dissertation, which explored Trance and Yoga, and sets out the initial ideas underpinning my current PhD research at the UK's Open University.

Adriana - Bio

Adriana became a BWY Level 4 500+ yoga teacher in 2017. She completed an MA in Traditions of Yoga and Meditation at SOAS in 2021 and starts a PhD at the Open University in 2023 exploring the Role of Absorption in Modern Postural Yoga. She has been teaching History and Philosophy of yoga at Yoga Teacher Trainings since 2021 and continues teaching yoga.

## Inspiration / 14

# Paradox of Pranayama: the breath's path from god to element

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This paper investigates the transition of prāṇa from a central deity to a mere element of the material world, one that must be restrained and even stopped in favor of the mind and the eternal ātman. Given the Vedic and early Upaniṣadic importance of prāṇa and the breath, how can we understand the restraint of prāṇa —prāṇāyāma —in classical and later yogic teachings?

In the early Upaniṣads, prāṇa is the greatest of the five deities: breath, mind, sight, speech and semen. The 'contest of the faculties' is repeated throughout the Upaniṣads to illuminate the superiority and vitality of the breath. Then a twofold transformation occurs. Prāṇa is demoted as the middle Upaniṣads turn toward the ātman as the ultimate essence of existence. The present paper examines this transformation.

First is the 'mentalisation' of spiritual practice. With the development of early systems of Sāṃkhya, the material universe is explained as an intellectual creation —one that unfolds through the buddhi first before evolving into grosser elements. The breath and prāṇa are overlooked in most iterations of Sāṃkhya, the systems that inform the development and early practice of yoga. This paper examines how, in these systems, the pursuit of human spiritual liberation is via the mind and intellect rather than the breath.

Second is the stopping of the material to pursue the eternal; the desire to restrain or stop the material elements in order to realize the spiritual. This includes restraining the senses and stopping the turnings of the mind, in search of the "breath behind the breath". The breath, as part of material manifestation, must be stopped in pursuit of puruṣa. Thus prāṇāyāma is born, the restraint of the breath.

The methodology of this paper is historical, philological and intertextual, drawing from the Veda, the principal Upaniṣads, the Mahābhārata, the Sāṃkhyakārikā and the Pātañjalayogaśāstra.

## Institutionalisation / 15

# Patañjali in Contemporary India: Role and Representations

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Patañjali was the name of a premodern Indian sage to whom important works on Sanskrit grammar, yoga philosophy and the medical system of Āyurveda are ascribed. In recent decades increasing attention has focused on Patañjali as the authority on and figurehead of yoga. Some authorities now also consider Patañjali a patron of music and dance, and in South Indian traditions he sometimes features as one of the Siddhas, physician-chemists believed to possess tantric attainments or perfections (siddhi).

Believed to be the author of the Yogasūtras, which has attained canonical status in many yoga traditions, Patañjali has been appropriated by various contemporary authorities, yoga centers and Āyurvedic institutions. This development has led to the creation and installation of different types of visual representations, a process that is still ongoing. The modern engagement with Patañjali's visual form appears to have begun in the 1980s in South India and includes statues and paintings. Yoga guru Swami Ramdev has popularized Patañjali's name as an authority on Yoga and Āyurveda throughout India. He adopted the name for a line of products marketed as Patanjali® and Patanjali Ayurved® and named a network of educational institutions in India after the sage. He installed a large Patañjali statue on the premises of one of these institutions, the Patanjali Yogpeeth, in 2006. It

is only one of several statues of Patañjali placed in public spaces in contemporary India, the Patañjali shrine in the Dhyānalinga temple complex at the Isha Yoga Centre inaugurated in 1999 perhaps being the oldest. This paper surveys visual representations of the sage in various parts of modern India and examines their function and significance.

**Inspiration / 17**

## **Yoga and Psychology in Dharmapala's Buddhism**

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The Sri Lankan Buddhist Theosophist Anagarika Dharmapala is most commonly remembered as the instigator of the Sri Lankan Buddhist revival movement and as a close collaborator with the Theosophists Blavatsky and Olcott. However, his work on psychology as well as on Yoga is less known. In this presentation I will engage with his writings on both of these topics and will argue that his unique mixture of these transgressed the boundaries of notions of the Self in Buddhism until then. The debate on the Self in Buddhist Psychology is omnipresent in Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhism and I argue that Dharmapala used his notion of Yoga to solve this conundrum. This, however, was inspired by his theosophical readings much more than an existing yogic tradition in Sri Lanka.

**Introspection / 18**

## **People and Monkeys in Yoga Poses in the Wall Paintings Decorating the Buddhist Caves of Kucha**

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Kucha was an oasis kingdom that ruled the region centered around present Aksu Prefecture, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China, before the 10th century. The local population was mostly Buddhists before they converted to become Muslims around 9th and 10th centuries, and they carved numerous Buddhist cave monasteries and nunneries.

Those cave monasteries consisted of the cave groups, that were in turn sets of caves serving different functions. Some of the caves were carved for devotional activities, the other caves were living quarters of the monks and nuns, and some were depositories. Among the caves for devotional activities, some were decorated, and the commissioned artisans painted beautiful paintings both narrative and ornamental.

Some of those wall paintings contain the illustrations containing the persons and monkeys posing similar body postures practised in present yoga practices. Two cases are special focuses of this studies, first is the Brahman standing on one leg with the other leg raised, with his both hands gathered before his chests. The second is the meditating monkey seated on grass mats. These illustrations in Kucha show some close similarities with the versions survived in Sanskrit literature such as *Avadānaśataka* and *Divyāvadāna*.

First image depicts the story of Siddhartha Gautama as the Brahman practitioner in his former life. To accelerate his perfect enlightenment the Buddha at that time meditates inside a cave or under a

tree before the Brahman. The Brahman in awe stands in one leg with gathered hands, and chants the meditating Buddha for seven days and nights without a blink of an eye. The second story depicts the elder Upagupta born as a monkey. He served the *pratyekabuddhas* and tried to emulate them by meditating.

There are also other images containing the persons and monkeys in yogic poses painted in Kucha's Buddhist caves. The repeated appearance of these poses may show that the shared tradition between the schools of Yoga and Buddhism that was also transmitted to the ancient Kucha.

## Introspection / 19

### “Puruṣa bound from within / without looking on”: Gurani Anjali's Sāṃkhya-Yoga Music on Long Island, New York

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Gurani Anjali (1935-2001) arrived to the United States in the 1950s before the major influx of immigration from India that would follow in the 1960s. She eventually established Yoga Anand Ashram in Amityville on Long Island, New York, where she taught Sāṃkhya-Yoga philosophy within the context of the United States' countercultural and post-countercultural periods. Central to Anjali's repertoire of yoga techniques were music practices which she and her students adapted to the countercultural social and historical context in which they found themselves. This paper shows how Anjali's universal ideas about Sāṃkhya-Yoga became entangled in her new sonic environment as her yogic lyrics merged with her students' acoustic folk ensemble, but also how Anjali intended for her lyrics to lead students toward a transcendent experience of their social environment altogether. Thus from an etic perspective, this paper firmly situates Anjali's music in its historical context, while also articulating, from the community's emic perspective, how Anjali's yogic music from her Indian Ocean world proposed to inculcate an experience of yoga's higher Self, *puruṣa*, which was evidently “bound from within / without looking on” as the lyrics to her popular song suggest. This paper draws its analytical framework from the newly emerging literature outlining an Indian Ocean Ethnomusicology to demonstrate how Anjali transported her yoga philosophy from Bengal into her new countercultural sonic environment on the United States Atlantic Coast. Because her musical influence extended beyond the Indian Ocean region, however, this paper also argues that limiting ourselves to performing Indian Ocean Ethnomusicology inevitably presents the same analytical limits the emerging field has sought to overcome in area studies of music. It thereby proposes that we adopt a “One Ocean Ethnomusicology,” a new analytical framework that permits us to connect musical heritage from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean and beyond.

## Inspiration / 20

### The Synthesising Influence of Eustace Miles: Breath Culture and the Assimilation of Yoga in Fin de Siècle Britain

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I am an independent scholar, researcher and writer. I completed the SOAS MA Traditions of Yoga and Meditation (distinction) in 2022 and am in the process of expanding my dissertation research into a PhD proposal. My area of focus is early twentieth century therapeutic culture, including the introduction and dissemination of modern yoga, and the cross over with both established and new religious movements. Specific areas of interest include the significance of vegetarianism and the role of the breath in contemporary models of belief, health and wellbeing. Whilst completing my MA I was a student representative on the SOAS CYS committee and the YDYS 2022 organising committee.

Subject Area:

Modern Yoga, breath control, therapeutic culture, Eustace Miles, Vivekananda, New Thought, Vegetarianism, socio-cultural history, dynamics of cultural exchange and transformation

Outline:

This paper will explore the significance of breath control as an early pre-cursor to contemporary commercialised yoga in the context of fin de siècle Britain. It will examine how socio-cultural features of Edwardian London had a role to play in furthering a construction of 'better breathing' as a route to health; and how one historical actor – physical culturist and famed food reformer Eustace Hamilton Miles (1868-1948) – assimilated and disseminated the teachings of Swami Vivekananda as part of his popular ethos of 'all-round' health. It considers the selective processes of knowledge exchange that occurred at a formative period of modern yoga's construction and the extent to which the neo-Vedantic teachings of Vivekananda inspired a new elevated and sacralised understanding of health in the broader Western context.

**Introspection / 21**

## **The Latin faces of yoga in the Americas**

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This paper presents an exploratory theoretical framework for examining the various manifestations of yoga in Latin America. It offers a comprehensive introduction to a range of specific cases spanning multiple countries in the region, dating from approximately the 1900s onwards. Linked to Proyecto YoLA®, a collaborative initiative, this paper acknowledges the contributions of experts from diverse fields, disciplines, and geographical regions who investigate various aspects of yoga in the present day Latin American context. The primary focus of these intellectual endeavors lies in analyzing how the practice, commercialization, and preconceptions surrounding yoga have influenced contemporary societies worldwide, with a particular emphasis on Latin America. As an interdisciplinary undertaking, this project explores key themes, including issues of political and symbolic power, public health, gentrification, spiritual exploration, civic ethics, peacebuilding, methodological innovation, marketing strategies, the interplay between tradition and modernity, and the integration of knowledge systems into specific local cultural contexts. In probing into these axes, the inquiry also traces the influence of relevant agents in the making of a religious modernity tinged with esoteric and proto-New Age sensibilities and ideas. Through historical research and empirical investigations, this project aims to expand the horizons of the burgeoning field of Modern Yoga studies.

**Introspection / 22**

## **Embodying Shiva and Shakti- the construction of gender in contemporary, European tantra**

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A few years back, Mark Singleton suggested that we consider the term “yoga” as it refers to modern postural practice as a homonym, instead of a synonym, of the “yoga” associated with the philosophical system of Patañjali, or the “yoga” that forms an integral component of the Śaiva Tantras (Singleton 2010, 15). Perhaps the same suggestion could be made when considering the many techniques that go by the name of “tantra” within the milieu of contemporary spirituality in Europe. Few practitioners of these techniques (which include breathwork, yoga, meditation, and sensual/sexual practices) claim any connection to traditional tantric lineages, though many of them borrow concepts found in the north Indian texts called tantras, most importantly the notion of “Shiva” (Śiva) and “Shakti” (Śakti). Within traditions of monistic Śaiva Tantra, these terms commonly refer to the principle of consciousness respectively the principle of power and take mythological and iconographical forms as god and goddess. When used in contemporary, western tantra these concepts tend to be applied onto female and male bodies, suggesting that women are embodiments of “Shakti” and men of “Shiva”. Practitioners are often encouraged to strengthen their “feminine” or “masculine” qualities, with the purpose of creating greater sexual polarity and erotic tension, but also in order to liberate creative energy or gain spiritual progress.

This presentation, based on my current interdisciplinary PhD research, will showcase and problematize the construction of gender within contemporary, European tantra, using material from recently executed qualitative interviews with practitioners in the field, and applying a theoretical framework which highlights the “complexity and slipperiness of spirituality” (Fedele and Knibbe 2013, 3), especially in relation to questions of authority and power.

**Introspection / 23**

## **YOGHISM, CHRISTIANISM, AND THE ANDEAN COSMOVISION: AMALGAMATING YOGA IN BOLIVIA, ISSUES OF SYNCRETIC SPIRITUALITY**

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ADRIANA MALDONADO GALARZA  
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**Abstract**

As is the case in many countries, yoga initially arrived in Bolivia in the shape of books. One text stands out as possibly initiating Bolivia’s yoga tradition: ‘Autobiography of a Yogi’ by Paramahansa Yogananda. Planting interest and curiosity for yoga among a mainly Christian audience searching for new forms of spirituality, the book was then followed by the arrival of Serge Raynaud de la Ferrière’s Universal Great Brotherhood (GFU), promoting Yoga and a new movement he called ‘Yoghism’. It was not until the 1970s that the first GFU centre was founded in La Paz. The initial ceremony setting the beginning of the GFU in Bolivia was carried out at the Tiawanaku ruins, a sacred Andean landmark. Characterised by its religious syncretism, Bolivia today embraces Yoga in both a Christian and an Andean way, with roots in De la Ferrière’s and Yogananda’s philosophy, and the New Age ideals of union of the Self and the Higher Self or a divine essence pervading the universe. With a historical and ethnographic approach, this paper aims to discuss yoga and the issues of individual and social identity and spirituality in Bolivia. It presents some characteristics of what this practice and philosophy has meant and means to its Bolivian practitioners.

Adriana Maldonado - Bio

Adriana became a BWY Level 4 500+ yoga teacher in 2017. She completed an MA in Traditions of Yoga and Meditation at SOAS University in 2021 and starts a PhD at the Open University in October

2023 exploring the Role of Absorption in Modern Postural Yoga. She has been teaching History and Philosophy of Yoga at Yoga Teacher Trainings since 2021 and continues teaching yoga.

**Introspection / 24**

## **Purpose and Text-Image-Relationship of Illustrated Yoga Manuscripts**

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Christina Riebesell is lecturer at the Asia-Africa-Institute, Culture and History of India and Tibet at Hamburg University.

Christina's research focusses on the History of Yoga, especially text-image-relationship of Illustrated Yoga Manuscripts bringing together her art historical competence as well as her knowledge of the History of Yoga Practice.

Prior to coming to Hamburg, Christina was Head of the Photographic Collection at the Max Planck Institute for Art History, Rome. She was also Postdoctoral Fellow at Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence, held a Research Project of Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and was assistant professor at the Department of History of Art, University of Tübingen

Christina Riebesell received her PhD in Art History from Hamburg University and her Master in Yoga Studies from Università Ca'Foscari, Venice.

**Purpose and Text-Image-Relationship of Illustrated Yoga Manuscripts\*\***

In this paper illustrated Yoga manuscripts showing Yogis in practice will be approached from an art historical as well as yogic perspective, putting the focus on the purpose and on the text-image-relationship of the material in question.

The analysis covers the development in various traditions from around 1600 to the end of the 19th century, from being precious objects in palace collections to gradually acquiring a more and more didactic purpose. Since the early texts were not meant to be instructions for practitioners, the associated illustrations may help to clarify where the texts are not sufficiently concrete or univocal. It will be shown that the visual, non-verbal medium often supplies valuable information not given by the text.

The two aspects treated here are connected and result in the question: How reliable is the image? The critical analysis of the text-image-relationship helps to evaluate images as historical sources in their own right.

In this way the mutual elucidation of text and illustrations can deepen our understanding of the role of Yoga in Indian Society.

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## **A phenomenologist tries to read yoga –a case study and some lessons**

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The German philosopher Hermann Schmitz (1927–2021) is one of the most prolific and original phenomenological thinkers of his generation. He is perhaps best known for his work on the “felt body” (Leib), where he discovers and systematically describes several structural and dynamic traits of this

phenomenological entity. These are, according to him, basically all-human (though, on a higher level, culturally formed) and so enable the cross-cultural understanding of concepts and texts concerning this sphere of experience. It is therefore not surprising –but certainly rather untypical for a classically trained 20th century European philosopher –that Schmitz also deals more than cursorily with yogic material. The proposed paper will be based on the pertinent passages in his book *Der Leib* (1st ed. Bonn 1965), where 13 of 600 pages are devoted to yoga. The hermeneutical situation will be analyzed in both directions. Firstly, Schmitz’ attempts to come to terms with the yogic evidence is treated as a case study of problems and limitations facing scholars who stem from a Western philosophical tradition and lack a background in South Asian studies, even if they are interested and open-minded. Secondly, the shortcomings of Schmitz’ interpretations will be taken as a reminder that scholars of yoga too should reflect on their own way of communicating their findings to an audience outside of their field. It is easy to stay in the “comfort zone” of yogic jargon, but nevertheless attempts to sometimes leave it should be made, and it will be argued that a phenomenological approach is in fact particularly promising in this regard.

