

# GURUS *of* MODERN YOGA

EDITED BY  
Mark Singleton *and*  
Ellen Goldberg



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## NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Transliterations from Sanskrit follow the standard International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST) scheme, with the following exceptions: (1) place names are generally transliterated without diacritical marks, and modern English-language spellings are preserved; (2) names of authors and well-known persons from the modern period are generally written without diacritical marks, consistent with their or their organization's convention; (3) terms used in quotations are reproduced according to the original source; and (4) specific use of terminology by an organization, a guru, or an informant is reproduced accordingly. Although we have tried to maintain consistency throughout the text, the great variety of ways in which Sanskritic terms are rendered into English (and into the Roman script) across modern guru organizations inevitably results in some variation in spelling. We hope this will not be unduly confusing for the reader.

# Gurus of Modern Yoga





# Introduction

ELLEN GOLDBERG AND MARK SINGLETON

This book is about gurus in modern yoga. Its sixteen chapters explore the contributions that individual gurus have made to the formation of practices and discourses of yoga in the modern, transnational world, both within India and elsewhere. While our treatment is not intended to be exhaustive (and necessarily excludes important figures), our hope is that these various perspectives will shed new light on the changing role and function of the yoga guru in nontraditional contexts. Transnational yoga (i.e., yoga taught and practiced at a global level) is almost by definition dislocated with regard to localized, sectarian, or grassroots Indian models. This dislocation can be particularly apparent within guru-centered organizations, where either the students or the guru or both might find themselves in a unique hermeneutic encounter with norms and perspectives removed from those of their birth community. The result is adaptation: of the form or substance of the guru's teaching; of the spiritual and cultural affiliations of the students; or (usually) a complex intermingling of both. Many (if not all) of the yoga gurus represented in this book negotiate these cultural spaces.

## YOGA AND MODERNITY

Yoga, in its dissemination in the Western world, has undergone radical transformation in response to the differing worldviews, logical predispositions, and aspirations of modern practitioners. These forms were the result of a re-framing of practices and beliefs within India itself over the last 150 years in response to encounters with modernity and the West, and of simultaneous and on-going experimentation in a global context. Perhaps a majority of recent



forms of English language-based yogas in and out of India bear the clear traces of these processes.<sup>1</sup>

The modern period saw the dawn of new, democratic, scientific modes of yoga practice and teaching. These forms spread beyond the borders of India and were embraced by enthusiasts around the world. This transnational renaissance of yoga came into being as part of a wider dialogue between tradition and modernity. Certain aspects of yoga praxis were eliminated, while others were reconfigured and shaped according to the needs of the day. One such aspect was the guru. Teachings, and gurus, have always adapted to the times and circumstances in which they find themselves. However, the sheer pace of cultural change ushered in by modernity led to some unprecedented innovations in the way gurus present themselves and their teachings, and in the way they are received by their students. The situation is complicated still further when these gurus operate within foreign cultures (such as those of the United States or Europe) where there is no traditional infrastructure for their activities. What happens when Indian yoga gurus come to the West? What happens when their teachings are shaped by modern technology or corporate organizational structures? How do Western teachers of yoga negotiate their elevation to the status of guru? And what abuses can occur as a result of a guru's transplantation from a traditional, conservative environment to the modern, liberal West? These are some of the questions asked in the chapters of this book.

## THE CHANGING FACES OF YOGA

Peter Berger (1979) claims that the encounter between modernity and global religions was “cataclysmic and unprecedented” (p. 2), and something similar might be asserted with regard to yoga. Transnational yoga today is not necessarily divorced from premodern Indian forms (or indeed “extramodern” ones, i.e., forms that have been isolated from and therefore not significantly altered by the encounter with modernity). Nevertheless, in many instances the forces and themes that have shaped the modern world have also left their indelible marks on yoga theory and practice: the ascendancy of reason, characterized by an emphasis on science, technology, and empirical thinking, or what Wade Clark Roof (1999) calls the “rational basis for truth” (p. 621); secularization and the separation of the private and the public spheres (i.e., religion and state); democratization, leading to the demise of religious monopolies through the rejection of institutional exclusivism; the relativizing of religious beliefs and practices, in conjunction with a profound desire for freedom of choice; the triumph of capitalism and the subsequent commodification of religion (which in turn gives birth to the complex phenomenon of the spiritual marketplace and competition among global religions); and the rise of the

modern state, where we see discourses on nation-building, notably in India, adopt and adapt religious themes and practices in the service of the new (or emerging) country. These modern themes, and how they play out through the figure of the modern yoga guru, are variously addressed in the sixteen chapters of this book.

The modern vision of yoga as an empirical science develops not only as an integral part of its formative rationale but also as its culminating narrative. Modernity transforms yoga, for example, in the medicalization of its applications, practices, and goals in an attempt to create a new *somatic science*—to borrow a phrase from David A. Palmer and Xun Liu (2012; see also De Michelis, 2008). The medicalization (and somatization) of yoga is demonstrated, for example, in the work of modern gurus like Kuvalayananda (Alter, 2004) and Yogendra (see Chapter 3 by Alter in this volume). Early modern yoga gurus forged new ground by developing medical applications of *āsanas* and *prāṇāyāmas* (postures and breathing techniques) for the purpose of treating the sick and as a therapeutic aid to cultivate optimum physical fitness and health (see Singleton, 2010a).

Health benefits and the potential for increased longevity are central issues in modern yoga that coincide with the stabilizing and validating rhetoric of medicalization yet retain a sense of *haṭhayoga's* collective and canonical past (see Goldberg, 2009). Several of the gurus examined in this volume (see Chapters 6 and 7 on Iyengar, Chapter 3 on Yogendra, and Chapter 16 on Swami Ramdev) suffered severe illness in their youth and came to yoga not necessarily to find enlightenment but rather to find a cure. However, we also see embedded in some modern discourses of yoga the notion that the eradication of disease can potentially culminate in the attainment of immortality or the divine body (*divyadeha*), particularly among adept practitioners (see Chapter 8 on Kripalu in this volume). Thus, we find combined the instrumental, scientific emphasis of the modern rational world and the alchemical and metaphysical preoccupations of medieval *haṭhayoga* (see White, 1996).

The encounter with modernity has brought yoga to the forefront of the spiritual marketplace where gurus (must?) compete with each other for disciples and practitioners (see Chapter 9 by Jain and Chapter 13 by Waghorne in this volume). With the aid of teacher training curricula; the sale of yoga clothing, books, and DVDs; and worldwide online access, we see unprecedented innovation not only in the ways that modern gurus market their particular approach to yoga but also in how they mastermind forms of connectivity with devotees in a global context (see, e.g., Chapter 13 by Waghorne, Chapter 14 by Warrior, and Chapter 16 by Sarbacker in this volume). This leads to what Joseph Alter in Chapter 3 calls “transnational refractions of globalized *gurudom*.” Moreover, the commercialization and popularization of yoga practice has repositioned modern yoga as a repository of idealized cultural norms that have concretized themselves in such a way that they appear iconic, prototypical,

and eternal. Though the strategy of claiming an ancient and primordial past is not new, modern forms of yoga nonetheless emphasize and express it in non-normative and innovative ways—often according to the transmission, authority, and experience of the individual guru (see, e.g., Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 in this volume).