Prof. (AMU Poznań) Dr. habil. Sven Sellmer  
Institute for Oriental Studies  
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Sven Sellmer studied Philosophy, Indology and Greek Philology at Kiel University and earned his PhD there with a comparative work on the understanding of subjectivity in selected Indian and Greek traditions. Since 2004 he has been teaching Sanskrit and Ancient Indian culture at Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań. In addition to comparative philosophy, his main areas of interest include the Mahābhārata, comparisons of the Homeric and Indian epics, Vedic literature, the beginnings of Haṭhayoga, and generally the application of computational methods to philological problems.

**Introspection / 26**

## ”Jai Hanumān. Jai Coatlicue!” - Negotiating Bhakti Yoga and Aztec Devotion at the Jamadi Center, Mexico

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Nestled in the rural countryside of Amealco, Mexico, the spiritual retreat center known as “Jamadi” takes its name from the native Otomí word, signifying “gratitude to the Spirit.” Within this haven, the region’s first Hanuman temple stands out for its unique presence, catering to yoga practitioners and SBNR (Spiritual But Not Religious) audiences. In an intriguing juxtaposition of cultures and faiths, the temple dedicated to Hanumān shares space with a monumental Aztec shrine venerating Goddess Coatlicue. This paper explores the complex interplay of cultural and spiritual networks at Jamadi center, where the founders have forged “a deep connection between Mexico’s indigenous traditions and a devoted and authentic relationship with Sanātana Dharma.”

This synergy between diverse cultural and spiritual dimensions manifests not only in the unique amalgamation of architecture and iconography but also in the retreat center’s diverse offerings from postural yoga and *kirtan*, to reinvented pre-Hispanic traditions such as cacao ceremonies. Employing a multidisciplinary approach, this preliminary study aims to examine the discourses, practices, and implications of the convergence of Hanumān worship and revitalized Aztec ceremonies within the same sacred space. This research highlights the dynamic interplay of traditions offering insights into the particular forms that globalized yoga can take in local settings.

**Introspection / 27**



## Jinarajadasa: A Messenger of Oriental Wisdom, or a Theosophical Missionary in Latin America

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The flow of religious and spiritual ideas has proved to be constant and eclectic, as well as a dynamic means that links different regions of the globe. It has been especially intense from the second half of the nineteenth century onward. This paper will explore the noteworthy touring of the notorious theosophist C. Jinarajadasa in Latin America, with special attention to his visit to Mexico in the late 1920s. On the one hand, this paper seeks to survey the importance of The Theosophical Society's role in the early constructions of modern yoga as well as the global exchange of religio-philosophical interests throughout the modern world at large and, on the other, attempts to unravel the dynamics of theosophical activities in Latin America, in particular. Jinarajadasa's view on yoga was distinct from later conceptions of postural practice, yet was strongly embedded in important notions at the time about progress and education, aiming at a form of karmayoga, or method of appropriate action. This study is part of a broader project that has been tracing the history and reception of yogic ideas in Latin America. Thus, Jinarajadasa's mission will be examined in the light of a wider network of dialogues, interactions, and competition among different actors in the first half of the twentieth century, a time that saw the inevitable rise of global yoga as we know it today.

**Institutionalisation / 28**

## The Effectiveness of Yoga Interventions in Improving the Well-being and Productivity of Desk-based Workers - A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

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Prolonged hours of sitting at work among desk-based workers have been associated with a host of physical and mental health conditions. These conditions can lead to work disability, absenteeism, and a significant economic and psychosocial burden. This systematic review and meta-analysis aimed to assess the effectiveness of yoga interventions on the well-being and productivity of desk-based workers. Nine electronic databases, ClinicalTrials.gov and the WHO International Clinical Trials Registry Platform, were searched from inception until the 28th of February 2022. Fifteen studies met the inclusion criteria, and ten studies (nine RCTs and one NRCT), comprising 1046 participants, were deemed eligible for the meta-analyses. Meta-analysis was performed using the inverse variance random-effects method on eligible outcomes and comparisons, and the remaining outcomes were reported qualitatively. Compared with passive controls, yoga was associated with statistically significant improvements in psychological and physiological well-being, perceived stress, sleep quality, and musculoskeletal discomfort. Compared with an active comparator, yoga was associated with improvements in psychological well-being. When used as an adjunct to conventional therapies, yoga was effective in improving musculoskeletal discomfort. The qualitative analysis also revealed statistically significant improvements in most physical and mental health parameters. However, the results may be limited in robustness due to methodological flaws, high risk of bias, high heterogeneity, and limited number of studies, which underscores the need for more extensive trials.

**Introspection / 29**

## Acoustemologies of Breath: Sounding and Listening in Contemporary Yoga

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In this paper, I will introduce my practice-led research *Acoustemologies of Breath: Sounding and Listening in Contemporary Yoga*, undertaken in collaboration with Professor Isabel Nogueira at UFRGS in Porto Alegre, Brazil. I take inspiration from Steven Feld's (1992) concept of 'acoustemology' to theorise 'sounding' and 'listening' as a way of knowing in contemporary yoga practice. I foreground the sonic sensibilities of breathing-moving bodies doing practice and the relationality of knowledge production. I explore the ways in which the sound of breathing mediates relations between practitioners and meditates the relation with one's body when listening to one's own breath. I ask what kinds of 'knowing' breath can reveal and consider the affective-empathetic import of listening to breath. I locate my relational inquiry in the situational encounters of practice in different contemporary yoga contexts, and I critically reflect on the socio-political significance of sounding and listening in relation to place, space, and time. In sum, I will present a sonic and theoretical contribution to contemporary yoga scholarship, and exhibit creative possibilities for future interdisciplinary research.

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## Bridging the gap between yoga scholarship and practice: explorations in democratising knowledge

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What can or should yoga practitioners and teachers do with the research findings of yoga scholarship? What are the specific implications for contemporary yoga practice? Whilst increasing opportunities exist to be taught by academics and researchers in this area, enthusiastic learners are still often left on their own to ponder the significance of this information on their practice and teaching. The authors of this paper completed the *Traditions in Yoga and Meditation MA* at SOAS in 2020, and felt this gap acutely. We began a series of interventions to explore these questions, using workshops, qualitative research (including interviews and surveys) with students, auto-ethnography, case studies and applications of relevant frameworks. For McNeil in particular, bringing techniques from more diverse yogic texts into their own teaching has been an illuminating innovation. In this paper we will share the results of this work, in the hope of encouraging further research and discussion in this area. We discovered that many students indeed felt adrift and confused by contradictions in simplified narratives of yoga history, most were unaware of the complexities of yoga scholarship. However, we also found that fruitful insights arise through collaboratively exploring the changing ways in which yoga has been understood and practised through time and around the world from its Indian beginnings with contemporary practitioners. From these insights we propose an inclusive and democratic approach to both disseminating this wealth of knowledge to a broader audience as well as enabling the findings from that process to feed back into academic research. Collaborative endeavours, open dialogues, and dynamic discussions are valuable pathways to making this profound body of knowledge accessible and meaningful, ultimately bridging the gap between yoga scholarship and practice.

**Martha Henson, SOAS.**

MA Traditions of Yoga and Meditation.

Martha completed a 200 hours Yoga Teacher Training in 2016 in Nepal and was left with more questions than answers. She briefly taught yoga before discovering the SOAS MA in Traditions of Yoga and Meditation, which she did over 3 years and was awarded a distinction. She was also coordinator for the SOAS Centre of Yoga Studies from 2018-2020. Under the banner of IntoYoga, she has recently begun running small-scale yoga studies workshops on the Isle of Wight.

**Ruth McNeil, King's College, London.**

PhD candidate in Theology and Religious Studies

MA Traditions of Yoga and Meditation.

Ruth is a PhD candidate in Theology and Religious Studies at King's College, London, under the supervision of Professor Clare Carlisle and Dr Karen O'Brien-Kop. Ruth's interdisciplinary research project proposes a radical exploration of emptiness (*śūnya*), a key state which leads to liberation, as embodied experience within the ancient to early mediaeval Hindu and Buddhist contemplative traditions of South Asia. Ruth completed the MA Traditions of Yoga and Meditation at SOAS, University of London in 2020 for which she received a distinction. Her studies, in combination with the somatic perspectives she has developed over the last twelve years as a teacher and practitioner of yoga, Pilates and as a movement therapist, place her at the unique intersection of theory and practice.

**Inspiration / 31****Worldview types amongst yoga practitioners in Finland****Author:** Måns Broo<sup>1</sup>**Co-author:** Janne Kontala<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup> Åbo Akademi University<sup>2</sup> Åbo Akademi**Corresponding Authors:** mans.broo@abo.fi, janne.kontala@abo.fi

There are many studies of yoga practice and philosophy, but less of the yogins themselves. Our study, part of a larger, four-year project on yoga in Finland, investigates the worldviews of yoga practitioners in Finland using Q-methodology. The theoretical assumption behind Q-methodology is that there is only a limited number of predominant viewpoints in any subjective discourse. A well-designed Q-instrument should reveal those viewpoints – and do so beyond the often so reductive and even meaningless categories of “secular”, “religious” or “spiritual”. Designing an instrument that is specifically attuned to the discourse of modern yoga, we expect to uncover some of the major outlook types amongst the practitioners.

In our presentation, we will discuss the process in arriving at the Q-statements we have used, as well as some preliminary findings of the project. While the sample is from one country, we expect the results to tell us something more general about the expected outlook orientations in modern yoga. Despite local peculiarities of Finnish forms of yoga, most of the Finnish commercial as well as idealistic yoga domain consists of easily recognisable global brands.

**Introspection / 32****Yoga, Value Retraditionalisation and Minority-Identified Yoga Practitioners in Finland****Author:** Ella Poutiainen<sup>1</sup>

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This talk introduces my upcoming empirical research on BIPOC and LGBTQ+ yoga practitioners' experiences of yoga in Finland. Contemporary yoga appears as liberal, empowering and subversive on the surface, but has been criticised for complicity in oppressive structures, such as whiteness, patriarchy, and heterosexism (Jain 2020; Lucia 2020; Balizet & Myers 2016). Within the scene of yoga and holistic spirituality advocates for racial justice and inclusivity have called for teachers and practitioners to practice introspection regarding questions of cultural appropriation, white privilege, and cis- and heteronormativity (Saad 2020; Camellia 2023; Wiggins 2023). These issues have become increasingly topical in recent years due to the growing visibility of the political far right, conservatism, and conspiracy thinking within the field of holistic spirituality worldwide. As such, the yoga scene mirrors wider cultural trends of value retraditionalisation and the rise of nationalist and anti-gender ideologies. Thus, this presentation unpacks questions of the inclusivity and accessibility of yoga spaces, and how these recent developments may impact already vulnerable groups of yoga practitioners. While there are studies about BIPOC practitioners' experiences of (mainly American) yoga (eg. the journal *Race and Yoga*), the experiences of LGBTQ+ practitioners remain largely unexplored. I will investigate the inclusivity of yoga in the context of Finland, which is characterised by nordic exceptionalism –the idea that Finland among other nordic countries is an exceptionally democratic and equal welfare state. Nevertheless, scholars have argued that image of exceptionalism easily makes inequalities invisible, for instance, by contributing to problematic assumptions that posit Finland outside of histories of racism and colonialism (Keskinen 2021). Furthermore, while Finland scores relatively high in international comparisons regarding LGBTQ+ rights, hatespeech and hate crimes against LGBTQ+ people continue to be major problems (Oikeusministeriö 2021). Indeed, awareness of race and LGBTQ+ issues seem only just emerging in the Finnish yoga scene.

**Inspiration / 33**

## **The Wheel of the Navel and Lotus of the Heart: Metaphor, Medical Knowledge, and the Early Tantric Body**

**Author:** Shaman Hatley<sup>1</sup>

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The cakras of yoga have fascinated interpreters ever since the tantric body entered Anglophone discourse and scholarship in the late nineteenth century. While multiple authors in this period advanced biomedical interpretations of the tantric body, the consensus of modern scholarship is that the tantric body is a 'visionary' body or mental construct without empirical basis. This essay seeks an interpretive space between these two views: interpretations of the tantric body couched in the idiom of science, and the view that it is purely an idealized product of visualization or imagination. Through a close reading of the early Śaiva tantra corpus, focusing on circa 7th–9th century sources, I argue that the tantric body was, in fact, closely aligned with the early-medieval medical body. This becomes apparent in tracing the history of two key concepts: the 'lotus of the heart' (*hr̥daya-puṇḍarīka*) and 'wheel of the navel' (*nābhīcakra*), which feature in religious, philosophical, and medical literatures prior to their appearance in the tantra corpus. Close attention to this context reveals that discourse on the body in early Śaivism is rooted in widely-shared conceptions of the body, many stemming directly from medical traditions. This paper will also trace some of the developments which led to more esoteric and visionary conceptions of the tantric body in the second millennium.

**Introspection / 35**

## **From ridicule to recognition. Image of yoga in public media in communist Poland. A case study of Malina Michalska.**

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Yoga and yogis were present in Polish media from the beginning of the 20th century. After 1945, the popular image of yoga transformed to reflect the change of general perception of yoga in Poland. There was a shift from understanding yoga as something esoteric, exotic or sensational towards yoga being viewed through the lens of science and medicine, as well as a new lifestyle to counteract stress and to promote health and longevity. Post-war Poland was a communist country where official media were controlled by the state. Some publications on yoga were released in the unofficial circulation (e.g. the publishing series of Polish-Indian Library). But starting from mid-1950s, yoga was also present in the official media. Malina Michalska (1916-1973), an autodidact yoga teacher, was among those who influenced how yoga was understood and practiced in Poland as a popular activity. Images showing this former acrobat dancer wearing a black leotard were found in numerous press releases, her book "Hatha Yoga for All" (1972) and newsreels (Polish Film Chronicle). A review of several examples shows how yoga was gaining increasing public recognition and acceptance, and ultimately also popularity. Michalska's understanding of yoga as a healing system was based on her personal experience. It fitted well in the secular milieu of communist Poland, where some research was focused on health promotion, and physical and mental well-being. This shift from ridiculing to recognition of yoga influenced by how it was presented in mass media laid foundation for yoga reception in Poland in the future, when new yoga trends and adaptations appeared.

**Inspiration / 36**

## The Politics of Imagining at the Boundaries of Yogaland

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This paper explores the production of imaginaries and the processes of meaning-making vis à vis the politics of identity and power at the boundaries of Yogaland. Yogaland, as a spatial-temporal domain that is primarily founded on acts of imagination, is understood here as epitomising the institutionalisation of the expanding transnational modern yoga project. However, having been applied both descriptively by practitioners and analytically by scholars, the boundaries of Yogaland remain ambiguous and continually contested.

Drawing upon ethnographic research conducted at the boundaries of Yogaland, this paper proposes that the politics of imagination undergo negotiation within these very locales. It contends that such negotiations constitute a pivotal aspect of the underlying processes of meaning-making that are fundamental to the expansion and external validation of the transnational yoga project. Within this context, boundaries are construed as distinct localities where challenges, predicaments, or dissonances manifest, thereby posing a potential threat to Yogaland's persistence. Examples of such dissonances include the promotion of Hindu fascism in the name of dharma, the concealment of abusive guru histories while celebrating their roles in popularising yoga, and the inflationary use of health claims to legitimise yoga practice while ignoring safeguards or physical risks. Imaginaries and narrations are employed to reconcile these cleavages and mitigate the dissonances in the perception of Yogaland, a process that effectively engages in defining Yogaland and the demarcation of its boundaries.

Preliminary findings suggest that the Yogaland experience is inherently ephemeral, as the extraordinariness (Außeralltäglichkeit) it offers can only be temporarily embraced before it inevitably dissipates into ordinariness. Consequently, the principal modes of engagement with Yogaland predominantly revolve around imaginative constructs created from outside its boundaries, which makes it an eternally elusive and liminal place.