## THE GURU TRANSFORMED?

Traditional Indian students had to undergo initiation and extensive training under a qualified guru before they could learn the techniques and practices of yoga. Yoga was often secretive and exclusive, and the relationship with the guru was one of submission and obedience (although not necessarily without interpersonal tensions: see Smith and White, Chapter 6, n.20). Indeed, it was often understood that yoga would simply not work without the grace of the guru (see, e.g., Hayes, 2003; Padoux, 2000; White, 2000b. See also *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.28; *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6: 21–23). Today, on the other hand, millions of yoga practitioners around the world appear to carry out their study and practice of yoga perfectly well without ever having had—and even perhaps without ever having wanted to have—a guru. (Some, of course, might dispute exactly how “well” such study and practice is in fact carried out.) In other cases, popular modern gurus open their doors to everyone who wishes to follow their teachings and learn their techniques. Indeed, from the beginnings of yoga’s acculturation in the West, students have often readily received teachings and guidance without necessarily being formally inducted into any organized doctrinal or social structure, and without undergoing “traditional” initiation. Such indeed was the case with Swami Vivekananda’s students, as Joe Mlecko has observed (1982: 21; see also Chapter 1 by Killingley in this volume).

As such, discipleship under modern Indian gurus takes on new normative features, often reflecting the new technological, ideological, bureaucratic, and spiritual concerns of the day. Some gurus may even seem to outright reject tradition (or, in the inimitable words of Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, “all that traditional whatever”; see Chapter 13 in this volume) but nevertheless build on traditional tropes of the guru to create distinctly modern mediations of authority and charisma (see also Chapter 15 in this volume). Conversely, we may still see an ongoing preoccupation with and respect for lineage (*paramparā*, *sampradāya*, *saṅgh parivār*) and the transmission of knowledge from guru to disciple, albeit reconceptualized in the context of, for example, nationalist belonging or online transnational community (see Chapters 14, 15 and 16 in this volume). Transmission may no longer be exclusive and private, nor does it necessarily even entail a direct, personal relationship with the guru, especially in large, transnational organizations (see, for example, Chapter 13 in this volume).

Growing standardization within various schools of modern yoga has meant that the line between public and private knowledge has shifted. Institutionalized teaching curricula and standardized, graded courses may reinforce (or at times even replace) the charismatic authority of the living guru, especially when yoga organizations have to adapt themselves to the legal and bureaucratic demands of state law or local government (see Chapter 7, this volume). Alongside this “institutionalization of charisma”, we also witness what we might call the “corporatization of charisma”, with freshly trademarked rituals and the culture of corporate secrecy displacing more traditional understandings (see Chapter 13 in this volume).

Similarly, the newly invented ritual of community yoga practice held in a dedicated “yoga studio” thrives particularly in the modern urban environment, where teacher training courses are often a substitute for the guru–disciple relationship of the past. Secrecy and privacy have given way to community and public settings, and in some quarters even a programmatic discouragement of private, individual self-practice (see Chapter 10 in this volume). Similarly relevant in this regard is the phenomenon of the Yoga Shivar, the group yoga camps common today in modern India (Alter, 2008; see also Chapters 15 and 16 in this volume).

In place of personal, secretive, one-on-one models, then, we may see a variety of public, democratic, accessible, *one-on-many* modes of teaching and knowledge transmission. Nevertheless, many of the gurus discussed in this volume still reflect the master’s ability to transmit the charismatic authority of tradition, genealogy, and lineage. Some resort to traditional means of transmission like *śaktipāta dīkṣā* (see, e.g., Chapters 8–10 in this volume) albeit shorn of the secrecy and exclusivity of traditional practice. Others insist on the mastery of particular postural sequences as a stringent prerequisite to entry into the lineage (Chapter 5). What all have in common to some extent, however, is their dynamic process of adaptation to the new requirements and the new opportunities of the modern world.

## GURU AS EXPERT

The changing function and status of the guru is intimately and dialogically linked to changes in the understanding and practice of yoga itself in the modern, globalized world. Similarly, a semantic shift has occurred in the usage of the term *guru* in the English language over the past century. Indeed, the phenomenon of the transnational Indian guru has itself brought into being its own global spiritual nomenclature, which Srinivas Aravamudan (2006) has labeled *Guru English*. To some extent, the new, predominant meaning of guru in popular English-language culture has displaced older significations, in turn (arguably) altering expectations of what it is to be a guru. The Oxford English

Dictionary tells us that guru means “a Hindu spiritual teacher or head of a religious sect. Also in gen. or trivial use: an influential teacher; a mentor; a pundit” (<http://www.oed.com>, accessed March 1, 2012). The first sense is the one that we might expect to be intended in a scholarly work on yoga (such as this one), and indeed many of the gurus treated in this book are arguably *Hindu spiritual teachers* or heads of a *religious sect*. However, this is by no means always the case: some do not even consider their work *religious* (see, e.g., Chapter 15 in this volume), and nor do they necessarily self-identify as Hindu (see, e.g., Chapter 10 in this volume).

Indeed, some modern gurus most certainly embody features of the guru closer to the second definition of the term—which introduces a fundamental ambiguity into the role and purpose of the guru in the world of modern yoga. Clearly, today’s *general/trivial* sense of the word can apply to virtually any field of endeavor and is by no means limited to the spiritual or religious domains. There are parenting gurus, lifestyle gurus, design gurus, computer gurus, business gurus, fitness gurus, sex gurus, and golf gurus. Like another English loan-word from the Sanskrit, pundit (Skt. *paṇḍita*, cited, rather confusingly, as part of the OED’s second definition of guru), a guru is “an expert in a particular subject or field, *esp.* one frequently called upon to give his or her opinion to the public” (<http://www.oed.com>, accessed March 1, 2012). These leaders are not necessarily expected to make pronouncements on religious or spiritual matters, although they may. This sense of the word is a metonym of the original, primary meaning, connoting the privileged understanding and authority supposed of the Indian guru, albeit transposed into the secular realm and limited often to purely technological knowledge.

But if the prominence of Indian gurus in the modern world (and ideas about what they do) has given rise to this colloquial English usage, it is also true that the colloquial usage can help us think through what it means to be a guru of modern yoga. In other words, the semantic associations of the word in contemporary, popular parlance—one possessed of technological efficiency and expertise, whose ideas and vision have become influential or authoritative and who can offer definitive advice—may also illuminate the range of functions that the yoga guru is expected to fulfill. The website <http://theyogaguru.com> (accessed January 12, 2012) presents an eye-catching example. It is the online home of the New Delhi-based Holistic Healthcare Foundation, whose team offers classes and courses on power yoga, corporate yoga, health yoga, kids yoga, call center yoga,<sup>2</sup> dance yoga, dynamic meditation, and memory power development. The founder of the organization, yoga guru Dr. Mohan Kumar, is currently engaged in “Ph.D.-level research” on “yogic science for chronic management with side benefits” and possesses an MA in yoga science, diplomas in yogic science, Scientology, Silva Method of Mind Power, “and other various intensive training programs on yoga and naturopathy” (<http://theyogaguru.com/mohanji.htm>, accessed January 12, 2012). *Yoga gurus* in

this model are presented as highly trained instructors or physicians whose technological expertise makes them eminently qualified to teach. The emphasis is firmly on the scientific demonstrability of yoga's efficacy. What is more, the various classes are clearly inspired by trends in yoga that were developed and popularized in the West (in particular the United States) and that are increasingly influencing Indian conceptions of the place and purpose of yoga (to say nothing of its dress codes). The guru here is the lifestyle coach, personal trainer, and alternative health practitioner who may offer spiritual advice but is authorized by essentially nonmystical, rational-scientific knowledge. Thus, the modern yoga guru may operate in the space between the traditional, Indic sense of the word and the colloquial English one.

## ABUSES

The problem of what constitutes a guru, and in particular a yoga guru, is a pressing one. The globalization of yoga has expanded the guru's sphere of influence beyond the boundaries of his or her own immediate cultural community into milieus where the religious affiliations, function, status, and role of the guru may not be well understood—indeed where he or she may also be a stranger. This is surely a significant contributing factor in the many infamous conflicts and abuses that have dogged guru organizations in the West and in India during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Examples are numerous and familiar and, it would seem, ongoing, even within the arguably secularized domain of popular, mainstream yoga.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, during the first third of 2012, just prior to the submission of this manuscript to Oxford University Press, there were two more high-profile guru scandals, this time involving American teachers of (respectively) Indian and Tibetan tantra, one of whom had previously been selected as the topic of a chapter for this book.<sup>4</sup> And some months later (October 1, 2012) a new scandal emerged around Kausthub Desikachar, grandson of the legendary modern yoga guru T. Krishnamacharya (Chapter 4, this volume) and head of the Krishnamacharya Healing and Yoga Foundation, who was accused of the sexual, mental, and emotional abuse of students dating back at least to 2007.

The blogosphere has been buzzing with discussion of how adherents of these particular systems, or, more generally, practitioners of yoga and meditation, can come to terms with these events, which in many ways recapitulate similar, famous scandals of the 1960s, '70s and '80s. Guru scandals have deepened the distrust of the guru system among many in the West. Guruship has been diagnosed as one way of assuming dangerous and insidious "masks of authoritarian power," to cite the subtitle of one well-known book on the topic (Kramer & Alsted, 1993), and gurus' "feet of clay" (to cite the title of another: Storr, 1996), have been extensively examined, psychoanalyzed, and criticized.

The rejection of gurus' authority on moral and rational grounds also has a strong history within modern India and includes such eminent figures and associations as the Brahmo Samaj (see Chapter 1 in this volume); Jiddu Krishnamurti (see Chapters 4 and 15 in this volume); the Indian Rationalist Association; and the novelist G. V. Desani (see Chapter 15 in this volume). A strong anti-guru critique also prevails in certain quarters of the press in India today, which often takes particular umbrage at the enormous wealth accumulated by some.<sup>5</sup> Abuses by gurus are not generally the focus of the chapters in this book—although some gurus, such as Sathya Sai Baba, discussed in Chapter 12, and Swami Muktananda, discussed in Chapter 9, have indeed been at the center of major controversy, as has Kripalu's disciple Amrit Desai (discussed in Chapter 8 in this volume; see also Goldberg, 2013). It is nonetheless important to acknowledge that for many in Asia and the West today the guru system has come to appear bankrupt, suspect, or intrinsically corrupt.

It may also be that modern egalitarianism and a strong ethos of self-sufficiency, coupled with a belief in *spiritual empiricism* (where one's own inner and outer experience is all that is needed to ascertain spiritual truth), also contributes to a mistrust of traditional roles of the guru as source, authority, and guarantor of success in the spiritual life. In the individualized realm of Protestant, nondenominational spirituality or of varieties of New Age religion, the guru may in fact be perceived as a threat or an impediment to the process of discovering *one's own truth*.<sup>6</sup> In the words of one Western spiritual seeker encountered in India by one of the editors, one doesn't need a guru because "G-U-R-U [Gee, you are you]." That is, ultimately one must rely upon oneself to find oneself. Such convictions are also prevalent in the teachings of some Western Protestant Buddhists, such as Stephen Bachelor (see Bachelor, 2010). For millions of yoga practitioners around the world today, it is neither necessary nor desirable to have a guru.

## MODERN BHAKTIYOGA

An assumption is sometimes made that modern yoga has been formulated, standardized, and formatted in a singular or immediately recognizable way: that is to say, the *āsana*-based systems that De Michelis (2004) labels *Modern Postural Yoga*. However, as De Michelis herself makes clear, and as several of our authors ably demonstrate, yoga's various expressions in the modern world cannot be reduced to single monolithic model.<sup>7</sup> The modern development of *bhaktiyoga* (the yoga of intense personal devotion to a guru or god) and *karmayoga* (the "yoga of action", sometimes used synonymously in modern parlance with *sevā*, to mean humanitarian service or engaged practice) are particularly interesting examples. Although often arguably at odds with what is traditionally designated by these terms, such forms allow dedicated



practitioners to embrace the teachings of their gurus and to engage in meritorious and charitable acts. To regard modern expressions of yoga only in terms of global forms of posture practice would be to ignore the massive popular growth of *bhaktiyoga* in modern India and the globalized world and to significantly underestimate its profound influence and widespread appeal. Thus, we have made a conscious choice to include several gurus who exemplify the modern traditions of *bhaktiyoga* and *karmayoga* (see Chapter 11 by Kim, Chapter 12 by Srinivas, and Chapter 14 by Warriar in this volume).

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The chapters in Part 1 examine three of the founding fathers of the modern yoga renaissance: Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and Shri Yogendra. In Chapter 1, Dermot Killingley considers Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), whose decision to “manufacture yogis” in the United States set the scene for a new global culture of yoga. Local demand for yoga was high, but Vivekananda maintained a critical (and selective) relationship to it. Drawing principally on certain parts of the *Yogasūtras*, and on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Vivekananda developed two recurrent and interrelated themes: a hierarchy of religions and a distinctive interpretation of the theory of evolution. The inclusion of this chapter comes at a pivotal time as organizations throughout India celebrate the 150th anniversary of Vivekananda’s birth. In Chapter 2, Ann Gleig and Charles Flores take as their starting point the scholarly neglect of Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) and demonstrate the important impacts that he has had on the contemporary yoga climate. The chapter considers the status of physical culture and *haṭhayoga* in his Integral Yoga system, before examining the influence that his *close* and *creative* lineages have had on modern yoga generally. Joseph Alter, in Chapter 3, examines the *magic and modernity* of Shri Yogendra (1897–1989), who was among the first to develop a system of modern yoga physical education in the early 1920s, combining yogic knowledge from his guru with an understanding of contemporary physical culture acquired during several years in New York. While rejecting yoga’s superstitious past, he nonetheless invoked the potential of yoga’s supernatural power and the authority of mystical gnosis. In this way, he embodies many of the contradictions of the modern yoga guru.