**Institutionalisation / 37****The Unuttered Mantra: The Role of Ajapā within Haṭhayoga****Author:** Seth Powell<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup> *Yogic Studies***Corresponding Author:** seth@yogicstudies.com

Topics: Hathayoga, Textual Studies, Yoga History, Mantra

Unlike its Tantric and Āgamic scriptural predecessors, where mantra plays an elevated role within the doctrinal systems of Mantramārga praxis, in most medieval Yogaśāstras that feature Haṭhayoga, teachings on mantra are largely absent or assume a lesser status. The *Dattātreya yogaśāstra* states that Mantrayoga can be “mastered by anyone” and that the “weak are entitled” to practice it. Likewise, *mantrasādhana* is listed as one of the obstacles to yoga practice. In the *Śivayogapradīpikā*, mantra is reframed more positively, however, is interiorized within a *prāṇāyāma* environment, specifically in the form of the *ajapā*, the “unuttered” mantra—that is, the natural sound of the inhalation and exhalation. This type of interiorized yogic mantra thus holds a more positive soteriological value within the context of *prāṇāyāma* than does traditional mantra japa on its own. As has been argued, this *ajapā* can also be seen as a yogic appropriation of the principal Vedic Gāyatrī mantra (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 134). This paper will introduce and analyze the *Śivayogapradīpikā*’s unique teachings on the *ajapā* within the context of its Haṭhayoga. The paper argues that the unuttered mantra of the breath, comprised of the disyllabic *haṃsa*, is first reversed to *so’ham*, and then in turn is fashioned into the monosyllabic *om*. Through the success of yogic praxis, the all-important Vedic Gāyatrī mantra is thus re-interiorized within the yogic body in the form of *om*—ultimately leading the yogin to the highest *prāṇāyāmic* state of *kevalakumbhaka*.

Seth Powell, PhD, Harvard University, *Yogic Studies*

Dr. Seth Powell is a scholar of Indian religions, Sanskrit, and yoga traditions, who earned his PhD in South Asian Religions at Harvard University. His dissertation comprised a critical edition, translation, and detailed study of a 15th-century Sanskrit yoga text from south India known as the *Śivayogapradīpikā*—which uniquely combines yoga, ritual, and devotion. He also works on the visual and material culture of yoga in premodern India, uncovering yoga’s past through temple sculptures. Seth is the founder and director of the online educational platform, *Yogic Studies*, which provides extensive courses and training in Yoga and South Asian Studies to students worldwide.

**Inspiration / 38****Charting the Early History of Modern Yoga Through Latin America and Iberia with the Works of Yogi Ramacharaka****Author:** Philip Deslippe<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup> *UC Santa Barbara***Corresponding Author:** pdeslippe@ucsb.edu

As scholarship on the history of modern yoga has grown and developed in recent decades, attention has been paid to both the development of yoga in the Anglophone world, often as a presumed default, and the development of yoga in individual nations, particularly throughout Europe. This paper suggests that the development of modern yoga can be understood from the vantage point of Latin America and Iberia just as well as it can be through Britain, the United States, and India. As its case study, it uses the thirteen books authored by the American lawyer William Walker Atkinson (1862-1932) as Yogi Ramacharaka.

In late-1903, the first works published under the pseudonym Yogi Ramacharaka almost immediately found their way into Latin America, and in only a few years, they started to be translated into Spanish and Portuguese through several key figures, and then distributed in mass quantities by several immersing metaphysical publishers and distributors in Argentina, Brazil, Spain, and the borderlands of the United States. Their popularity was enhanced by the particular interests of Theosophists and proponents of New Thought and occultism, and also general interest in physical culture and India. While their influence is difficult to quantify, it was still undeniable, and in ways both direct and indirect, they helped to position yoga in its current position of popularity in Latin America. The example of the Yogi Ramacharaka books in Latin America and Iberia not only supports already existent themes in the ongoing histories of early modern yoga such as transnational exchanges, networks such as the Theosophical society, and the influence of print, but also show that as a truly global phenomenon, a centering of the history of early modern yoga is as valid in Brazil or Argentina as anywhere else.

**Introspection / 39**

## **From India to Chile: The journey of the Suddha Dharma Mandalam, its audience, adaptations and translations.**

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Subject area: Modern yoga

This paper discusses the hitherto understudied Suddha Dharma Mandalam (SDM), allegedly the first Yoga school in Chile. The SDM was established in India in 1915 and subsequently in Chile in 1927, where it then took a hybrid form of its own. Based on documental research and interviews, the paper sets out to probe into, and contextualize, the first audience of this particular yogic school, as well as to discuss the dynamics of dissemination and teaching that the SDM developed in its first 20 years. Noteworthy is that the leader of the SDM, the Chilean guru Váyera, received teachings and initiation directly from an Indian guru, but completely remotely through correspondence. Thus, this distance instruction and initiation represent a particular cultural exchange between India and South America, and then from Chile to the Spanish-speaking world.

Macarena González has been an Iyengar Yoga teacher for more than 10 years. She has a bachelor degree in Art from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and is an independent researcher. She has completed the Advanced Certificate Program of the Yogic Studies platform, with a research guided by Seth Powell on the version of the Bhagavad Gītā used by the Suddha Dharma Mandalam, the first school of Yoga in Chile. She is also part of an ongoing publication on Yoga in Latin America, led by Adrián Muñoz and Borayin Larios, framed in the YoLa Project. Her research is centered on the history of yoga in Chile, focusing on the first decades of the 20th century.

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## **Teaching Women Their Place: Alignment in Yoga Postures as Rhetorical Strategy**

**Author:** Agi Wittich<sup>1</sup>

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This talk illuminates the complexity of generalizing and individualizing in Iyengar yoga alignment practices aimed at women. It examines the pedagogical strategies and rhetorical framing used to teach alignment in women-oriented Iyengar yoga classes. It first explores the dialectical tension

between three pedagogical methods: (1) general postural instructions aimed at all bodies, (2) female-body specific instructions, and (3) individual adjustments made to particular female students' alignment. While general alignment instructions mean to be "universal", meaning sex or gender neutral, they fail since that they rely on gender essentialism, as do general and female-specific adjustments, that take into consideration sex and gender. While individual adjustments recognize diversity in women's embodied experiences, I argue that they also carry an authoritarian connotation, positioning teachers as the authority over women's experiences. Secondly, the talk explores the rhetorical framing, including word choice and metaphors, used in Iyengar yoga reveals competing discourses about women's body positioning: On the one hand, teachers emphasize empowerment through inner strength and self-knowledge, suggesting yoga can be liberating. On the other hand, instructions to keep certain body parts "lifted" or "spread" reveal remnants of problematic expectations for women to present their bodies in narrowly acceptable ways. This paper builds upon previous research studies gendered language and gender-specific movement socialization in body and movement related classes. The findings are drawn from an analysis of IY literature and 37 interviews with IY teachers and 4 Iyengar family members (2015-2017).

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## **Pedagogies of Salvation: The Micro and Macro-Politics of Yoga in Euro-American Societies**

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Positioning yoga at the intersections of the fitness and wellness industry, therapeutic culture and the landscape of contemporary spiritualities, this contribution presents an ethnographic and micro-sociological study of the ways in which modern postural yoga is taught, transmitted and interiorized in Euro-American yoga studios today. While most of the available literature to date concerns itself with the genealogical reconstruction or philological study of yoga, this presentation, by focusing on the micro and macro-sociological dimensions of the practitioners' bodies, self-conduct and every-day life, answers the important question of how yoga informs our Western views of the body, self-care and the reception of Asian traditions in our present zeitgeist.

Starting from several years (2018 –current) of immersive fieldwork within the Milanese branch of Odaka Yoga, an innovative style of postural yoga blended with martial arts elements, the presentation discusses what the author calls the pedagogies of salvation and the processes of apprenticeship of the modern yogi. It conceptualizes the teacher-student relationship as the main channel of socialization through which the bodies, minds, and souls of practitioners are normalized, disciplined, and transformed so as to match current post-Fordist, neoliberal working requirements and therapeutic culture.

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## **“We wish you a very successful erotic exploration of life”: Revisiting tantric paths in the West**

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The rise of tantra's popularity in the West, which roughly begun with the movement initiated by Osho (Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh) in the 1970s, is showing no sign of stopping anytime soon. Thus far, scholars have mostly analysed tantric practices in the West for their emphasis on sensationalised



sexuality (Urban 2008), under the lens of consumerism (Padoux 2017) and as cultural appropriation (Timalsina 2011), even though more recently also their potential for healing trauma has been recognised (Plancke 2020).

Without denying the hedonistic elements professed by many Western tantric schools and their often-problematic relationship with tantra's South Asian origins, here I wish to shift the attention from questions around how tantric practices manifest in Western contexts to questions investigating why they manifest the way they do. More specifically, I ask 'What ontological conditions do cross-cultural ritual transformations respond to?'; 'Can tantric practices that are not adapted to the context in which they unfold maintain their efficacy?'

Data for this study derive from my ongoing anthropological fieldwork consisting in open-ended conversations with practitioners from a number of tantra schools in the UK and Europe and my own participation in tantra workshops, festivals and lectures. Acknowledging that tantric practices are embedded within practitioners' modes of being-in-the-world and their realms of existentiality, and juxtaposing Western practices with the findings from my earlier research on contemporary tantric practices in India, I wish to shed light on cross-cultural ritual adaptations and their efficacy.

Through a genealogico-archaeological approach, it emerges that different understandings of guru-dom, bodies, gender, divinity, the environment and beingness at large call for different practices as precondition for their efficacy. Therefore, looking beyond discourses of cultural appropriation, sensationalism and consumerism can help to better understand the seemingly unstoppable rise of tantra in the West and the profound needs this phenomenon may respond to.

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## Yoga Research Landscapes. The Mapping Study

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The ancient practice of yoga has expanded beyond its traditional realms, becoming a significant focus of interdisciplinary research worldwide. To understand this vast research landscape, we analysed data from academic journals and conference proceedings using dictionary-based content analysis and text mining analysis. These methodologies empowered us to examine research topics, revealing patterns and tracking their evolution over time. Consequently, we discerned changing trends and emerging themes within yoga research. Since 2000 we have noted a substantial upsurge in empirical studies, most notably in medicine, psychology, and sociology. The scope of contemporary research isn't restricted to the physiological benefits of yoga; it also explores its cognitive, emotional, and societal ramifications. A standout trend is the exploration of the neuroscientific foundations of yoga and its therapeutic applications. While research does extend into areas like history and philology, the volume of studies in these fields pales in comparison to those in the medical and social sciences. Our study paves the way for future investigations, underscoring yoga's multifaceted impacts and the value of interdisciplinary collaboration.

Agata Świerzowska, historian of religion, historian of ideas, assistant professor at the Centre of Comparative Studies of Civilizations at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. Her primary field of interest covers the theory of religion, modern and traditional forms of spirituality and the tradition of yoga with the special focus on its modern transformations. Her current research concentrate on the history of yoga in Poland. She authored, among others, monography *Joga w Polsce od końca XIX wieku do 1939 roku: konteksty ezoteryczne i interpretacje* [Yoga in Poland from the Late 19th Century to 1939: Esoteric Contexts and Interpretations], Jagiellonian University Press, Kraków 2019.

## **“It gets me to the same place”: Sanskrit in modern postural yoga teaching**

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Most practitioners of modern postural yoga (MPY) are white, non-South Asians who do not identify MPY practice with Hinduism or with religion. And yet, as Lucia (2020) discusses, many seek “authenticity” by appealing to (exoticised) South Asian religious and cultural forms, and experience this authenticity as grounds for authority. This paper contributes to this discussion through a case study of the use of the Sanskrit language by UK-based MPY teachers. Drawing on original ethnographic research, the paper additionally considers the subjective experience of Sanskrit usage for MPY teachers. Considering this experience alongside dynamics of “authenticity” and exoticism enriches the discussion by complicating the picture thus presented.

Sanskrit usage represents a fruitful avenue for exploring the dynamics of exoticism, authenticity and authority in MPY. Sanskrit use in MPY is both widespread, involving experiential dynamics that implicate most MPY practice, and also varied, permitting the exploration of a variety of experiences within MPY.

This paper explores three examples of Sanskrit usage among teachers of MPY that illustrate the range of that usage. Drawing from ethnographic and autoethnographic data, the paper applies the tools of affect theory (Schaefer 2015) to examine the subjective experience of Sanskrit usage among MPY practitioners. It considers how Sanskrit use among MPY teachers may be evidence both of dynamics of exoticism and also of committed personal, even religious, practice. This research furthers the discussion of the dynamics of exoticism and power within MPY, and contributes to understandings of the experiential dimension of MPY practice.

Samuel Horsley is a second-year PhD student at the University of Edinburgh researching the teaching of Hindu philosophy by MPY teachers. He previously completed undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in religious studies at the University of Oxford.

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## **Omwashing Yoga: The Far-Right’s Weaponization of Spirituality Toward Ethnonationalism**

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Yoga continues to be popularly employed in mainstream spaces such as corporations, educational institutions, and elitist networks. Recently, there has been a global uptick of yoga’s deployment by far-right political entities, such as police academies, detention facilities, vigilante groups, armed forces, and law enforcement programs. While existing literature advances critical understandings on yoga in the former spheres, scholars have limited understanding on the political intentions of yoga’s appropriation by the military and far-right.

This research lessens the gap by bringing a critical lens to the global phenomenon of “omwashing,” the far-right’s use of yoga as a colonial and ethnonationalist tool to mask state violence and divert the gaze from their supremacist agendas. Focusing specifically on India, Israel, and the U.S, I examine the consumption, political purpose, and ethical stakes of yoga’s appropriation by the far-right - and consider how, for instance, the depiction of yoga as a “peaceful” practice to help law enforcement officers, soldiers, and defense forces combat “stress” and cultivate “calmness” serves to promote the dangerous practice of “spiritual bypassing” and legitimize state-sanctioned violence against the

marginalized “other.”

Peeling back the sociological, historical, and political roots and consequences of the decision to militarize yoga in these contexts, I employ discourses of orientalism, queer feminism, neoliberal spirituality, and decolonization to analyze how far-right governments, authoritarian leaders, and related political institutions discuss their use of yoga and mindfulness. Methodologically, I use a combination of focus groups, media and content analysis, and autoethnography as a yoga teacher to study how Indian, Israeli, and American political and cultural institutions co-opt New Age spirituality. By weaponizing yoga to conceal their fascist ideologies, these far-right forces advance an islamophobic, genocidal, and imperial agenda while disguising their societies as free and peaceful. At the heart of this study is the anti-imperial struggle to decolonize yoga.

Sheena Sood, PhD (she/her) is a Philadelphia-based activist, educator, sociologist, and healing justice visionary of South Asian descent. She is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Delaware Valley University in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Sheena has studied yoga at Kailash Tribal School of Yoga in McLeodganj, India (YTT-200hr, AYTTC-500hr). Her current research project, *Omwashing Yoga: Weaponized Spirituality in India, Israel, and the US*, investigates the growing incorporation of yoga and mindfulness by far-right law enforcement, military, and vigilante groups. Envisioning a futuristic yoga that centers collective freedom by centering all humanity, living beings, and Mother Earth, Sheena curates “Decolonizing Yoga” workshops through frameworks that recognize yoga’s oppressive layers and liberatory potential. She is also the founder and creative director of *Yoga Warrior Tales*, an interactive adventure-based educational program that teaches children yoga and mindfulness through a social justice lens. Learn more at [www.sheenashining.com](http://www.sheenashining.com).

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## **Jain Yoga of the 6th Century: Haribhadra’s Yogabindu**

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Haribhadra provides an early glimpse into the reception of Yoga, reinterpreting its philosophy in light of Jain karma theory. This paper will examine the Yogabindu’s analysis of karma, its five-fold Yoga, and its descriptions of religious practices such as paying attention to dreams, recollection of past lives, fasting, and performance of devotional ceremonies. The Yogabindu gives a succinct summary of Jain philosophy and practice.

The five-fold Yoga of the Yogabindu specifies that the practitioner of Yoga must traverse the following three stages: introspective Self-reflection (*adhyātma*), Cultivation (*bhāvanā*), and Meditation (*dhyāna*). These three actively wear away binding karmas. This leads to the spontaneous practice of Equanimity (*samatā*) and the final stage of Quieting Fluctuations through which one destroys karmas (*karma-kṣaya*).