Part 2 examines the lineage of Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888–1989), whose enormous effect on the popular Western practice of yoga was mainly due to his influential disciples. In Chapter 4, Mark Singleton and Tara Fraser examine the life and later teachings of Krishnamacharya, as mainly refracted through the writing and teaching of his son, T. K. V. Desikachar (1938–). Krishnamacharya’s vision of religious universalism for yoga exists in a complex tension with his profound commitment to his native Śrīvaiṣṇavism. This



latter is reflected in the significant elements of *bhaktiyoga* which pervade his yoga teaching. Jean Byrne (Chapter 5) considers the early Krishnamacharya disciple and founder of the popular system of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga, Sri K. Pattabhi Jois (1915–2009). Permission to teach in this system (known as *authorization* or *certification*) comes through a direct blessing from the guru rather than as a result of completing a standardized teacher training course (otherwise common in many schools of Modern Postural Yoga). This, argues Byrne, makes Ashtanga as taught by Jois a unique guru *paramparā* within modern yoga. In Chapter 6, Frederick Smith and Joan White examine the career of B. K. S. Iyengar (1918–) as a *yoga guru*. The chapter considers the formation and development of Iyengar's career as a yoga teacher; the influences beyond his teacher, T. Krishnamacharya; his self-perception as a student, teacher, and acclaimed guru; the transformations in his reception as a yoga teacher, master, and guru; and his literary output. In Chapter 7, Suzanne Newcombe compares Iyengar with a less well-known transnational guru, Yogini Sunita (1932–1970), who taught yoga in Britain during the 1960s. This chapter explores how the guru-*śiṣya* (disciple) relationship was institutionalized within a highly bureaucratic, state-funded adult education system, arguing that Sunita failed to create a lasting body of popular yoga because she did not establish institutional structures around her charismatic teachings.

Part 3 considers three influential figures within transnational yoga who have taught within a tantric framework. In Chapter 8, Ellen Goldberg examines the extraordinary life of Swami Kṛpālvānanda, also known as Kripalu (1913–1981), who inspired a transnational community of devotees when his disciple Amrit Desai (1932–) brought him into international prominence in 1977. Goldberg stresses the importance of three core tantric elements in Kripalu's approach that are not typically seen in other schools of modern yoga, namely, *śaktipāt dīkṣā* (defined in the Kripalu community as initiation through the awakening of *śakti* or *prāṇa*); *prāṇayoga sādhanā*; and the attainment of divine body. The publication date of this book coincides with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kripalu's birth. Andrea Jain, in Chapter 9, analyzes Swami Muktananda (1908–1982) as an *entrepreneurial godman*. Jain argues that it was by packaging his religious organization, *Siddha Yoga*, in the accessible form of the Intensive and by actively marketing *śaktipāt* (direct, mystical transmission: lit. descent of power) to mass audiences in the 1970s that Muktananda successfully attracted thousands of spiritual seekers. Though revelations about Muktananda's tantric sexual practices damaged Siddha Yoga's image, the movement survived largely because of strategies to maintain a positive vision of Muktananda. In Chapter 10, Lola Williamson considers John Friend, founder of Anusara Yoga, who established a spiritual system based on rituals of the body that create a sense of community and provide meaning to individuals who have abandoned traditional religion. The chapter considers his role as a modern guru (or, as he refers to himself, an *ācārya*) and explains how

Friend's encouragement of networks of teachers and practitioners helped to establish a tantra-based philosophy and practice in America as well as other countries.

Part 4 considers *bhaktiyoga*. Chapter 11, by Hanna Kim, examines the life of Pramukh Swami Maharaj (b. 1921), current head of the Swaminarayan (Svāminārāyaṇa) organization. Kim explores the relationship of the devotee to guru and to God in the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) and shows that according to the devotees the guru represents god incarnate. Next, in Chapter 12 Smriti Srinivas examines the life of Sathya Sai Baba, who died during the preparation of this book (1926–April 24, 2011). Srinivas argues that at least two different uses of yoga are refracted within Sathya Sai Baba's teachings and writings. These refractions also intersect with other histories, social movements, teachers, and their practices (including Theosophy and Buddhism), creating a wide terrain of significance and giving vitality to theories and practices of yoga in the contemporary world. The Swaminarayan organization and the Satya Sai Baba movement place absolute emphasis on the guru whose living presence provided seekers with a tangible and humanly recognizable template for how to achieve the ontological goal of being in constant communion with the guru through *bhaktiyoga*.

The two chapters in Part 5, Chapter 13 by Joanne Punzo Waghorne and Chapter 14 by Maya Warrier, consider mediation of the guru–student relationship by technology. The setting for Chapter 13 is Singapore, where two gurus—Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (1956–) and Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev (1957–)—and their organizations offer courses on yoga techniques. Singapore—cosmopolitan, multiethnic, and increasingly the model for development in Asia—presents a fascinating case study of new contexts and new packaging for yogic techniques that offer practical solutions for life in the new fast-paced urban Asia. Chapter 14 (which might equally have been placed in the section on *bhaktiyoga*,) explores the online expression and experience of *bhaktiyoga* in the modern, transnational, devotional enterprise centered on the popular globetrotting guru Mata Amritanandamayi (1953–). It examines the ways this organization uses its vast cyber network to reinforce devotion to the guru and to cement guru–devotee attachment across vast geographical distances. The Internet sustains, enhances, and intensifies devotional experience and gives an immediacy and intimacy to the devotee's engagement with an often physically absent, but always virtually present, guru.

Finally, Part 6 considers two politicized gurus for whom nation-building is a component part of yoga practice. In Chapter 15 Gwilym Beckerlegge examines the role of Eknath Ranade (1914–1982), founder of the lay, service-oriented spiritual movement the Vivekananda Kendra. Ranade determined that yoga should be at the core of the Kendra's activities. Beckerlegge explores the transmission of yoga within the Kendra in relation to its categorization as a *sevā* activity; the role of Eknath Ranade, who was in many respects highly

critical of guru culture; and the movement's reliance on its cadre of life workers in promoting its vision of the so-called yoga way of life. In Chapter 16, Stuart Sarbacker considers the controversial contemporary guru, Swami Ramdev (1965–), a central figure in contemporary Indian spirituality and politics. Launched into celebrity status through a popular cable television series, Swami Ramdev has brought the theory and practice of yoga to India and the world on an unprecedented scale. Sarbacker provides an overview of Swami Ramdev's life, philosophy, and social activism, arguing that he can be understood as a modern yoga revolutionary, committed to the transformation of the Indian people, the Indian nation, and ultimately the world through yoga.

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## NOTES

1. The academic study of modern yoga has burgeoned over the past ten years or so, and while we do not have space to summarize that work here readers interested in finding out more about the field might begin by reading the introductory articles and chapters in De Michelis (2008); Newcombe (2009), and Singleton (2007; 2010b) and the foundational books Alter (2004); De Michelis (2004); Strauss (2005), and

- Singleton and Byrne (2008a). More resources for the study of modern yoga can be found at <http://modernyogaresearch.org>.
2. This service is for the many young people in the Delhi area who are employed in call center work, which is, according to the website, resulting in “rising cases of spondilitis [sic], hypertension, insomnia, fatigue, nausea, chronic headache, coronary malfunctions, back pain, computer syndrome and dry eyes” (<http://theyogaguru.com/callcenter.htm>, accessed January 12, 2012). These complaints cause increased absences from work, which could, claims the website, be reduced through the practice of yoga: “It is scientifically proved that yoga makes call center's employees healthy, productive and alert, taking less medical leaves” (ibid.). This seems a particularly poignant intersection of corporate capital's demand for global outsourcing and the reconfiguration of yoga as a component part of the international (tele-) service industry. It also recapitulates the way that yoga and relaxationism were conceptualized and used by white-collar Americans in the early twentieth century as a means to increase worker efficiency (see Singleton, 2005).
  3. See, for example, Kramer and Alsted (1993), Paglia (2003); Puttick (1995), Rochford (2010), and Storr (1996). The website <http://strippingthegurus.com>, while not an academic source, has useful references for further investigation. Thanks to Suzanne Newcombe for this reference.
  4. These were John Friend, founder of Anusara Yoga (see Chapter 10 by Williamson in this volume), and Geshe Michael Roach. For a timeline of the Friend scandals, see <http://www.yogadork.com/news/running-timeline-of-anusara-controversy-updates-and-teacher-resignations/> (accessed May 25, 2012). On Michael Roach, see the article by Matthew Remski: <http://www.elephantjournal.com/2012/05/psychosis-stabbing-secrecy-and-death-at-a-neo-buddhist-university-in-arizona> (accessed May 4, 2012).
  5. For example, <http://www.siliconindia.com/news/general/SuperRich-Spiritual-Gurus-of-India-nid-110419-cid-1.html> (accessed May 25, 2012). See also <http://www.indiansceptic.in/index.htm> (accessed May 25, 2012). Thanks to Suzanne Newcombe for this reference.
  6. See, for example, Jayanti Tamm's (2010) memoir of growing up as a disciple of Indian guru Sri Chinmoy before breaking free. In a newspaper interview, Tamm emphasizes, “It's about finding one's own truth. This is my experience; this is my truth.” From <http://www.rickross.com/reference/srichinmoy/srichinmoy46.html> (accessed May 30, 2012). On New Age as a category, see Hanegraaff (1998) and Heelas (1996, 2008).
  7. De Michelis's (2004) other types are Modern Psychosomatic Yoga, Modern Meditational Yoga, and Modern Denominational Yoga (188). For De Michelis, the guru is a predominant feature of only one of her four categories: Modern Denominational Yoga, which “was a later development that seems to have got fully underway only during the 1960s with the appearance of more ideologically engaged Neo-Hindu *gurus* and groups that incorporated elements of Modern Yoga teachings” (p. 189).

PART ONE



Key Figures in Early  
Twentieth-Century Yoga



## CHAPTER 1



# Manufacturing Yogis: Swami Vivekananda as a Yoga Teacher

DERMOT KILLINGLEY

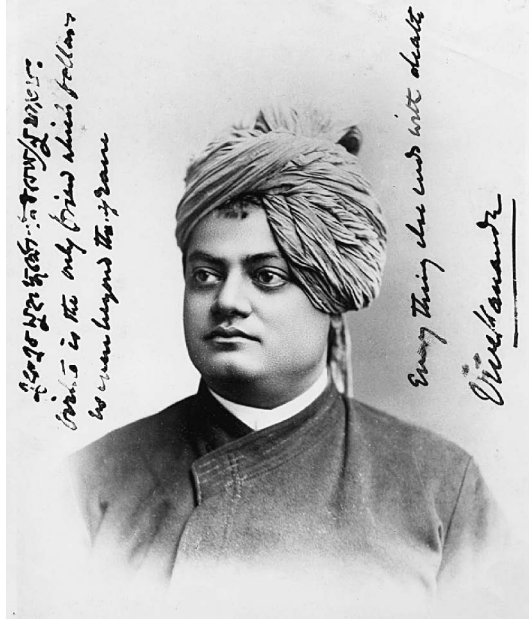
## INTRODUCTION

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), the first teacher of yoga in the West, has been called “the creator of fully-fledged Modern Yoga” (De Michelis, 2004: 90). The words *creator* and *modern* are significant; he did not simply bring yoga from India to the West. He had not been trained in any yoga school, and much of what he said about yoga was developed when he was already in the West. To say this is not to question his authenticity, still less his sincerity, but to point out the complexity of his position in the history of Indian and Western thought and of modern yoga. Before discussing his yoga teaching in detail, we need to look at the circumstances in which it took place: his background in India and his career in the West, starting with the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in September 1893. We should also consider what was already known and thought about yoga in the West, particularly in the United States.

## VIVEKANANDA’S LIFE

Vivekananda was born in 1863 among the English-educated bourgeoisie of Calcutta (now Kolkata). His birth name was Narendranath Datta; but he is referred to throughout this chapter as Vivekananda, the monastic name by which he was known when he went to America and for the rest of his life. Soon after he graduated from Calcutta University in 1884, the sudden death of his father, a successful lawyer, plunged the family into poverty, with Vivekananda





**Figure 1.1:**  
Photo portrait of Vivekananda. (Courtesy of WikiCommons.)

as its head. He became a follower of the uncouth but influential saint Ramakrishna (1836?–1886). After Ramakrishna’s death, Vivekananda and some other followers became *saṃnyāsins*, and from 1888 to 1893 he wandered through India. In June 1893 he sailed for the United States, where he spoke at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago (Seager, 1995). After his success there, he toured America, giving lectures on Hinduism and building a following, mainly in New York. In August 1895 he sailed to London and gave talks there, returning in December. In April 1896 he sailed again to London; in December he sailed to India, landing in Colombo on January 15, 1897. In May he organized his followers into the Ramakrishna Mission in Belur Maṭh, Calcutta. In 1899 he again visited London and the States, returning in December 1900 to Belur, where he died in 1902.

## VIVEKANANDA’S BACKGROUND

Calcutta in the nineteenth century was a marketplace of ideas, offering many of the wares that were current in the British Isles and North America. This was made possible through developments in communications, including printing, steam travel by rail and sea, and changes in the use of vernacular languages. These, together with the growing class of people familiar with English, made

possible the all-India lecture tours of the Brahmo Samaj leader Keshub Chunder Sen (1838–1884),<sup>1</sup> his associate Pratap Chandra Mozoomdar (1840–1905), and later Vivekananda.

The education system, in which English was the dominant language, provided a body of knowledge with which a limited, largely urban public could be expected to be more or less familiar. At the same time, communication with India's past was facilitated by philological and archeological research, the printing of Sanskrit and other Indian language texts, translations into European languages, and historical and literary studies. The Buddha and his teachings, which had been known mainly to *pandits* through the refutations found in brahmanical literature, became a serious option for religious seekers.