The Yogabindu describes ritualized activities that enhance spiritual purification and advancement. These include reverence toward those who have already attained a state of spiritual elevation, the performance of *pūjā*, control of appetite, and the practice of prayer or *japa*. These austerities wear away the negative influences of past karma. They cut the knots of attachment (*granthi-bheda*) so one may reach freedom (*mukti*) (175-209). These ritualistic undertakings lead to a mind state (*citta*) characterized as profound (*gambhīra*, 403).

Other topics covered in the *Yogabindu* include religious pluralism and critiques of Buddhist, Sāṃkhya, and Vedānta teachings. Haribhadra positively affirms the common goal of freedom from bondage across all traditions. The 527 verses of the text encapsulate Jainism, providing a comprehensive view

of the faith and its practice as found in the 6th century. The text also helps one understand Yoga's cross-cultural, inter-religious, and international appeal.

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## **The Kundalini Research Foundations. Gopi Krishna's global network of kuṇḍalinī researchers.**

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**Abstract:**

In 1967, the Indian Pandit Gopi Krishna (1903–1984) published his autobiographical account, *Kundalini. The Evolutionary Energy in Man*. The book revolves around a bodily experience, which he interpreted as the awakening of the Tantric energy notion of kuṇḍalinī. Research into kuṇḍalinī thenceforth developed into the major aim of his life. Along with a growing group of international collaborators, Krishna founded the Kundalini Research Foundation, aiming to shed light on kuṇḍalinī's enigmatic nature. These collaborations were increasingly embedded in a global network of practitioners, scholars, and religious protagonists. From 1970 through the mid-1980s branches opened in India, Europe, and North America—all promoting Krishna's ideas and writings.

This paper aims to investigate organization, structure, and activities of the Kundalini Research Foundation and its associated global network of kuṇḍalinī aficionados. Moreover, highlighting Krishna's role as imitator of global research endeavors sheds light on the transnational aspect of modern kuṇḍalinī discourses. For a comprehensive understanding of modern perspectives on kundalini, it is thus indispensable to analyze the activities of Krishna's Kundalini Research Foundations—a cultural phenomenon that scholars have hitherto paid little attention to.

**Short bio:**

Marleen Thaler is a historian of religion at the University of Vienna, with additional degrees in Social and Cultural Anthropology and Oriental Studies, all from her alma mater. Her research interests include Alternative Religious Currents, Esoteric Studies, Religious Traditionalism, Global History, Contemporary Paganism, and the history of yoga. Currently she is finalizing her doctoral dissertation on the globalization, scientification, and nationalization of kuṇḍalinī, focusing on Gopi Krishna's seminal influence on modern kuṇḍalinī discourses. Other current projects involve a co-edited volume on subtle energies and her upcoming monograph on John Michell.

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## **A history of the institutionalisation of complementary medicine in Switzerland : the case studies of yoga-therapy & mindfulness**

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The institutionalization of yoga as a therapeutic practice in Western countries is the result of a secular cultural transformation. Patients' expectations and changing demands cause modern medical doctors to start questioning the biomedical paradigm and searching for new methods to treat chronic diseases, stress, cancer, and ultimately reflecting on the way they intend prevention. This research endeavours to trace the yoga historical trajectory in Switzerland from 19th century to our days

when the Swiss healthcare system has inscribed yoga among the wide range of alternative therapies institutionalising complementary medicine within the Swiss Federal Constitution (art.118a\_2009). Beyond the historical research related to ancient and modern literature on yoga and yoga-therapy, the data discussed in this paper are extracted by hospital archives, extensive interviews with yoga-therapists, mindfulness practitioners, modern MDs, all based in Switzerland, France, Italy and USA. Furthermore, the results presented in this study are based on the analysis of the PhD thesis of the French medical doctor, Bernard Auriol, *Prolegomène à une Yogathérapie de groupe*, University of Toulouse, 1970. Dr Auriol followed the traces of his Swiss colleague Dr Roger Vittoz who modeled his own therapy called *Traitement des psychonévroses par la rééducation du contrôle cérébral*, 1911, giving a starting point to yogatherapy to be considered as « Salvation through Relaxation » (Singleton 2005). Giving birth to an extended protocol of yoga therapeutic practices that capture the medical cultural changes in the representations of health care, wellness and well-being, Dr Auriol's work helps provide a better understanding of increasingly numerous links forged between Western medical culture and health-care medical approaches of Eastern inspiration. Ultimately, this study hopefully contributes to Singleton's cited paper analysing the 'westernization' of yoga as an anthropological and social process of metamorphosis massively impacting not only the Western medical culture but the biomedical paradigm as a whole.

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## **Playing the Blame Game: A Critique of Neoliberal, Trauma-Informed, Prison Yoga**

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Rose Parkes is a part-time PhD student with the Open University, UK under the supervision of Dr Suzanne Newcombe (Religious Studies) and Dr Deborah Drake (Criminology). Her doctorate entitled 'Neoliberal Yoga, Lived Religion and Prison Abolition' seeks to evaluate the political and religious/spiritual beliefs of Prison Yoga Teachers and the extent to which they are working towards prison abolition. Rose has worked in criminal justice for over twenty years including as a social worker, probation officer and as a prison yoga teacher. She is currently employed as Associate Dean (Academic Programmes) for the Institute of Law, Jersey.

Playing the Blame Game: A Critique of Neoliberal, Trauma-Informed, Prison Yoga.

People in globalised capitalist democracies are reported to be living in secular communities where religion no longer plays a significant role in cultural life. The decline of orthodox religion has contributed to a growth in what is termed 'spiritual, but not religious' practices (Carey, 2018, p. 261). This drop in organised religion relates to an expansion in alternative forms of spirituality as people seek to find meaning in individual and personalised ways. Declining church attendance, rejection of doctrine, and hierarchical theology have led to an academic focus on the everyday beliefs, behaviours, and practices that people engage in; what religious studies scholars have often described as 'lived religion' (Bender, 2012; McGuire, 2016). As part of this changing landscape, there has been a corresponding increase in yoga and meditation, including trauma-informed approaches. These practices have now extended to secure settings, and, over the last decade, there has been a proliferation of prison yoga classes. Burgeoning research suggests there is a range of health and well-being benefits for people in prisons associated with regular class attendance. But, more recently, some studies have taken a critical view of how prison yoga may foster imprisoned people's docility and compliance with harsh regimes as part of the neoliberal prison industrial complex.

This presentation will critically consider the way in which neoliberal Prison Yoga Teachers (PYTs) offer trauma-informed yoga to increase the self-regulation and compliance of people in prison, keeping the emphasis on individual pathology and personal responsibility. This focus, arguably, accords

with the punitive politics of ‘tough on law-and-order’ politicians raising the question of whether PYTs and prison yoga projects are at risk of institutionalisation rather than being a practice to promote social justice, structural transformation, and liberation.

(283 words)

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#### Introspection / 53

### **The evolution of DeRose’s understanding on yoga. Theosophy, Swasthya and beyond, from Brazil to the world.**

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Subject area: MODERN YOGA

In his book titled *I Remember*, Luis Sérgio Álvares DeRose -Brazilian yoga teacher and bestseller- narrates the story of an ancient Dravidian boy who has to abandon his land in northern India due to the invasion of an aggressive nomad tribe and who goes through an initiatic path of knowledge and transformation. But the story opens with the following quote by Jean Cocteau: “I’ve always preferred mythology to history. History is truth that becomes an illusion. Mythology is an illusion that becomes reality.” Taking the hint that this quote suggests, in the present paper we address the different stages in DeRose’s thought and analyze some aspects of the transformational mythology that DeRose elaborates as a narrative of legitimacy for his teachings.

We suggest that DeRose’s thought can be understood as having gone through three phases, so far. The first phase, as he acknowledges, is linked to Theosophy and esotericism. The following period, in which he says to have abandoned theosophical wisdom, is dedicated to the systematization and dissemination of his “Swasthya yoga” teachings and brand. In his third and current stage, DeRose declares to have gone beyond yoga since “yoga does not work”, he says, and prefers to stick with his brand newer “DeRose Method”. We also intend to show that one of the basic keys of the overarching mythology into which he subsumes his conceptions of yoga is transformation.

Gabriel Martino holds a PhD in Philosophy and works in the field of comparative Indian and Greek Philosophy. He is an Associate Researcher of the Argentinean National Research Council (CONICET) and a Visiting Research Associate of the Department of Religion at Rutgers University (USA). In 2021 he received a Fulbright scholarship to conduct a postdoctoral research project at Rutgers University focused on the notion of *karman* in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, under the supervision of Dr. Edwin Bryant. Martino teaches Sanskrit at the University of Buenos Aires, Greek at the Universidad del Salvador (Argentina) and Ancient Philosophy at both institutions. He is also a core member of the YoLa project, a collective research initiative on the history, adaptations and practice of yoga in Latin America

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## Aryan Heritage? Reconsidering Postural Yoga in Interwar Germany

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At first glance the history and spread of yoga in German speaking countries is fairly well documented. In transnational comparison, local discourses on yoga were heavily influenced by German Romanticism, the new science of Depth psychology, and a well-established Indological scholarship. By the turn to the twentieth century, 'yoga' became a buzzword in exclusivist bourgeois circles: in the realm of theosophy, New Thought and occult lodges. The major attraction of yoga was its promise of higher development, if not supernatural skills. However, in this period yoga practice was mostly synonymous with mental techniques and breathing exercises. Hardly any scholar of yoga's dissemination in Germany scrutinized whether and how yoga involved physical practice. Seemingly, and with one exception (Sacharow, see below), the gradual spread of (Neo) Hatha Yoga gained momentum only after 1945.

This paper focuses on the influence of the Indian āsana revival in the 1920s on the notion and practice of yoga in the German Reich. On the basis of overlooked written sources and archive material, I explore early medical research on the therapeutic application of yoga, the first guidebook available in German language for self-teaching yoga postures, and reconsider the impact of Boris Sacharow and his yoga school, operating in Berlin from 1937 to 1943. Subsequently I discuss these innovations against the light of völkisch ideology and National Socialist politics. I argue that postural yoga was an ambivalent niche phenomenon, promoted by both Jewish and explicitly fascist protagonists, in alliance with Indian nationals living in Germany.

**Inspiration / 55**

### Yoga as magic

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My name is Nikolai Suvorov, and I am a Ph.D. student at Universität Hamburg. In the recent past, I worked as a student assistant with Dr. Peter Pasedach. I worked on the creation of TEI (XML) transcript files of the two mahākāvyas surviving from 9th-century Kashmir, the Haravijaya and the Kapphīnābhyaḍaya, and their commentaries, from digital images of the different witnesses represented in Devanāgarī and Śāradā writing systems. While being an MA student at the same university, I, among other things, worked on my thesis *Quasi-historical part of the Yoginī Tantra*: chapters 12-14 dedicated to a part of the medieval treatise, which may be considered quasi-historical because it contains some dates related to historical events that are not always easy to identify with what happened in the actual past.

Before Universität Hamburg, I worked as an Arabic-English-Russian interpreter and translator and studied Indology at Saint Petersburg State University (Russia) (BA and MA).

One of the possible meaning of term yoga is magic, and this is broadly illustrated in the rituals part of the Yoginī Tantra that provides the practitioners with such kavacas as vajraśṛṅkala (against calamities caused by war and fever) and jaganmohakara that allows an adept to bewitch the world (the treatise states that naked (digambarā) Kālī bewitches the universe). Following that, different magical rites leading to power, son birth, knowledge, wealth, glory, and everything are depicted, referring to Phetkārīnī Tantra and Nīla Tantra. Then, the literary work dives into ṣaṭkarma but stresses that only vīras are eligible for it. After that, Śiva introduces a special vīrayoga that lies in the contemplation of three bindus in the image of a sixteen-year-old girl (Kāmakalā). Finally, in its ritual part, the Yoginī Tantra deals with vidyās, which are mantras that refer to female deities possessing particular names and bearing their functions.

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## **Yogi Haider: Inscribing Pakistan into the global contemporary yoga scene**

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Diane Charmey, University of Lucerne, Switzerland

I am a pre-doctoral student in Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Lucerne (supervisor: Ass. -Prof. Dr. Sandra Bärnreuther; co-supervisor: Dr. Suzanne Newcombe, Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies, The Open University, UK). My Ph.D. project will examine the trajectories of yogic practices from 1947 until now in Panjab in Pakistan and India and analyze the debates they generate on yoga as a healing practice. I did my BA and MA in South Asian studies (Hindi and Urdu) at the University of Lausanne. My master's thesis focused on the teachings in Urdu and English of Yogi Haider, a contemporary yoga teacher in Panjab Pakistan, and the way he was received in Hindi and English Indian media articles.

Research degrees and position: Master of Arts, University of Lausanne, South Asian Languages and Cultures, English, Specialization 'Literary Translation', currently a pre-doctoral student in Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Lucerne.

Title: "Yogi Haider: Inscribing Pakistan into the global contemporary yoga scene"

Subject area: Yoga in Pakistan

Basic outline: My paper will look at the teachings of Yogi Haider, a contemporary yoga teacher in Pakistan. Drawing from his online publications on YouTube and Facebook in Urdu and English, I will first analyze some of the ways he incorporates his yoga teachings into the Pakistani Panjabi context (e.g., his use of public spaces, specific dates, cultural references, and different languages). Secondly, I will study how he engages with current discourses in the contemporary global yoga scene (e.g., the instrumentalization of yoga by Hindu nationalist ideologies), thereby placing Pakistan on today's yoga map. This paper will show that the case of Yogi Haider is innovative for yoga studies. Indeed, yoga in Pakistan is currently understudied, yet it reveals compelling insights as it intersects with several political and religious issues in contemporary South Asia.

**Inspiration / 57**

## **From Monkey Mind to Inner Silence: What could permanent loss of inner speech in meditators tell us about its purpose?**

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The *Patañjalayogaśāstra* states that "the purpose of yoga is to stop the turnings of the mind". Similar aims for meditation are found in other historical texts such as the *Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā* and the Buddhist Pāli Canon, whilst in contemporary contemplative practices the idea that one should quiet the "monkey mind" is widespread. Given what we know about the human mind today, it is probable that these "mind turnings" refer to inner speech. Modern accounts suggest some long-term meditators have indeed been able to achieve a silencing of their inner speech as a permanent effect of their practice.



However, the cognitive sciences do not necessarily agree with these traditions that inner speech is unhelpful chatter and best abandoned. Despite the centrality of inner speech to the internal experience of most humans, it is still not well understood (Ferryhough, 2016), but its usefulness is generally assumed. Suggested functions for it include a means for conscious reasoning, forming memories or allowing different brain areas to communicate with each other (Langland-Hassan & Vicente, 2018). If that is the case, perhaps meditators are actually harming themselves by eradicating it. If they are not, however, it could overturn the current scientific assumption of utility. Either way, the experiences of meditators present a new source of evidence in a field that often struggles to answer questions about interior phenomena.

This paper will take an interdisciplinary approach, examining canonical texts, modern accounts of meditation experience and existing research within the cognitive sciences. It will openly invite discussion around the validity of combining these interdisciplinary methods in this manner. Ultimately, it will lay out compelling evidence that permanent loss of inner speech is a genuine phenomenon and explore the implications of this for our understanding of the operation of the conscious mind and the purpose of meditation.

Bio:

Martha Henson, SOAS.  
MA Traditions of Yoga and Meditation.

Martha completed a 200 hours Yoga Teacher Training in 2016 in Nepal and was left with more questions than answers. She briefly taught yoga before discovering the SOAS MA in Traditions of Yoga and Meditation, which she did over 3 years from 2017-2020 and was awarded a distinction. She was also coordinator for the SOAS Centre of Yoga Studies from 2018-2020. Under the banner of IntoYoga, she has recently begun running small-scale yoga studies workshops on the Isle of Wight.

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## **The Haṭhayogasamhitā - The Direct Precursor of the Gheraṇḍasamhitā?**

**Author:** Maximilian Hoth<sup>None</sup>

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Maximilian Hoth is a student in the M.A. program Yoga Studies at the University of Hamburg. He studied Indology and Japanese Studies in Hamburg and completed his B.A. degree in 2023. His study focus is on medieval and early modern haṭhayoga and tantric texts in Sanskrit and Hindi. In previous years he gained experience as a student tutor for Sanskrit at the University of Hamburg and as a self-employed yoga teacher. As of October 2023, he conducts an online Sanskrit class at the Numata Center for Buddhist Studies.