Like many of his class, Vivekananda spoke and read Bengali and English; he was also fluent in Sanskrit. He became one of the most successful exporters of Indian ideas in modern times, reaching a wider market than his predecessors such as Rammohun Roy or even Keshub. Demand in the English-speaking world, especially the United States and England, for wisdom from the East—which often meant India, the eastern country with which the United Kingdom was most closely connected politically and intellectually—led to his success. This demand motivated the Parliament of Religions of 1893, where Vivekananda had his first public success in the West. “The dichotomy between East and West was an organizing principle” for Vivekananda (Brekke, 2002: 48), but *East* here is hardly a geographical term: he came to Chicago from the west, across the Pacific.

## VIVEKANANDA, KESHUB, AND RAMAKRISHNA

As a student, Vivekananda was a member of the Brahmo Samaj, and like other Brahmos he was drawn to Ramakrishna. When his father died, Vivekananda's responsibilities included performing rituals for the dead. This led to a religious struggle within him, since the Samaj condemned these rituals in their traditional form. He turned again to Ramakrishna and became his close follower.

Vivekananda presents himself as Ramakrishna's foremost disciple, authorized by him to give his message to the world, and deriving his doctrines from him. He refers to him repeatedly as his Master, and attributes all his own achievements to him (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* [hereafter CW]: 3.312). In particular, Vivekananda attributes to him several recurrent motifs of his own teaching. One such motif is the harmony not only of all the doctrinal traditions of India (CW: 3.233 3.348; 4.107), but of all religions of the world (CW: 6.469); these are all paths to the same goal, as Ramakrishna himself has experienced by trying them all in turn (CW: 8.79). Another such motif is the use of *advaita vedānta* as the key to reconciling conflicting doctrines; another is the moral imperative to help the poor. This view of the relation of Vivekananda's

teachings to those of Ramakrishna is presented in the biographies published by the twin organizations that carry on Vivekananda's work: the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission.

Critical studies have shown that this view presents an inadequate picture of the personality and influence of Ramakrishna (Neevel, 1976) and of the sources of Vivekananda's ideas (Beckerlegge, 2000; De Michelis, 2004: 91–110). It is especially questioned whether *advaita vedānta*, which for Vivekananda is the ultimate truth underlying all Hindu traditions and all the religions of the world, was the basis of Ramakrishna's thought, and whether Ramakrishna set any value on social action, which is important in the work of the Math and Mission, though Vivekananda's own attitude to it was ambivalent. His thought owes much to the Brahmo Samaj and perhaps even to Freemasonry, which he also joined in his youth (De Michelis, 2004: 97–100). Later, he despised the Brahmos for their conformity to British ways of thinking (CW: 8.477–8), and regarded Mozoomdar, who represented the Samaj at the Parliament, as an obstacle to his work in the States (CW: 5.31; 6.282). When writing for a Bengali readership, he could nevertheless count the Brahmo Samaj among the great religious movements of India (CW: 4.462f.). He contrasted Keshub unfavorably with Ramakrishna (CW: 7.16), and the biographies published by the Ramakrishna movement follow him in emphasizing the role of Ramakrishna in his development, at the expense of the Brahmo Samaj. But, as we shall see, some of his ideas match Keshub's, and he presented them in an idiom which Keshub would have recognized, but which Ramakrishna, even if he had known English, would not.

Vivekananda takes liberties with his own biography. In a talk in California in September 1900, for instance, he describes how, when he was about sixteen (CW: 8.79), he and a “handful of boys” gathered at the feet of Ramakrishna, “an old man,” and were inspired by him to work for “Universal religion” and to have “great sympathy for the poor.” But “then came the sad day when our old teacher died” (CW: 8.80). Next comes the death of Vivekananda's father. Vivekananda, standing between the “two worlds” of his destitute family and his bereft band of young monks, with their task “for the good of India and the world,” found sympathy only from Ramakrishna's widow Sarada (CW: 8.81). There followed ten years of wandering, after which he determined to go to Chicago (CW: 8.84–5).

The chronology of this touching story is skewed at several points. Ramakrishna was hardly old: he was forty-five, or at most forty-eight, when Vivekananda first met him, and fifty to fifty-three when he died.<sup>2</sup> Vivekananda was not sixteen but eighteen at their first meeting, and twenty-one when he became a full-time follower. That was after his father died, contrary to what his narrative implies. The interval between Ramakrishna's death on August 16, 1886, and Vivekananda's embarkation on June 30, 1893, allows less than seven years of wandering, not ten. (In an earlier speech he claims to have “travelled twelve years all over India”

(CW: 3.226).) The chronological liberties entail others: it was to Ramakrishna, not to Sarada, that Vivekananda turned when his father died.

These inaccuracies can be excused by the context: Vivekananda was giving a talk, not writing an autobiography. He had intended to talk about *vedānta* but had been asked instead to talk about his work and what he had been doing. This, he says, is not such an interesting subject to him as to his hearers: “this will have been the first time in my life that I have spoken on that subject” (CW: 8.73). This disarming introduction, which itself takes some autobiographical liberties,<sup>3</sup> provides some excuse for lack of precision. The same excuse applies to most of his published works: they are talks taken down by others, and their structure is rhetorical rather than logical. They move quickly from one point to another, as the argument requires, explaining no more than is needed in the context. The context includes the cultural background of the audience, so that Vivekananda says different things to Indian, America and British audiences. Often the same point appears differently in different talks, and we need to compare several versions, each presenting the same point in incomplete form, to understand his argument. As a student he had been omnivorous rather than thorough or methodical (De Michelis, 2004: 96), and this trait appears in his works.

Keshub had already met Ramakrishna in 1875, and it was through the Brahmo Samaj that Vivekananda came to know him in 1881. Keshub’s meeting with Ramakrishna prompted an increasing acceptance of Hindu ideas and practices, as shown by his speeches during the last nine years of his life. Vivekananda confesses that he used to object to idolatry—a typically Brahmo attitude—until he learned otherwise from Ramakrishna (CW: 3.218). It was Ramakrishna, too, who won him over to the worship of Kālī, after six years of struggle against it (CW: 8.263).<sup>4</sup>

In several ways, Vivekananda’s methods resemble Keshub’s. Both were flamboyant characters who used their gifts for music and drama in their preaching. Both used the opportunities presented by steam travel within India and overseas, by the English language, and by the familiarity of their hearers with some features of Western secular thought, Christianity, various Hindu traditions, and to some extent Buddhism and Islam. Both believed that social problems could be solved only by spiritual means. Both were speakers rather than writers, and their published works have to be examined as rhetoric rather than sustained argument. That is, each not only sets forth the ideas that are in his mind but also manipulates ideas that are already in the minds of his audience. These ideas include the polarity of spiritual East and material West, the harmony of religion and science, human potential, and evolution.

On the other hand, Keshub shows none of Vivekananda’s fluency in Sanskrit and extensive knowledge of Sanskrit literature. Nor is he so concerned to anchor his teaching in Hindu tradition. While invoking elements from the Bible and European history as well as from India, he emphasizes the newness of his teaching and its freedom from any ethnic identity. Vivekananda, on the other

hand, emphasizes the antiquity of his teaching and claims that while it is to be found in the original forms of all religions, only *vedānta* preserves it in its purity.

While Keshub's treatment of yoga is much more general than Vivekananda's, he gives it an important place. His "New Dispensation" is not only "the harmony of all scriptures and all saints and all sects . . . of reason and faith . . . of the east and the west"; it is also "the harmony of yoga and bhakti" (Scott, 1979: 344). He associates yoga with his own interpretation of the divinity of Jesus, which he says must be framed in Indian terms if Indians are to accept it. Accordingly, "Christ is a true Yogi, and he will surely help us realize our national ideal of a Yogi"; Chaitanya and Guru Nanak embody the same ideal (p. 215). The term *yogi* denotes not only what Christ is but also what his followers are to become. "He will come to you as self-surrender, as asceticism, as Yoga, as the life of God in man, as obedient and humble sonship" (p. 217). Keshub does not tell us with any precision what he means by *yoga*, but it seems that, like Vivekananda, he regards the meaning "join" of the root *yuj* as a key to it, indicating a union of the human with the divine. Yoga is communion (p. 266), and Christ's "life was one continued yoga or communion with the Heavenly Father" (p. 332). The crucifixion "means *Yoga* posture, humanity dead yet alive" (p. 295).

## MISSION TO THE WEST

Vivekananda knew the Hindu tradition far more deeply than Keshub, and anchored his teaching much more securely in it. His need to do so follows both from his mission to the West and from the "plan of campaign" (CW: 3.207–227), which he announced on his return in 1897: to regenerate India using her own resources. In his first speech to the Parliament of Religions, he announced himself as representing "the most ancient order of monks in the world; . . . the mother of religions; and . . . millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects" (CW: 1.3; cf. Chowdhury-Sengupta, 1998: 26). He had been included in the program of the Parliament only as a result of negotiations after his arrival in the States, but his lack of organizational backing marked him as genuinely and universally Hindu, unlike the Brahmo representative Mozoomdar, whose attendance had been arranged in advance.<sup>5</sup> Rather than question the use of the multivalent term *Hindu* to cover the various, sometimes conflicting, religious traditions of India, Vivekananda exploited it as standing for "a religion which has taught the world tolerance and universal acceptance" (CW: 1.3).

Vivekananda had not set out for the West with the intention of becoming a yoga teacher.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, he may not have intended to be a teacher at all; at the Parliament of Religions, and in his first lecture tours, he was not so much a teacher as an advocate. He became a teacher during his stay in the States, in response to the reception he found, and he developed his teaching during that time (Raychaudhuri, 1998; Burke, 1966; Killingley, 1998). It has been

said that “he had to be an authentic Hindu even if it meant making it up as he went along” (Hatcher, 1999: 48). The idea of teaching yoga may have occurred to him in the course of that development; there is no indication of it in the speeches to the Parliament, or in the admittedly slight records from the time before he crossed the seas.

The evidence for Vivekananda’s intentions in 1893 is not entirely clear, but in addition to going to the Parliament he wanted to raise funds for relief work in India (Raychaudhuri, 1998: 4). This is the aim he declared in a confrontational speech to the Parliament: “I came here to seek aid for my impoverished people, and I fully realised how difficult it was to get help for heathens from Christians in a Christian country” (CW: 1.20). On his return to India, he said again that he had gone not for the Parliament of Religions but out of a fervent desire to relieve the misery of his people (CW: 3.226). Though he eventually stayed in the West for three and a half years, he had not intended to be there for so long. However, after the Parliament ended in September 1893, he made well-paid lecture tours, arranged by an agency (Burke, 1992: 178–179) and reported in enthusiastic, if ill informed, newspaper stories. By March 1894 he was tiring of the lecture circuit, “mixing with hundreds of varieties of the human animal” and having to “suit anybody’s or any audience’s fads” (letter from Detroit, March 15, 1894, 302–3). Instead, he was “bent upon seeing a little of Boston and New York” (letter from Detroit, March 12, 1894, CW: 8.301), rightly expecting more select, stable, and discriminating audiences there. He was also driven by the hostility of the supporters of Christian missions, which grew vehement from late February 1894 (Burke, 1966: 289–313). Accordingly, he moved in April from the Midwest to the East Coast, and participated in the annual conference of liberal Christians in Greenacres, Maine (Jackson, 1994: 28).

From July 1894 he lectured independently to various groups that can be described as cultic:<sup>7</sup> Christian Scientists, Spiritualists, Theosophists, occultists (De Michelis, 2004: 112–119). His motives and impressions are partially revealed in his letters. He tells his fellow disciples in India that he is “the guest of big people here” and “a widely known man” (Bengali letter, summer 1894, CW: 6.291), but he is becoming wary of accepting hospitality, especially from the rich (letter from Fishkill Landing, New York, to Mrs. Hale, his “mother,” as he called her, in Chicago, July 1894, CW: 8.314). The letters show that his purpose in America is shifting. In June 1894 he wrote to India that “primarily my coming has been to raise funds for an enterprise of my own”: to “educate and raise the masses” of India (letter from Chicago, June 20, 1894, CW: 8.306). But in February 1895 he is “beginning to feel that the old sages were right” in forbidding *saṃnyāsins* to collect funds (letter to Mrs. Ole Bull, February 14, 1895, CW: 6.299). In April 1895 he was teaching a Jnana yoga class of 130 students and two other weekly yoga classes of 50 each; soon he would be going to the Thousand Islands (on the St. Lawrence River) to find peace and seclusion with a few of his students and to “manufacture a few ‘Yogis’” (letter from New York to Mrs. Ole Bull, April 25, 1895, CW: 6.306). Such talks on yoga must



have been undertaken in response to a growing American demand for spiritual practices and techniques that would yield results (De Michelis, 2004: 118).

In his letters of this period, Vivekananda seems uncertain about his course of action, sometimes worried about the nascent movement he has left behind in India, and giving detailed instructions to his fellow *saṃnyāsins* there about their work, their finances, and their health. About his own work he can be ambitious, flippant, and despondent by turns. “To tell you the truth, the more I am getting popularity and facility in speaking, the more I am getting fed up” (letter to the Hale sisters, March 12, 1894, CW: 8.301). Reading his speeches to the Parliament of Religions and the reports of their reception, one would hardly expect him six months later to show such lack of self-confidence or such a sense of still being a learner. Just as it cost Congress lakhs of rupees to keep Gandhi in poverty, as Sarojini Naidu observed, so it took much mothering by wealthy American ladies to support Vivekananda’s manly self-reliance.

In 1895, writing from America to his brother disciples in India about the future expansion of their ashram, Vivekananda proposes “a big hall” for daily readings and classes, “one day for Yoga, a day for Bhakti, another for Jnâna, and so forth” (CW: 6.324), evoking the triad of yogas that, with the addition of *rājayoga*, recurs throughout his work. This suggests that his plans for India, as well as his teaching in the West, had been developing in the course of his American tour and in the light of his experience there. However, in his talks and writings in India after his return, there is little on yoga. Even in the “Lectures from Colombo to Almora” of 1897, in which, returning in triumph from the West, he sets out his visions for the regeneration of India, yoga and yogis receive only sporadic mention.<sup>8</sup> Though Aurobindo and Gandhi, in making *karmayoga* part of their schemes for national regeneration, were following Vivekananda (King, 1980: 51–53), he made remarkably little use of *karmayoga* in that context. Two of his talks on the *Bhagavad Gītā* (*BhG*)—one in Bengali in 1897 (CW: 4.102–110) and another in English in Calcutta in 1898 (CW: 5.246–249)—mention yoga frequently, as might be expected from their subject. But it appears on the whole that scheduled teaching on yoga was for export rather than home consumption.