The paper, “The Haṭhayogasamhitā –The Direct Precursor of the Gheraṇḍasamhitā?”, was submitted as his final thesis in the B.A. program Indology at the University of Hamburg. Its results unveil the hitherto overlooked historical, textual, and philosophical connection between the lesser-known Haṭhayogasamhitā and the famed Gheraṇḍasamhitā, exploring how the former may have served as a textual template to the latter. Through a rigorous comparative study, this research highlights the distinctiveness of the Haṭhayogasamhitā and its underappreciated role in shaping the yoga traditions, particularly in the 20th and 21st centuries, when it received limited scholarly attention.

Key elements of the presentation include:

1. **Historical Context:** An examination of the historical backdrop in which the Haṭhayogasamhitā and Gheraṇḍasamhitā may have emerged, offering insights into the cultural and spiritual milieu of their respective eras.
2. **Comparative Analysis:** A meticulous exploration of the textual content, practices, and philosophical foundations of both texts, elucidating the clear influence of the Haṭhayogasamhitā on the Gheraṇḍasamhitā.

3. **Reevaluating Significance:** Discussion on how this rediscovery enriches our understanding of yoga history and philosophy, and why the Haṭhayogasamhitā deserves recognition for its contributions to modern yoga research and practice.

By presenting these findings, this paper seeks to reframe the narrative surrounding the Haṭhayogasamhitā, emphasizing its crucial role in shaping the yoga traditions and calling for a reevaluation of its significance in contemporary yoga scholarship. It underscores the importance of recognizing the lineage that connects the Haṭhayogasamhitā and the Gheraṇḍasamhitā, shedding new light on the rich tapestry of yoga's evolution over the centuries.

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## Should A yogi be healthy? Health Concepts in Early Haṭhayoga Texts

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The physical body assumes a paramount role in contemporary transnational globalized yoga, particularly within the realm of modern posture-based yoga. It is inextricably linked to the pursuit of health and well-being. However, much of what constitutes yoga today, both in India and worldwide, draws its roots from Sanskrit yoga texts, particularly from Haṭhayoga texts. This presentation delves into several interlinked inquiries: How do early medieval yoga texts conceptualize health? What is the connection between health and the body's soteriology? These inquiries shed light on the positioning of yoga within Hindu traditions before it gained worldwide prominence.

This presentation emphasizes that, at its core, health, defined as the absence of disease, serves as a foundational prerequisite for a profound exploration of the subtle yogic body, including the understanding of consciousness and its complex dimensions. Furthermore, eradicating the misleading self-identity, known as ahaṁkāra, represents a transformative process leading to perfect health. This process involves not only the elimination of physical diseases but also transcending all forms of suffering and surpassing the transient pleasures associated with the physical body. In the grand scheme of things, the corporeal body ascends in importance, evolving into a repository of diverse physical methods that promote health, longevity, and, ultimately, liberation. Consequently, the emergence of the biomedical discourse surrounding yoga in modern India was not created ex nihilo. Haṭhayoga, with its roots stretching back to medieval times, played a pivotal role in shaping this historical transformation.

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## Interfaith Dialogue In Jain Yoga Texts

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Interfaith Dialogue In Jain Yoga Texts

By Cogen Bohanec, MA, PhD

Assistant Professor in Sanskrit & Jain Studies, Arihanta Institute

Often Jains take Anekānta-vāda ("non-exclusivity") as having implications for interfaith goodwill and acceptance, as a sort of philosophy of social-ahimsā (social "non-violence"), which can be taken

as consistent with religious pluralism and interfaith amity. For example, several texts on yoga by Haribhadrasūri engage in a sort of interfaith dialogue in a way that affords significant value to other non-Jain yoga traditions. This presentation will demonstrate a conceptual framework (of pragmatism and fallibilism) employed by Jain thinkers in Jain yoga texts that allows for significant valuation of other yoga traditions and thereby fosters a potential for interfaith harmony, while being faithful to central teachings of the Jain tradition. Jain thinkers often will subordinate theory to practice and admit the fallibility of human knowledge in such a way that is consistent with a reading of Anekāntavāda as more than just a system of logic, but as a mandate for social-ahiṃsā between religions. This is consistently expressed in Jain Yoga texts as a core expression of the Jain tradition's approach to yoga.

**Institutionalisation / 62**

## Psychoactives and Psychedelics in Yoga: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Culture

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Psychoactives and Psychedelics in Yoga: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Culture  
Stuart Ray Sarbacker, Oregon State University

In this paper, I examine the intimate relationship between the mind-body disciplines of Hindu systems of yoga and the use of psychoactive substances in the Indic religious context, with an eye to the ways in which modern cosmopolitan forms of yoga have been impacted by, and intersected with, the use of psychedelic substances, such as Mescaline, LSD, Psilocybin, and Ayahuasca. The foundation of the study is a comparative examination of the semantic field of psychoactive substances in Indic texts related to yoga and tantra, including typologies such as soma (elixir), viṣa (agent/poison), oṣadhi (herb), amṛta (ambrosia), rasa (essence), and dravya (substance), as well as the utilization of specific plant agents such as dhattūra (datura) and bhaṅga (cannabis). These concepts are, in turn, connected to relevant strata of Indic religion and philosophy, from the Vedic, classical, and medieval contexts, with special attention to discussions in the Pātañjalayogaśāstra and Buddhist Abhidharma literature of siddhi and ṛddhi (accomplishments) and nirmāṇacitta (constructed minds) arising from the use of oṣadhi. Building upon this, I examine how the use of psychoactive substances, particularly psychedelics, has played an important role—and perhaps will play an increasing role—in the culture of yoga in the 21st century, whether through the intersection of global countercultural trends, retreat and festival culture, or through the emerging paradigms of the psychedelic “facilitator” and “psychedelic chaplain” that parallel modular yoga teacher training. I further demonstrate how linkages between yoga and psychedelics in contemporary contexts are an extension of the spirit of psycho-experimentation characteristic of the Indic context but also thoroughly modernist, illustrating the cosmopolitan nature of transnational yoga traditions. Lastly, I offer a provocative analysis of how the “Second Wave” movement or “psychedelic Renaissance” as exemplified by the work of neuropharmacologist Roland Griffiths, is, in fact, deeply indebted to Hindu yogic and tantric traditions genealogically linked to the psychedelic counterculture of the “First Wave” psychedelic movement in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s.

**Institutionalisation / 63**

## Is Sāṃkhya Really Dualistic? A Comparative Perspective Gathered from Other Gnostic Yogas

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A form or another of dualism within the Sāṃkhya philosophical system has long been noticed and denounced. Early opponents of Sāṃkhya were quick to point out the inherent and problematic dualism they perceived in the system's distinction between 1. puruṣa, the only metaphysical category representative of consciousness in the Sāṃkhyan list of twenty-five core realities (tattva-s), and 2. prakṛti, the category which encompasses everything non-conscious and out of which Sāṃkhya theorizes and organizes the entire manifestation of the cosmos.

More recent academic commentators of Sāṃkhya have generally continued in the early footsteps of dualism-shaming. For example, Gerald James Larson, leading scholar of the tradition, believes Sāṃkhya to be promoting an "eccentric form of dualism," in the sense that it does not fit the usual or conventional notions of dualism articulated in Western schemes of thought. This talk suggests that there is another possible way of reading the function of puruṣa and prakṛti in Sāṃkhya that makes it much less eccentric in the general context of South Asian Gnosticism.

I propose that the Kārikā be read from two synchronic perspectives illustrative of a diachronic pedagogical and psychagogical progression. 1. From the perspective of the 'path' to be undertaken by the student of Sāṃkhya, there is indeed such a thing as puruṣa and prakṛti. They are to be contemplated in a precise dialectical manner detailed within the text. 2. From the perspective of its result, 'fruit,' or goal, however, the Kārikā is clear that the purpose of its ritual therapy is to isolate consciousness from everything that it is not, leaving it alone, pure and simple. Whatever prakṛti there was in the course of the Sāṃkhyan ritual visualisation, it vanishes once the eye of consciousness opens. As with every South Asian form of gnostic yogas, that ritual sacrifice, or spiritual exercise, is established through a specific internalization of taxonomy and its determinate negation.

**Inspiration / 64**

## (Haṭha)yoga for the Vedāntin in King Jasvant Singh I's Ānandavilāsa

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**Affiliation:** Gent University, Department of Arts and Philosophy, Languages and Cultures of South Asia

**Research degrees:** PhD in Arts (Languages and Civilisations of South Asia), Université de Lausanne (Switzerland), 2022.

**Research positions:** (present) FWO junior postdoctoral fellow 2022-2025; (2016-2019 and 2020-2022) research and teaching assistant to prof. Maya Burger, Université de Lausanne.

**Subject area of the proposed paper:** philosophical and literary history of Yoga-s in the early modern period.

**Bio:** Rosina Pastore (PhD) specialises in the intellectual history of Vedānta philosophies in the early modern period through primary sources composed in North Indian vernaculars (Brajbhāṣā, Avadhī, etc.). She is the author of a monography titled *Vedānta, Bhakti and Their Early Modern Sources. Philosophical and Religious Dimensions of Brajvāsīdās's Prabodhacandrodaya Nāṭaka*, about to be published by De Gruyter (Berlin). In her book, she has also dealt with the relationship between Vedānta, Bhakti and Yoga. This interest is carried on in her new research project sponsored by an FWO grant "When the king does philosophy: the Vedāntic writings of Jasvant Singh of Mārvād (1626-1678)".

**Inspiration / 65**

## Should you breath through the pores of your skin?

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The techniques and theories connected to Yogic breathing are confusingly manifold. In this lecture we shall follow the history of one hardly known idea connected with Yogic or rather meditational breathing, namely breathing through the pores of one's skin. The idea is not widespread in literature, but has a curious reception history, since it crops up over a long span of time. It is encountered in early Yogācāra Buddhism, reappears in late medieval Yoga and even in a wide-spread German work on Zen meditation from the 20th century.

**Introspection / 66**

## **Transnational Circulation of Yoga Instructors and Practitioners between Brazil and India (1950s-1970s)**

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In the 1970s, a regular flow of Hatha Yoga practitioners between Brazil and India was established, connecting yoga academies and research institutes in the two countries. However, the actual movement of ideas and people within such South-South yogic network was possible only due to the engagement of a small group of physical educators based in Rio de Janeiro with Hatha Yoga, initiated in the 1950s. In this paper, we focus on the role played by one of these professionals, Jean-Pierre Bastiou (1924-2016), a French bodybuilder, yoga practitioner and instructor, in the creation and furthering of transnational linkages between yoga academies and research centers in Brazil and India. Bastiou entered the transnational network forged by Swami Sivananda in the mid-1950s when he was already based in Rio de Janeiro. A disciple-by-mail of Sivananda, Jean-Pierre was the founder of the "Sivananda School of Hatha Yoga of Rio de Janeiro", in 1958. He travelled to India for the first time in 1961 with the purpose of meeting his Guru. During this trip, he expanded his connections with modern Indian Yoga. Having enrolled at the Teacher Training Course offered by the Yoga Institute, in the first semester of 1962, Bastiou started a long-lasting relationship with Shri Yogendra and his methods. With the aim of interpreting the role of Jean-Pierre Bastiou as a cultural broker dedicated to bringing together incipient communities of yoga practice in his adopted country and well-established modern Indian yogic communities, we analyze primary sources such as newspaper and magazine articles, memoirs, travelogues, and yoga manuals. We argue that this case study, by looking into trajectories of subjects in peripheral positions within yoga transnational networks, would allow us to broaden and refine our understanding of the diverse and complex dynamics permeating this field of practice and study.

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## **The Importance of Rousing Serpents: Kuṇḍalinī and the Evolution of Modern Yoga in the Work of Vivekananda and Yogananda**

**Author:** Anya Foxen<sup>1</sup>

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This paper examines the centrality of Kuṇḍalinī among the early modern globalizers of yoga, especially Swami Vivekananda and Paramahansa Yogananda, as well as several more minor figures. While neither man referred to his system as “*haṭha yoga*”—of which Vivekananda is famously quoted as being dismissive at best—both put forth frameworks that are perfect examples of what James Mallinson has termed “classical *haṭha yoga*,” employing originally ascetic physical techniques such as *bandhas* and *mudrās* to achieve tantric goals, namely raising Kuṇḍalinī. However, both men are also, in their own ways, deeply invested in modernizing the concept, articulating it through the lenses of contemporary science, medicine, and yoking both together into a theory of spiritual evolution. The paper also places the frameworks of Vivekananda (as represented in his *Raja Yoga*) and Yogananda (as presented in *Autobiography of a Yogi* and his mailorder lessons) in the context of other contemporary modernizers such as Kavalayananda, Sivananda, and teachers in the Krishnamacharya lineage.

Anya Foxen is an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. She holds a PhD from the University of California, Santa Barbara. She is the author of three books, including *Is This Yoga?* (co-authored with Christa Kuberry, Routledge 2021), *Inhaling Spirit* (OUP, 2020) and *Biography of a Yogi* (OUP, 2017), as well as a number of shorter pieces focusing on the roots and evolution of modern yoga.

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## **Between Orientalism and Universalism: A Global Perspective on the Popularization of Body-Oriented Yoga Practices in the People’s Republic of Poland 1956-1970**

**Author:** Ulrike Lang<sup>1</sup>

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In the mid-1960s, the People’s Republic of Poland experienced a craze for *hatha yoga*. Popular magazines circulated self-help yoga instructions, well-known actresses endorsed its health benefits, and yoga classes could be found in central Warsaw. My paper provides an explanation for the (seemingly) paradoxical popularity of body-oriented yoga practices in a socialist country by tracing the global cultural transfers and legitimation strategies that led to their adoption and institutionalization. I argue that the strengthening of Polish-Indian relations within the global geopolitical landscape after 1956 created a space of opportunity for individual and collective actors from both countries to participate in the ongoing global project of modernizing and universalizing yoga. In particular, Polish yoga propagator Malina Michalska, the Polish-Indian Friendship Society, and Ma Yogashakti from the Bihar School of Yoga presented yoga to the Polish public as a preventive health practice largely devoid of religious or ideological associations. They portrayed the adoption of yoga as a transformation of arcane Indian wisdom into humanistic and universally applicable knowledge that is firmly grounded in the principles of modern medical science and wholly aligned with official socialist ideology. This framing, in turn, is indicative of the Polish perception of India during the 1960s, where both conventional Orientalist ideas and newer universalist tendencies intersected. By analyzing the popularization of yoga in a country behind the so-called Iron Curtain, this paper aims to integrate the under-researched region of Eastern Europe into the history of global transfers of yogic knowledge and practice.

Subject areas: global history, Slavic Studies

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## **Nēhiyaw Yoga: Biomedical intervention in on-reserve Indigenous communities**

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This paper concerns the application of biomedical yoga intervention on sleep health in on-reserve Indigenous populations in Treaty 6 territory (rural Saskatchewan, Canada). Following a decade-long research relationships with rural Indigenous communities, and as part of a large-scale study of First Nations' sleep health, our research team has designed and is implementing yoga interventions appropriate to the nēhiyaw communities (Willow and Woodland Cree) on two rural reserves. This paper discusses the strategy and ethical considerations for applying the practice of postural, breath-based, and meditative yoga to rural Indigenous populations.

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## **Rasaśāstra and the Perfect Body**

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PhD South Asian Language and Cultures, SOAS University of London

Patricia is an Assistant Professor in the department of History at Hong Kong Baptist University. She was previously Assistant Lecturer in History, Classics and Religion at the University of Alberta and a Postdoctoral Fellow on the European Research Council-funded AyurYog project. Her research explores death, medicine, health, anti-aging, sexuality, gender, and ritual in Sanskrit religious and religio-medical texts with an emphasis on tantra and alchemy (rasaśāstra). She is the author of *Illness and Immortality* (2022 Oxford University Press).

Rasaśāstra and the Perfect Body

Within the tantric milieu we find various practices associated with health, anti-aging, and immortality. This paper will examine the twofold accomplishments (siddhi) of the alchemical tradition and how the consumption of ritually prepared substances leads to a perfected body. First, I will explore lohasiddhi, in which the alchemist experiments with mercury, metals, and gems in order to achieve dehasiddhi, the perfection of the body.

This perfect body is not simply an ageless one, but in fact necessity for a higher awareness and enlightenment within the living body. Thus, mercurials were more than medicines. They were, in fact, important tools for spiritual development. Here I will compare alchemical and yogic notions of the dehasiddhi to demonstrate the similarities and uncover the alchemical metaphors sprinkled throughout hathayoga texts. While much of yogic teaching focuses on a non-material bodily perfection, i.e. one that is divine rather than corporeal, alchemists believed that their physical body could be made pure enough to be both immortal and concrete.

Finally, I will discuss the purification process to examine the importance of mineral and plant additions to substances. While purification is meant to remove dangerous elements, alchemical recipes almost never call for the use of a single substance. Mercury itself must consume substances like mica, gold, and sulphur to achieve its maximum effectiveness. Purified mercury and other substances are

ingested with other medicinal substances, most often vegetable, animal, and alkali substances to strengthen the outcomes of the elixirs and to ease side effects of those taking them.

Keywords: rasaśāstra, tantra, yoga, medicine

### Introspection / 73

## Institutional Power and Community Power in Modern Yoga: Aligned or Maligned?

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Name: Amelia Wood

Bio: Amelia Wood is a PhD candidate at SOAS, University of London, researching abuses of power in modern transnational yoga contexts. She has presented work at several international conferences: the University of Chester Spiritual Abuse: Coercive Control in Religions conference (2021), the University of California, Riverside Religions and Sexual Abuse conference (2022) and the Jagiellonian, Poland, Yoga Darśana, Yoga Sādhana conference (2022).

Amelia received an MA in the Traditions of Yoga and Meditation at SOAS in 2015 –her dissertation focused on the roles and representations of women in pre-modern texts, supervised by Dr. James Mallinson.

Amelia is currently on the steering committee for the SOAS Centre for Yoga Studies (CYS) and convened the 2022 CYS Summer short course. She was on the organising committee for the 2022 YDYS conference in Krakow, Poland.

Institution: SOAS, University of London

Status: PhD candidate

Title: Institutional Power and Community Power in Modern Yoga: Aligned or Maligned?

Abstract:

In the last decade there have been a number of allegations and revelations of abuses of power from within yoga contexts, including spiritual, sexual and financial abuse. Responses from industry organisations, grassroots communities and the media have been inconsistent. Abuse has been minimised and denied –a discourse that has sometimes caused further harm to survivors and victims. Those accused have been both glorified and vilified –again, the impact on survivors of such a discourse is rarely considered. In some instances, communities have made space for the voices of survivors, victims and those who have been harmed.

I will present the ways in which institutions have responded to abuses of power in yoga contexts – implementing safeguarding process and scheduling trauma-informed studio classes –and compare it to community responses. Are institutional, organisational and community responses aligned –and if not, why not –or do they cause further harm? This paper builds on my work presented at the previous Yoga Darśana, Yoga Sādhana conference, which was largely theoretical. This new work includes qualitative fieldwork findings and therefore the voices and experiences of survivors.

### Institutionalisation / 74

## Delusion, Bilingual Poetry and Commentary Literature

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Śivasvāmin's Kapphiṇābhyudaya is a fascinating work of epic court poetry (mahākāvya) from 9th-century Kashmir, a product of a highly-developed intellectual culture. This poem builds upon a Buddhist theme, the campaign of the southern king Kapphiṇa against his northern rival Prasenajit. The latter,



a Buddhist, calls the Buddha for help when his army is about to be defeated in the decisive battle. The Buddha appears on the battle field, and magically reverts the tide of the battle. Defeated, Kapphiṇa stands in awe and embraces Buddhism.

The penultimate 19th canto of the poem is Kapphiṇa's praise of the Buddha. It is composed using the device of Bhāṣāśleṣa, i.e. it can be read in two languages simultaneously, Sanskrit and Śaurasenī Prakrit, with different meanings. This feat requires the text to be highly artificial and enigmatic. As so far no commentary on the poem had been available, it has been an unsolved mystery, leading to different theories being proposed, such as being a simultaneous Buddha- and Śivastotra. A manuscript of a commentary composed by Bhikṣu Tathāgata Indrasimha, a Buddhist monastic, has survived in Tibet. Copies of it have recently become available and the text is being edited.

In his treatment of the Sanskrit text of KA 19.11, discussing the word moha, "delusion," concepts discussed also in Pātañjalayogaśāstra 2.5, which deals with avidyā, are being picked up by the commentator: The misconceptions of eternality in the ephemeral, of happiness in suffering, of purity in foulness and finally of the self in the non-self. Particularly the last two terms being problematic in a Buddhist context. The paper will discuss the treatment of these four sets in the commentaries to the PYŚ, among others Vācaspatimiśra's Tattvavaiśārādī, and put them in relation to Buddhist doctrine.

Peter Pasedach is a research associate at the Indological department of Hamburg University. Currently he mostly works on a DFG-funded project on the two mahākāvyas, works of epic court poetry, surviving from 9th-century Kashmir, and their commentaries. Another area of his work is yoga, where he commenced a new digital critical edition of the Śivasamhitā and is in the preparatory stages of a project on the Tattvavaiśārādī, Vācaspatimiśra's commentary on the Pātañjalayogaśāstra.

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## The Other Śivasamhitā

**Author:** Peter Pasedach<sup>None</sup>

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The Śivasamhitā is a prominent text in the Haṭhayoga Corpus. Many editions and translations of it exist, but a new critical edition of it is a desideratum, as the two previous editions which call themselves critical did not pay much attention to the readings of their many witnesses, or did not even provide a critical apparatus (!). Furthermore, there is obviously more manuscript material around which has not been used by previous editors and which might shed some more light on the history of the text.

The current paper is going to report on some of the findings of a new search of manuscripts of the Śivasamhitā. One item of particular interest is the find of a manuscript of a Tantric text of the same name, but of different content, in the library of the Asiatic Society in Kolkata.

Peter Pasedach is a research associate at the Indological department of Hamburg University. Currently he mostly works on a DFG-funded project on the two mahākāvyas, works of epic court poetry, surviving from 9th-century Kashmir, and their commentaries. Another area of his work is yoga, where he commenced a new digital critical edition of the Śivasamhitā and is in the preparatory stages of a project on the Tattvavaiśārādī, Vācaspatimiśra's commentary on the Pātañjalayogaśāstra.

## **Merging the Mind in the Unstruck Sound –Jaina Yoga and anāhata nāda**

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Bio:

Corinna Lhoir, M.A., is a PhD student of classical Indology and a contract lecturer for Origins of Yoga at Universität Hamburg as well as an entrepreneur with her own online learning platform with focus on studies of yoga and Sanskrit (yogastudien.de). She holds a B.A. in Languages and Cultures of India and Tibet with focus on classical Indology from Universität Hamburg, a M.A. in Traditions of Yoga and Meditation from SOAS, University of London and a M.A. in Oriental Languages and Cultures (India) with focus on Jainism from Ghent University in Belgium.

Her research primarily focuses on yoga in Jainism. She is currently preparing a critical edition of the Yogapradīpa, a Jain medieval text on yoga and meditation, and a survey on the Jain Yoga of the second millennium AD.

Paper title: Merging the Mind in the Unstruck Sound –Jain Yoga and anāhata nāda

Abstract:

Anāhata nāda (or anahad nad in vernacular languages) is often described as the unstruck or uncreated sound, which means it doesn't have an external source like a musical instrument or vocal cords. It is considered to be the primal, eternal sound that exists within the cosmos and is believed to be the source of all other sounds. In various spiritual and yogic traditions, practitioners aim to attune themselves to the subtle vibrations of anāhata nāda as a means of meditation and spiritual exploration.

My paper is drawing from my current comparative PhD research on a Jain medieval manuscript on Yoga and will elucidate the way in which anāhata nāda was perceived and interpreted by the Jains, a religious minority, in the India of the second Millennium.

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## **The Purpose OF pain in Modern Yoga**

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Abstract

The centrality of pain in ascetic experience has long been recognised. Tales of the sufferings of martyrs and anchorites abound in the literature. While we can also find many examples of painful practices in the Vedas and epics, there is less information available about its role in Modern Yoga. Indeed, the popular narrative of the use of Yoga for pain relief appears to argue against the proactive application and acceptance of pain for the practitioner's benefit.

Using qualitative methods as well as textual research, this paper explores the role of pain in Modern Yoga practice. Drawing on the testimony of Yoga practitioners, primarily in the lineage of Krishnamacharya, it argues that, rather than something to be avoided, pain is seen by many of these practitioners as an inescapable, indispensable part of yoga practice. The result is a religious imaginary which takes its cues from the cultural context of the individual practitioner.

This paper argues that, for the Modern Yoga practitioner, the experience of pain is more aligned with ancient and Classical yoga texts than with the Modernist aversion to pain or the post- twentieth-century appropriation of Yoga for biomedical or therapeutic purposes. The blending of contemporary religio-spiritual preoccupations with physically demanding practices results in a philosophy in which pain is appropriated and interiorised as a soteriological tool. The language and imagery used to describe the experience of pain reflects the blending of cultures and religions which is at the heart of Modern Yoga. The result is an attitude to pain which has more in common with the askesis of the ancient yogin than previously recognised.

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**Inspiration / 78**

## **Transnational Inspiration: Prāṇa and Prāṇāyāma in Early Modern Yoga**

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A central practice to both premodern and modern yoga, prāṇāyāma (lit. “breath control”) is widely practised in yoga classes today. Yet, until now, it remained under-researched. Kraler’s PhD thesis “Yoga Breath: The Reinvention of Prāṇa and Prāṇāyāma in Early Modern Yoga” (2022) radically changes this. By carefully examining the history of modern prāṇāyāma between 1850 and 1945, it unearths several strands of modern yoga that were largely unknown or ignored. The thesis contains longitudinal threads, in which the continuity of the South Asian practices and their longstanding history are highlighted. The thesis also maps the more horizontal developments that bridge practices from Euro-American physical culture and yoga. In doing so, it carefully analyses yogic breath practices and their overlap and interaction with Euro-American hygienic, medical, and occult ones such as deep breathing and rhythmic breathing. Within these multiple intersections, ten key figures of modern yoga and their individual contributions to prāṇāyāma are discussed. In all these contexts, prāṇāyāma is understood as a tool for introspection providing physical, mental, and spiritual transformation. This paper will present the most salient points made in the thesis and opens a discussion whether parts of the history of modern yoga can be re-written by analysing modern prāṇa and prāṇāyāma.

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## **Yogic Discipline for the Worldly King: Meditation and Self-Mastery in Sanskrit Manuals of Statecraft**

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Is yoga practice appropriate for everyone, or is it only for monks and renunciators? What benefits of yoga might there be for those who are not seeking liberation in their current life from the cycle of death and rebirth? To begin to explore such questions, in this presentation I will examine techniques of self-mastery, such as meditation and the “conquering of the senses” (indriya-jaya), described in manuals of advice to kings. I will make particular reference to Nāgārjuna’s “Precious Garland” (Ratnāvalī, circa 2nd. c. CE) and Kāmandaki’s “Essence of Statecraft” (Nīṭisāra, circa 6th c. CE). Texts on kingship in pre-modern India have often been stereotyped as amoral, anti-religious, or even “Machiavellian.” This barely disguised disdain among scholars, however, overlooks important

features of these texts. Here we can find a specifically masculine ideal of perfection where the roles of “warrior” and “yogi” are blurred, such as the Mahāyāna Buddhist monk Nāgārjuna’s inclusion of “vigor” or “warriorhood” (vīrya) as one of the six virtues that a bodhisattva-king must cultivate. Although Kāmandaki understands the goal of the king to be power, not spiritual liberation, the means he prescribes may often serve both ends. Such advice offered to kings presents insights that are relevant to the lives of householder yogis in the 21st century.

### Introspection / 80

## The teacher disappears: Cases of disaffiliation on the margin of the Iyengar Yoga community

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Recent developments within modern postural yoga milieus –mainly bringing to light cases of sexual abuse –put into question the role of lineage in setting and transmitting standards of yoga practice. This opened new possibilities for yoga practitioners and instructors to consider moving their practice outside of the lineage format.

Within Iyengar Yoga, discontinuing affiliation is an ambiguous process. On the one hand, becoming an Iyengar Yoga instructor takes a lot of time and commitment, especially to strict rules of orthopraxy and to one’s leading teachers, with whom strong bonds of loyalty are usually formed. On the other hand, the process of certification is formalised and highly normative, which means that experienced and respected instructors can decide whether they want to be affiliated or not on a yearly basis. At the same time, the very ideological foundations of Iyengar Yoga assume a high degree of experimentation and innovation, which at the same time makes disaffiliation acceptable and puts into question its necessity.

The proposed paper will examine the experience of former Iyengar Yoga instructors, who recently decided to discontinue their certification, but remain active in their communities. Based on in-depth interviews, the paper will explore the stories of the subjects’ disaffiliation, the motivations behind their decision to discontinue their formal association with Iyengar Yoga, and their experience as no-longer-Iyengar-Yoga-instructors. It will also offer a look at the subjects’ view on the legacy of B.K.S. Iyengar, on the meaning they attribute to yoga practice, and on their aspirations regarding creating and maintaining yoga practitioner communities.

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## ”Puffing and Swelling as Bubbles”: Mantra and Music in Sri Sabhapati Swami’s Yoga

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The Tamil yogin Sri Sabhapati Swami (ca. 1828–1936) is known for his elaborate visual depictions of the Royal Yoga for Śiva (Śivarājayoga), but much lesser known is the attention paid to musical poetry, mantra, and sound within his Sanskrit publications that span Tamil, Hindi, Bengali, and English language worlds. In addition to lyrical songs and poetic compositions, Sabhapati also included instructions on the aural recitation of musical notes (*svara*) and Mantric seed-syllables (*bijamantra*), framing them as fragmented powers (*kalā*) of the syllable Om. Furthermore, he was probably the first modern yogin to develop a practice of silent chanting that was linked to the purification of

the five elemental principles (*tattva*) and other components of his embodied system of cakras or lotuses (*kamala*), which he also called “bubbles” and described as “puffing and swelling.” This paper analyzes how singing and aurality played such an integral part of Sabhapati’s yogic and mantric literature as well as today at a contemporary temple devoted to him, and focuses on how this practice was designed to enhance meditative practice as well as benefit audiences of devotees.

**Institutionalisation / 83**

## **Tracing the Genesis of Lakṣyayoga (“Yoga auf Targets”) - From Śaiva Tantras to Late Medieval Rājayoga Texts**

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Bio:

Nils Jacob Liersch (M.A.) is a research assistant in the Haṭhapradīpikā project at Philipps-Universität Marburg and is mainly working on his dissertation as part of this project. For his Ph.D. he is preparing a critical edition and annotated translation of the *Yogatattvabindu*. This is a descriptive yoga textbook from the 17th century that belongs to the Rājayoga genre, which contains a complex taxonomy of fifteen different types of yoga.

Abstract:

This paper focuses on the evolution and historical development of a particular form of yoga known as Lakṣyayoga (“Yoga auf Targets”). The paper will explore the historical lineage of this yoga practice, tracing its origins from ancient Śaiva Tantras to late medieval Rājayoga texts.

The *Dikṣottara* is described as the *locus classicus* for the six-fold reward-oriented contemplation of Śiva. The six *lakṣyas* taught here are also mentioned in the Yoga of the *Mālinīvijayottara* and *Kiraṇa*. These six *lakṣyas* are believed to provide the initiated yogin with a direct experience of Śiva. The *Netratantra*, the *Tantāloka*, *Manthānabhairavatantra* or *Ūrmikaulārnavatantra* teach three *lakṣyas*. From here, the practice of three *lakṣyas* can be traced via medieval texts of the Haṭhayoga genre and Yoga Upaniṣads up to late medieval Rājayoga texts such as the *Yogatattvabindu* in which the practice of now five *lakṣyas* becomes an own type of yoga.

The exploration of the history of Lakṣyayoga yields insight into important foundational mechanisms of the reception history of yogic practices across the centuries and traditions.

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## **The politics and poetics of yoga spaces: three case studies from the UK**

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Drawing on survey data, interviews and field notes, this paper describes the economic, social, and ethical considerations balanced by mainstream yoga teachers in choosing where to teach –the politics of yoga spaces. Using three archetypal yoga spaces: church hall, multi-use gym, and yoga studio, the case studies highlight demographic trends and multi-generational perspectives, from older teachers working in community spaces to younger teachers increasingly working in yoga-specific spaces. The archetypes shed light on the complex relationship between popularized yoga and the social imaginary: the relationship between yoga, Christian faith, and the institutions of the Church; bodybuilding, identity, and spirituality in gym spaces; and the acculturation of South Asian religious traditions in yoga specific spaces. In the second half of the paper, drawing on Bachelard's philosophy of the imagination and the poetics of space (1958) the case studies elaborate on how these yoga spaces affect participant subjectivities and are themselves effected through the performative and discursive elements of practice, becoming 'heterotopias' or (re)imagined spaces (Foucault, 1968). As heterotopias, the material outer space contributes to liminal spaces of interiority and contemplation during a yoga class, metamorphizing participants' inner worlds on a spectrum ranging from metaphysical escape to loving connection. I ask how these consciousness-raising experiences contribute to identity and agency? As Newcombe (2018) has argued 'physical space becomes an exceptionally useful focus for understanding controversy, contested meanings and the complex and multivalent place of yoga in contemporary society.'