## YOGA IN THE WEST BEFORE VIVEKANANDA

The word *yoga* was already current in English by Vivekananda’s time, not only in specialist literature. In 1843 the *Penny Cyclopædia* included an article on yoga (Vol. 27, p. 657), which begins by deriving the word from “the Sanscrit radical *yuj*, ‘to join,’” and explaining it as “union with the universal spirit (*Paramâtma*)”—a similar *vedāntic* understanding of the word to Keshub’s and Vivekananda’s.<sup>9</sup> This was the usual explanation; it was not until 1925 that Edgerton’s translation “discipline,” justified by the contexts in which the word is used as well as by etymology, became generally available.<sup>10</sup> The word *yogi*, in various spellings, many reflecting the pronunciation *jogi*, had been current much longer, often

with disreputable connotations.<sup>11</sup> However, until Vivekananda, yoga had been known in the West as an activity of the other, not as something to which Westerners might aspire. Even when Henry David Thoreau says that “rude and careless as I am, I would fain practice the *yoga* faithfully” and claims to be a yogi “to some extent, and at rare intervals,”<sup>12</sup> his claim is extravagant; he is making a trip to the fabled Orient in his head rather than reporting any actual practice.

Monier-Williams’s *Indian Wisdom* (1875) describes yoga on the basis of Patañjali’s *Yogasūtras* (YS), though he views it negatively as “a mere contrivance for getting rid of all thought” (p. 103) and adds accounts of the “physical mortifications . . . popularly connected with the Yoga system” (p. 103) and impelled by “faith in a false system” (p. 104). He also describes yoga as it appears in the *BhG*, treating it as an eclectic combination of *sāṃkhya*, yoga, *vedānta*, and *bhakti* (p. 137). He translates *yoga* in the *BhG* as “yoking” (p. 142, fn. 3), but follows the usual interpretation as referring to union with God. These passages, in a book intended to give “educated Englishmen . . . an insight into the mind, habits of thought, and customs of the Hindūs” (p. iii), provided an authoritative, though unsympathetic, statement of some aspects of the meaning of *yoga*. They offered no encouragement to take it up.

The Theosophical Society, founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, did much to popularize Indian ideas and Sanskrit words, including the word *yoga*. However, it presented yoga as an occult science. A. P. Sinnett, an English journalist in India, taking his ideas from Blavatsky, described yoga as cultivated by a brotherhood of adepts to be found “all over the East” but mainly in Tibet (Sinnett, 1881: 24). The inaccessibility of Tibet and the relative inaccessibility of “the East” itself, not to mention its lack of geographical location, guaranteed the occult status of this science. Sinnett insists on the difference between yoga and “the loathsome asceticism of the ordinary Indian fakeer, the *yogi* of the woods and wilds” (p. 26). He also distinguishes between “*Hatti yog*” (*haṭhayoga*), which is “mere physical exercises,” and “*Ragi yog*” (*rājayoga*), “which is approached by the discipline of the mind, and which leads to the higher altitudes of occultism” (p. 27). However, the Theosophical Society did not encourage the view that anyone, apart from Blavatsky herself and the remote brotherhood of Mahatmas in Tibet with whom she claimed to communicate, could become an adept, so for most Theosophists yoga remained an activity of the other (De Michelis, 2004: 118). Vivekananda repudiated such esoterism (e.g., CW: 1.134), insisting on the inherent potential of every person; this fit the ideas of self-improvement that were current in the American circles he addressed.

## THE PLACE OF YOGA IN VIVEKANANDA’S MESSAGE

In the Ramakrishna movement, yoga is the practical teaching underpinned by *vedānta*; it is the means to the ultimate goal (Jackson, 1994: 71). Either of these terms could denote Vivekananda’s teaching: the book published in



London as *Yoga Philosophy* (Vivekananda, 1896) was republished in the States as *Vedanta Philosophy*.<sup>13</sup> Since he regarded all forms of spiritual striving as yoga, his yoga teaching is not clearly divided from the rest of his teaching. More recent yoga classes have been filmed or ethnographically reported, but Vivekananda's are harder to describe. They are partially recorded in his *Complete Works*, in the form of talks taken down by his followers; after Vivekananda's return to the States from England in December 1895, this was done by the stenographer Josiah Goodwin (*Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples*, 1965 [hereafter *Life*]: 383).

Vivekananda's first attempt to "manufacture" yogis (CW: 6.306, quoted previously) was at Thousand Island Park, the country retreat of his New York follower Miss Dutcher, from June 19 to August 6, 1895. Some talks given there were taken down by one of the participants, Miss S. E. Waldo, and published as "Inspired Talks" (CW: 7.3–104). However, because the course lasted several weeks and Miss Waldo found "it was not possible to take notes" (*Life*: 357; but see p. 361), this record is incomplete. The recorded talks include passages loosely based on the YS and the *BhG*—the two texts on which Vivekananda relied most for authority in his yoga teaching—and they also refer to other texts.<sup>14</sup> However, they range over many topics, which are developed elsewhere in his works. He taught that all paths lead to "the Whole" (CW: 7.6); all prophets teach the same (CW: 7.17); Spirit is omnipresent (CW: 7.7); truth is beyond books (CW: 7.9, 53); truth is within each of us, needing only to be uncovered (CW: 7.20, 34, 54, 71); and our efforts cannot benefit the world (CW: 7.102) but they benefit ourselves (CW: 7.9). He expounded Śāṅkara's commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtra* (CW: 7.32) and spoke extensively of Ramakrishna (CW: 7.23–25) and of the Goddess (CW: 7.26) and here and there of the Buddha and Jesus.

Evidently the manufacture of yogis is not a routine process; indeed, any sort of routine would be contrary to Vivekananda's soteriology as well as his temperament, since the ways to perfection are countless and should be chosen to suit the needs of different people. His classes would hardly be recognized as yoga classes today: as far as we can see, his students sat on chairs in their ordinary clothes.<sup>15</sup> Even in *Rāja-Yoga*, posture receives only passing mention (CW: 1.137). If he had given them exercises in posture and breathing, his students would surely have mentioned such novelties, but what they report is the "blessed experience" (*Life*: 365), "fraught . . . with unusual opportunity for spiritual growth" (p. 357), of being in his presence and hearing him talk, not forgetting his cookery (pp. 361, 365).

Vivekananda's yoga classes, besides meeting an American demand, served an agenda of his own, which he had announced in Chicago: to show that conflict between religions could be resolved only by Hinduism, or more precisely by *advaita vedānta*—and not by Christianity, as some participants in the Parliament, including some of its organizers, supposed. In his first speech, after extolling Hinduism for its tolerance, he added, "We believe not only in