**Inspiration / 85**

## **From Ritual to Introspection: The *adhyātmayoga* of the *Kaṭha-Upaniṣad***

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Dominik A. Haas is a researcher in South Asian Studies working with ancient Vedic and Sanskrit texts. He is the author of *Gāyatrī: Mantra and Mother of the Vedas* and regularly publishes on the topics of Hinduism, Vedic religion, mantras, deification, the history of yoga, and soteriology. Following an interdisciplinary approach, he combines philological and historical research with methods and insights from various fields, ranging from digital humanities to text linguistics, religious studies, and archaeoastronomy. As co-founder of the Initiative for Fair Open Access Publishing in South Asian Studies, Haas is also involved in promoting innovative forms of scholarly communication, and fair working conditions in the academic and publishing sector.

### **From Ritual to Introspection: The *adhyātmayoga* of the *Kaṭha-Upaniṣad***

Classical South Asian Studies, philology, Upaniṣads, pre-classical yoga

The *Kaṭha-Upaniṣad* is a heterogeneous and diverse Sanskrit text that deals with the nature of human beings after death. Similar to the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, with which it even shares some stanzas, it enjoys great popularity in modern transnational yoga. It mentions two ways of salvation that are supposed to lead to immortality: an elaborate Vedic fire ritual as well as a method referred to as yoga. These two are not easily reconciled, and philologists have repeatedly imputed incoherence and contradiction to the text. In my talk, I will present some of the results of my book project on the *Kaṭha-Upaniṣad*, which takes a novel, text linguistic approach to analyzing the structure, coherence, and production process of this text. In particular, I will discuss the relationship of ritual and introspection and the central role the concept of the so-called *adhyātmayoga* was intended to fulfill in linking the two.

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## From Worshipping God to Becoming God: A Theistic Teaching of Pāśupata Yoga in the Īśvara Gītā

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to explore the concept of theistic yoga in the Īśvara Gītā (8th century CE) which is believed to be a Śaiva text, especially a Pāśupata philosophical text. Many yogic texts do not accept the concept of God (Īśvara) or sometimes prescribe the worship of Īśvara for the attainment of liberation, but Īśvara is not conceived as the almighty Īśvara with Omni-attributes rather it is deemed as a helping agent in the spiritual path of Sādhanā. I argue that while many yogic texts rule out the possibility of a creator God and God's liberating power, the Īśvara Gītā holds that God is the creator, preserver, and destroyer of this universe and enjoins the practice of Pāśupata Yoga, which results in liberation by the grace of the God. Pāśupata Yoga is the means not only of worshipping the Lord but also of becoming the God himself, and Īśvara is not only the means but also the end of the spiritual journey of a Pāśupata Yogi. In the Īśvara Gītā Śiva is the Paśupati, Master of Beasts, who instructs a group of sages about the highest truth and the means to realize it through the practice of yoga. Śiva says that he himself is supreme, the source of creation for all other gods, and the ultimate focus of yogic concentration.

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## Yoga as an Academic Discipline in Indian Public Universities

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The election of a Hindu nationalist government in 2014 brought yoga to the forefront of Indian politics. Since then, the Indian state has devoted considerable resources to integrating its teaching into India's public infrastructure. In particular, in 2016 it selected six central universities to establish departments with the capacity to award university yoga certificates up to PhD level. By analysing the history and implementation of this policy and its main actors through the specific case of Visva-Bharati, a university founded by Rabindranath Tagore in Bengal in 1921, where a Department of Yogic Art and Science has been opened, this paper attempts to work out the nature and stakes of this institutional yoga, the intellectual and social networks on which it is built, and its relationship with sectarian Hinduism.

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## Comparing the Metaethics of Patañjali's Yoga and Nondual Śaivism

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Metaethics may be characterised as the philosophical and soteriological framework in which a tradition's implicit normative ethical theory and practical ethical precepts are embedded. This paper

compares two traditions that contributed to the evolution of modern transnational yoga as it is currently practiced: Patañjali's Yoga, exemplified in his *Yogasūtra*, based on the dualist Sāṃkhya system and influenced by Buddhism; and nondual Śaivism, which itself emerged from the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta.

Ethical precepts (the *yamas* and *niyamas*), as well as devotion 'the Lord', *Īśvara*, play important roles in Patañjali's Yoga. I argue that Patañjali's Yoga emerged from early theistic Sāṃkhya, resisted Buddhist idealism, and yields a moral realist metaethics that is grounded in the characteristics of the three *guṇas*. Patañjali's metaethics may be understood as a form of natural law theory, but one quite unlike anything found in the Western traditions.

In nondual Śaivism by contrast, ultimate reality or *Paramaśiva*, may be said to be amoral –not in a pejorative sense, but in the sense that absolutely everything that happens in the universe is merely the 'play' (*krīḍā*) of Śiva –there is no sense of a teleological goal towards the realisation of 'the Good'. The ultimate goal for the nondual Śaiva tantrika is the realisation that they are Śiva, exercising complete and total freedom (*svātantrya*) in whatever way seems fitting. There is no necessary correlation between spiritual advancement and ethical behaviour. The metaethics of nondual Śaivism may be characterised as a form of hermeneutical fictionalism, in which followers may choose pragmatically to follow the 'rules of the game', as though in a play, but without believing in any ultimate moral values.

I argue that the diverse metaethical frameworks that are implicit in different yogic traditions play important and often under-appreciated roles in a range of ethical challenges facing modern transnational yoga.

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## **Sexual Abuse and Rape Culture in Modern Transnational Yoga - Case Study: Sivananda Yoga**

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Over the past decade, victims/survivors have streamed forward to report sexual violence within the modern transnational yoga context, creating a distinct survivor movement: #metooyoga. Despite a growing body of victim/survivor narratives and investigative documentation, discussion of sexual abuse perpetrated by revered figures is conspicuously absent within the wider yoga community and scholarship. Further, the topic is often actively hidden, denied, and shut down by practitioners and devotees, especially when their guru is implicated.

Rape culture refers to commonly held beliefs and attitudes which serve to both deny and rationalize instances of male sexual aggression against women. It is argued that these attitudes create a hostile social climate toward victims/survivors of sexual violence, the net effect of which is to deny or minimize the perceived injury, blame victims for their own victimization, and shift sympathy to the male accused. While discourse on rape culture has primarily remained a secular feminist endeavour, this paper articulates the connections between persistent rape culture logics and weaponized spiritual teachings and attitudes within the yoga context.

Reports of abuse by once beloved gurus and spiritual teachers have elicited rage, denial, gaslighting, spiritual bypassing, smear campaigns, and defamation lawsuits from their former yoga communities and the business arm of the tradition. Given this multiply burdened social climate, understandably, many victims waited decades before going public with their experiences of sexual abuse when they were young women and, in some cases, children. To date, few have received any accountability, truth-telling, compensation, or repair in response to their disclosures. In contrast, nearly all accused and their yoga empires have continued business as usual, largely exempt from critical analysis by yoga scholars, practitioners, or the broader culture in which yoga has received amnesty.

**Angela Gollat** holds an MA in Social Justice Studies and Women and Gender Studies at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada, and is a co-organizer of Project SATYA, a survivor solidarity movement investigation sexual abuse in Sivananda Yoga. She is currently working within the



public health sector to address up-stream causes of gender-based violence, and lectures on global reproductive justice within Lakehead University's Gender and Women's Studies Department.

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## **Mystical Pluralism, Yogas, and the Role of Learning in Early Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava Theology**

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One of the most enduring debates within the study of religion over the last century and half has been how to make sense of the plurality of mystical experiences found in the human record (James, 1902; Zaehner, 1957; Stace, 1960; Katz, 1978; Forman, 1990; Taves, 2009). This question, however, is not new nor confined to modern academic discourse and theological speculation. There is a rich history in Indian theological and philosophical thought that has recognized and developed various theories relative to their particular worldview. Among these, Jīva Gosvāmin (ca. 16th c.)—one of the early architects of early Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology—offers an innovative model of mystical pluralism in which different scripturally-sanctioned paths of yoga lead to the ability (yogyatā) to directly perceive (sākṣātkāra) divine reality (tattva) without attributes as brahman or with attributes as a form of bhagavān. While traditional historiographical research is critical for gaining insight into the influence of the context and history of the ideas informing such models, contemporary psychological research can offer us insight into the influence of human psychological processes. To this end, I argue cognitive research on learning (Rumelhart, et al, 1976; Bechtel et al, 2002), attribution theories (Spilka et al, 1985; Malle, 2004), and conceptual processing theories (Al-Issa, 1995; Aleman and Larøi, 2008) suggests that paths of yoga can serve as learning strategies that transform how one cognitively processes information. In so doing, they create favorable cognitive conditions for the emergence of experiences reflective of what one has trained and learned to experience.

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## **Yoga in Contemporary Indian Art**

**Author:** sowmya ayyar<sup>1</sup>

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This is a case study of Visual Artist Suresh K. Nair's Covid Contemplations. During Covid, Nair brought his work into small spaces using business cards as his canvas. His work can be seen as a display of yoga philosophy, practicing balance of elements in order to make up the universe; visualizing different limbs of Ashtanga yoga.

Through each card, Nair portrays asana, pranayama, and shunya. His work is about the panchabhutas: earth, water, fire, air, and space. Each card can be seen as a jivatman, seeking its space in the whole, complete paramatman, seen through the coming together of the entire display.

Nair builds a sense of Sangha, or community, through his art, by encouraging the audiences to interact and add to the display.

Nair's work uses eco-friendly, sustainable material which is biodegradable: it is not meant to withstand time; rather, it is in the present, the here, the *now*, teaching us to also be present. Thus, his

work introduces the idea of vairagya, or detached attachment: each card can be released individually.

This presentation will include a live, interactive display of thousands of pieces arranged in yogic themes of panchabhutas in asanas and pranayama pieces, and shunya spaces. The presentation will analyze Nair's work along these lines, as well as gender and class.

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## Serpent Power 2.0: Kuṇḍalinī Activations in Contemporary Germany

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Already early yoga pioneers like Sri T. Krishnamacharya and Yogananda but also Western psychologists like C.G. Jung and popular authors like John Woodroffe were interested in Kuṇḍalinī practices in the early 20th century. Kuṇḍalinī, a secret »serpent power«, as Woodroffe famously called it, is said to sit coiled at the bottom of the spine and, according to Tantra and Haṭhayoga, must be stimulated by various and difficult practices to move up into the skull to lead to an enlightening experience.

As many practices in contemporary yoga, what was once considered esoteric and very advanced, today gets broken down, democratized, and embodied. The »Kundalini Activation Process« (KAP) taught by Venant Wong promises exactly this on the homepage: »(···) a blend of raw Kundalini & deep consciousness that is overwhelmingly incarnated into the physical body.« The website promises that with continued exposure a »profound rewiring of the brain structure and central nervous system happens« and a facilitator even told me that she has to teach them because she got »addicted« to these experiences. In this talk, I will present preliminary ethnographic, historical, and body research on contemporary Kuṇḍalinī practices and discourses, already popularized by Osho and Yogi Bhaḥan: What precisely is the nature of today's Kuṇḍalinī practices and in what setting are they performed? How do people describe their experiences and how can their effects be understood from an embodiment point of view? And how do these practices and discourses resonate with a contemporary European middle class amidst their busy, urban, digitalized (family) lives?

Dr. Laura von Ostrowski's book to her PhD-thesis was published Open Access under the title *A Text in Motion* in 2022. As a religious scholar, indologist and ethnographer her areas of research include modern and contemporary yoga, the reception history of the *Yogasūtra*, aesthetics and embodiment. She teaches about the history of modern yoga at the online education portal [www.yogastudien.de](http://www.yogastudien.de) and is associated with the University of Hamburg, Germany.

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## The Soteriology of Sound Revisited: Meditation on OM at Death in the Pāśupata Sūtra

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As recent work on Pāśupata asceticism by Jonker has shown (2021), liberating "union" (yoga) with Śiva was to be achieved through the practitioner's self-induced death, by the method known to later yogic traditions as "climbing up" (utkrānti), whereby the soul leaves the body and ascends. In this paper, I explore this idea from another direction, through a granular examination of Pāśupata mantra meditation in relation to some earlier texts of Brahmanical yoga. Various Upaniṣads and

the Bhagavad Gīta offer ample evidence that Pāśupata meditation at OM at death is indebted to the paradigm that I have elsewhere called the “soteriology of sound” (Gerety 2021): meditation on the sacred syllable at death to achieve immortality or liberation. Through a close reading of the Pāśupata Sūtra (5.24-29, 34) in light of these older sources, I place Pāśupata OM meditation in the genealogy of Hiraṇyagarbha’s yoga (Harimoto 2020)—and by extension, I make arguments for 1) the centrality of OM in early Brahmanical yoga and 2) the broad influence of Hiraṇyagarbha’s system in the early centuries of the Common Era.

**Introspection / 95**

## Finding the Brown Body in Contemporary Yoga

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The collision of health inequalities exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and social inequities raised through the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement following the murder of George Floyd put a spotlight on the treatment of black bodies in world of white privilege. In contemporary yoga settings, this led to discussions around inclusion on the basis of race, gender and body shape and size alongside issues of cultural appropriation and appreciation by white bodies of a practice which originates in the Indian subcontinent and has been exported, largely as means of physical exercise, globally. Most of the main contributors to the debate have been from the Global North, with yoga practitioners in North America and Europe leading the conversation. In India, yoga continues to be used as a soft power tool by the ruling party and a vehicle of Hindu nationalism. Conspicuous by its absence is an interrogation of the socio-politics of the brown body, both as the intended initial recipient of instructions in yoga (including asana) and as an evolving, modern practitioner. This paper will examine both yogic and anthropological literature in an attempt to understand the historical relevance of the brown body in the Indian subcontinent, as a subject of forced and voluntary migration and will reflect on the brown body’s positioning in contemporary practice.

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## From Theorhythm to yoga teachers: The impact of Phiroz Mehta in the UK

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This paper seeks to contextualise Indian philosophy teacher Phiroz Mehta’s contribution to UK yoga culture between the 1930s and 1980s. It will consider how he blended Theosophy and yoga to form his own practice called ‘Theorhythm’ and how he pioneered health camps in Dorset during the 1930s that included Theorhythm sessions for mostly middle-class women. The paper will include interview excerpts with British yoga teachers who studied with Mehta in the 1970s and 1980s and their reflections on how his talks shaped their professional yoga teaching. Finally, the paper will assess Mehta’s relationship with Fritjof Capra, author of the best-selling popular book *The Tao of Physics* and who studied with Mehta in London in the 1970s. [This is a follow-up paper to an article published on Mehta in 2023 in *Religions*.]

Dr Karen O’Brien-Kop is Lecturer in Asian Religions at King’s College London. Her books include *The Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies* (with Newcombe, Routledge 2020), *Rethink-*

ing *'Classical Yoga': Meditation, Metaphors and Materiality* (Bloomsbury Academic 2021) and *The Philosophy of the Yogasutra: An Introduction* (Bloomsbury Academic 2023).

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## **Rethinking Patañjali and āsana: The relationship between āsana (posture), sukha (bliss), and meditation in early Buddhism and Patañjali's yoga**

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MA Traditions of Yoga and Meditation (SOAS)

Rethinking Patañjali and āsana: The relationship between āsana (posture), sukha (bliss), and meditation in early Buddhism and Patañjali's yoga

This paper offers a new history of the link between āsana, bliss (sukha), and meditation in Ancient India. In particular, it offers a new interpretation of the passage on āsana in the Pātañjalayogaśāstra (2.46-2.48) by exploring its ascetic background. Philipp Maas (2018) and Dominik Wujastyk (2018) have already argued that the usage of the term samāpatti in 2.47 suggests a Buddhist background, but without exploring this potential background further. A more detailed consideration of early Buddhist evidence suggests that Patañjali drew on an earlier discourse on overcoming the hardships of prolonged meditation and ascetic life in the wilderness by using meditative techniques to suffuse one's body with a pleasant feeling or bliss (sukha) that cancels out the pain (duḥkha) which might otherwise be felt. The importance of the noun sukha in the Buddhist discourse on meditation suggests that the compound sthirasukha in 2.46 might best be taken as a bahuvrihi compound, referring to a stable (sthira) feeling of sukha (ease or bliss) during āsana practice.

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## **Smṛti in the Pātañjalayogaśāstra: Retention, recollection and the practice of self**

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One of the distinctive features of early Buddhist meditation was the wide range of awareness or attention practices of smṛti (sati). There is also an important role for smṛti in the Pātañjalayogaśāstra, where it appears in a variety of semantic contexts, not only in the mundane cognitive function of memory, but as an applied meditation technique of correct and clear recollection of objects of attention. This paper argues that to analyse how smṛti functions in Patañjali's meditative formulas, we should consider Buddhist recollection practices such as affective conceptual/visual recollection (anusmṛti) and the four abiding awarenesses (smṛtyupasthāna) –since both categories of smṛti are mentioned in Patañjali's text.

Dr Karen O'Brien-Kop is Lecturer in Asian Religions at King's College London. Her recent books are *The Routledge Handbook of Yoga and Meditation Studies* (with Newcombe, Routledge 2020), *Rethinking 'Classical Yoga' and Buddhism: Meditation, Metaphor and Materiality* (Bloomsbury 2021) and *The Philosophy of the Yogasutra* (Bloomsbury 2023).

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## **Fierce Aesthetics of Asceticism: The Goddess Cāmuṇḍā in Temple Art of Medieval North India**

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Cāmuṇḍā embodies various roles, including that of a mother (mātr), a yoginī, and an independent goddess or manifestation of Mahādevī. She is characterised by her transgressive Śaiva attributes, which include cradling a skull cup, standing on a cremation ground atop a corpse—a possible reference to śavasādhana, the corpse ritual—and wielding items like the skull-topped staff (khaṭvāṅga) and drum (ḍamaru). Described as 'fully perfected in yoga' (yogasamsiddhā) in Purāṇas and represented clad in tiger skin and severely emaciated, her portrayal in medieval Indian art resonates with those of ascetics. Even though her exclusively fierce and wild appearance is overemphasised in secondary literature, Cāmuṇḍā also shared aspects with practitioners of tantric Śaivism. In sculptural art, she inhabits spaces with these Śaiva figures and is often surrounded by a devoted entourage. Notably, from the early medieval period, she began occupying cardinal niches in temples. Especially noteworthy are those temples situated on monastic premises, such as the Mattamayūra temples of Central India.

This presentation outlines Cāmuṇḍā's relationship with ascetic practitioners through an examination of material sources. It also explores the mechanisms that facilitated her integration as a core deity in these monastic temple spaces. The focus lies on her pioneering integration into the Mattamayūra world as early as the 9th century, giving insights into the deities venerated by the Śaiva Siddhānta sect. Additionally, her depiction in temples affiliated with the Pāśupatas in neighbouring regions is considered as well, shedding more light on her significance as a yoginī worshipped by yogis.

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## **Menstrual practice –a survey of the field**

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Menstruation for some is a sacred thread connecting women with their natural rhythms whilst for other, such as Kashmirian tantric brahmins, menstruation is 'that which could not be suppressed in [the women of the cult], the monthly discharge of their inner depravity'(Sanderson 1985:202). But it could be halted. Fourteenth century haṭha yoginīs draw up menstrual and sexual fluid inside their bodies to acquire extraordinary powers (Westoby 2021). Sixteenth century practitioners of nūdan, Chinese inner alchemy, halt menstruation as a precursor to gestating a golden spirit embryo and birthing it through the head (Valussi 2003). Twentieth century members of yoga-oriented New Religious Movements (NRMs) practice to halt menstruation. Twenty-first century yoga practitioners use the pill to stop menstruation in order to practice yoga postures.

Scattered accounts of female sexual and menstrual praxis in South Asia stand in stark contrast to the body of scholarship on male asceticism, masculinity and continence. Women's praxis is obscured by the façade of dangerous female sexuality and the seeming impenetrability of the sources' misogyny. Modern-day religious and spiritual movements, from leaders to lay-practitioners, have a lot to say about a topic usually treated as private—if not taboo.

This presentation surveys historical research on menstrual practice in Indian religions and compares this with approaches in NRMs and yoga communities. This presentation builds on historical textual sources with pilot interviews and public testimony to sketch the state of the field and propose new research directions: a project to gain an in-depth understanding of peoples' approaches to and interventions in their own menstrual cycle as informed by spiritual, religious or cultural beliefs and the availability and use of traditional or modern contraceptive technologies.

#### Bio

Ruth Westoby is a doctoral researcher in yoga and an Ashtanga practitioner. Ruth is writing up a thesis on the body in early haṭha yoga, 'Blood, snake, fire: The mighty body of yoga in early haṭha texts', at SOAS University of London, prepared under the supervision of Dr James Mallinson. Ruth has published early research findings in the peer-reviewed *Religions of South Asia* and numerous public articles. Ruth collaborated with the SOAS Haṭha Yoga Project's 'embodied philology', interpreting postures from an 18th-century text teaching a precursor of modern yoga, the *Haṭhābhyāsapaddhati*, in 2016 and 2017.

Ruth is Visiting Lecturer in Indian Religions at Roehampton University, teaching postgraduate theory and method in the study of religion and undergraduate contemporary issues in global religions. Ruth serves on the Yoga in Theory and Practice Unit of the American Academy of Religions and served on the steering committee for the SOAS Centre of Yoga Studies.

#### Introspection / 102

### Who is well Versed in Yoga: Insights from Yogaśatakam of Haribhadra

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#### Who is well Versed in Yoga: Insights from Yogaśatakam of Haribhadra

This paper delves into Yogaśatakam, an 8th-century medieval Jaina yoga text composed in Prakrit by Śvetāmbara Ācārya Haribhadra in verse style. As a yogic text, Yogaśatakam employs various Jain yoga techniques. The focus of this study is to examine the concept of the "efficient person in yoga" (adhikārī) within the context of Jain Yoga. To establish the ancient roots of this medieval text, I will investigate its correlation with ancient Jain canonical texts. The text categorizes efficient persons in yoga into three types:

Apunarbanvdhaka - those who do not exhibit a strong inclination towards engaging in evil activities.  
 Samyagdr̥ṣṭi - those who possess the right faith in the enlightened one (vītaraga), in the guru, and in the religion propounded by the enlightened one (dharma).  
 Samyagcāritrī - those who adhere to right conduct.

This progression represents a distinct Jain model of yoga, defined as a path comprising three jewels. Through these three stages, efficient yogis, as described by Haribhadra, attain the final destination of liberation, which is the ultimate goal.

#### Inspiration / 103

## Experiencing the 'Unstruck Sound' in the Yoga of the Sants

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My research revolves around the North Indian bhakti traditions of early modernity and concentrates on the analysis of religious ideology. I also deal with selected aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy, pertaining especially to the tathāgatagarbha (buddha nature) doctrine.

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My paper will focus on some theoretical aspects of the yogic 'unstruck sound' (anahad nād/śabd) practice and its soteriological importance, as reflected in selected writings of the North Indian Sants. Inherited from the Nāths, this practice was given paramount importance, and following or 'catching' the 'unbeaten' or 'boundless' interior sound was equated with attaining the supreme deity. Although in some strands of the Sant tradition this practice was deprived of its (haṭha) yogic context, it has retained a soteriological function. The aim of this paper will be to investigate the changes made to the anahad nād practice in the bhakti-oriented context of the Sant tradition, using the works of Kabīr, Dariyā Biharvāle, as well as Dādūpanthī and Rādhāsvāmī authors as examples. I am particularly interested in the way the later Sant tradition, as represented by the Rādhāsvāmīs, understands the process of grasping the inner sound without the use of corporeal yogic techniques and, subsequently, how it redefines the role of yoga and yogīs.

**Inspiration / 104**

## Blended Ontologies: entanglements of yoga, martial arts and post-modern Indian dance

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Yoga Darśana, Yoga Sādhana: Introspection, Inspiration, Institutionalisation  
22-25 May 2024 University of Hamburg

### Blended Ontologies: entanglements of yoga, martial arts and postmodern Indian dance

#### Abstract:

Emerging out of New York in the second half of the twentieth century, the dancers who coined the term 'postmodern' for their creations shared a fragmentation that embraced plural perspectives with more theoretical understandings of postmodernism. This in turn enabled enormous innovation in dance technique, because any movement was now potentially 'dance', its composition rather than any intrinsic qualities classifying it as choreography, thus massively diversifying the range of embodied practices that found their way onto the stage. These investigations took on particular characteristics in South India, where influential choreographers sought to forge an explicitly Indian contemporary dance language, by dismantling what Chandralekha (1928-2006) famously termed the 'dollification' of classical Indian dance by deconstructing its 'grammar' to free it from its classical content and religious narratives. They did so in part by drawing on yoga and the South Indian martial art *kaḷarippayār* in the somatic dismantling and bricolage which is a hallmark of postmodern

dance. This blending of forms, while on the one hand striking and powerfully effective, has also obscured the ontological and somatic distinctions between these practices of yoga and *kaḷarippayarr̥*, in part because dance itself is often understood by its practitioners to be in some way soteriological. Focussing on Chandralekha's final work, *Sharira*, and the training methods of Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts in Bengaluru, this paper analyses this somatic and ontological overlaps between these forms and sheds light on the role of contemporary dance artists in contributing to the analysis, transmission and dissemination of both yoga and *kaḷarippayarr̥* in India and beyond.

#### **Biography:**

Lucy May Constantini's PhD in the School of Religious Studies at the Open University explores the relationship between practice and textual traditions in *kaḷarippayarr̥*, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council's Open-Oxford-Cambridge Doctoral Training Partnership. This interdisciplinary research encompasses ethnography and the study of manuscripts in Malayalam and Sanskrit. Her methodology is informed by her background as a dance artist, where her work has investigated the confluence of martial arts, yoga and postmodern dance as maker, performer, facilitator and teacher, in the UK and internationally. She has also been engaged with yoga, either as practitioner, teacher, or teacher trainer, for over three decades.

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## **Did Vindhyavāsin compose the Yogabhāṣya?**

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In pre-modern South Asia, the authorship of the oldest surviving commentary on Patañjali's Yoga Sutra, the so-called Yogabhāṣya (c. 400 CE), was variously ascribed to Patañjali himself, Vindhyavāsin, or Vyāsa. While there is a broad scholarly consensus that the authorship ascription to Vyāsa is ahistorical, scholars like J. Bronkhorst, G. Larson, and myself depicted the hypothesis of Vindhyavāsin's authorship as a viable or even preferable alternative to that of the bhāṣya being Patañjali's own commentary. Other historians of Indian philosophy, like E. Frauwallner and P. Chakravarti, took a different stance. Based on their analysis of historical sources and the surviving fragmentary accounts of Vindhyavāsin's philosophy, they argued that Vindhyavāsin was a predecessor of the author of the Yogabhāṣya and not the author himself. In the present talk, I will re-examine the available sources and previous scholarship to improve our knowledge of the exact position of Vindhyavāsin in the history of Sāṅkhya and Yoga and contribute new arguments for solving the authorship problem of the Pātañjalayogaśāstra (i.e., the Yoga Sutra together with the Yogabhāṣya).

**Inspiration / 106**

## **Gandhi's Yoga Sādhana for Sarvodaya**

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In this paper, I will explore Gandhi's engagement with various yogas and yogic texts as a case study for the role of various yogas—a cornucopia of practices—not simply karma yoga in his sociopolitical



activism. His personal observances include various facets of yoga (emotional, physical, psychological, and moral) for personal empowerment and social uplift. Gandhi affirmed the value of haṭhayoga—āsanas, praṇāyāma, etc.—to build healthy satyagrahis and citizenry. Although this fact has escaped the attention of many, he emphasized haṭhayoga for health and strength. Furthermore, Gandhi made bhakti yoga central to his daily regimen—devotion to Rama—for achieving complete surrender and egolessness. In his writings, Gandhi often quoted Yogavaśishtha, especially the chapter on vairāgya, to emphasize the value of detachment and equanimity in public service.

**Inspiration / 107**

## Yoga and the Siddhis in Early Theosophical Writings

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Bio: Dr. Alexandrova is Associate Professor of Instruction at the University of Texas at Austin. She teaches a variety of courses on Russian cultural history, literature, and language. Her current research interests include the history of ideas in the late Russian Empire, theories of physical culture and modern yoga, alternative spiritualities, and Theosophical currents in Russia and abroad. She is also a certified yoga teacher (RYT 200) and a long-time yoga practitioner and meditator. Dr. Alexandrova's work has appeared in *The Russian Review*, *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, and *The Conversation*. She is currently writing a book entitled *Madame Blavatsky's India: In Search of Āryāvarta* (under contract with Oxford University Press).

Paper: "Yoga and the Siddhis in Early Theosophical Writings"

In this paper, I trace the evolution of the concept of the siddhis in the early Theosophical Society, as both an important component of the process of establishing authority within the organization, and as an evolutionary goal that suggested the possibility of the development of certain special powers through physical and spiritual practices, as prescribed to the Society's members. Importantly, the notion of the siddhis, or "phenomenal powers," as possessed by the Theosophical Masters, was closely linked with Theosophical understanding of science and with the nature of knowledge transmission. The first half of the talk engages with existing scholarship on the topic, and establishes a theoretical framework for the examination of the use of the siddhis, based on both scholarly perspectives and practitioners' definitions. The second part of the article analyzes specific examples of the use of the siddhis by early Theosophical leaders—Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott—and examines how the siddhis were understood and treated in the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society.

**Inspiration / 108**

## Fifty Unknown Verses on Yoga: An Early Attempt to Synthesise Pātañjalayoga with Haṭha and Rājayoga.

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The Yogapañcāśikā might be one of the earliest attempts to integrate Haṭha and Rājayoga with Pātāñjalayoga. The text is cited by name in a Sanskrit work called the Vivekamukura, which may have been composed in the late sixteenth century. Unlike other compilations on yoga from the early modern period, the Yogapañcāśikā is a short work of merely fifty verses that cites only the Pātāñjalayogaśāstra. It teaches an aṣṭāṅgayoga: the first four auxiliaries are Haṭhayoga, and the second four, Rājayoga. It is a Śaiva work that aims at raising kuṇḍalinī, uniting Śakti with Śiva and attaining jīvanmukti followed by videhamukti when the yogi's karma is completely extinguished.

This talk will attempt to answer the most obvious questions about the codex unicus that contains the Yogapañcāśikā. It will also provide a short overview of the contents of the work and some comments on their historical importance.

**Inspiration / 109**

## **Empower Your Mind: A Study of Manobala Pañcaviṁśikā**

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This paper examines “Manobala Pañcaviṁśikā,” a modern yoga text composed by Ācārya Mahāprajña (1920-2010). Comprising twenty-five verses in Sanskrit, the text explores practices aimed at empowering the mind. Ācārya Tulasī (1914-1997), the ninth head of the Jain Śvetāmbara Terāpantha sect, introduced a new order within Jain monkhood, known as “samaṇa-śreṇī,” in 1980. Notably, when the first group of Samanis embarked on their inaugural journey abroad, Tulasī tasked Mahāprajña with providing guidelines to Samanī Smita Prajña and Samanī Madhur Prajña to help them overcome the challenges and potential loneliness of their overseas travels.

This paper delves into the practices outlined in the “Manobala Pañcaviṁśikā” that were intended to empower the minds of the Samanis. It argues that these practices are rooted in common yogic traditions with global recognition. However, Ācārya Mahāprajña's contribution lies in presenting these practices through a Jain lens, aligning them with Jain principles and values. An intriguing feature of the text is the recurring phrase “manobal pravardhte” in its verses, emphasizing the pivotal role of strengthening the mind.

This study contributes to our understanding of how ancient practices can be adapted and applied within specific cultural and religious contexts to foster mental resilience and well-being. By focusing on “Manobala Pañcaviṁśikā,” it sheds light on the intersection of yogic principles and Jain philosophy, offering valuable insights for those interested in the intersection of spirituality, mindfulness, and empowerment.