

inherent in today's global yoga forms is sterile and limited insofar as it fails to give serious consideration to the substance of these modern forms. It is for these reasons that I do not base this study on a comparison of modern "hatha" yoga with its purported medieval forebears. In the first chapter, I nevertheless offer a brief outline of some older forms of yoga and provide references for readers wishing to find out more concerning the theory, practice, and history of these forms, in particular *haṭha* yoga.

I am well aware—on the basis of several years of presentations and informal discussions on the material presented here—that my work will elicit some very specific reactions in certain quarters. For those who prefer hagiography to history, such as some Western apologists of "traditional" systems of postural modern yoga, this work is easily dismissed as either irrelevant or malign in intent, and its author as an academic trespasser on hallowed ground. Others, who situate themselves in an antagonistic relationship to the authority of modern traditions (or who are angry about what "has been done" to yoga), revel in what they see as a much needed exposure of convenient but specious myths. Both these responses are based on the assumption that my intention is to "demolish" the validity of modern yoga or to show that the postural forms that abound today are "bastardized," "compromised," "watered down," "confected" (and so on) with regard to the true meaning and authentic practice of yoga. Both responses, however, aside from misrepresenting my position, are inadequate and undesirable as they stifle genuine and sustained thinking about the substance of modern yoga. While there seems little point in protesting that this material is not presented through love of controversy or iconoclasm on my part, it is worth suggesting that there may be more profitable ways to view this book than as a hostile but ultimately irrelevant academic exercise on the one hand, or a righteous destruction of false idols on the other.

A more valid and helpful way of thinking beyond such unproductive positions might be to consider the term *yoga* as it refers to modern postural practice as a *homonym*, and not a synonym, of the "yoga" associated with the philosophical system of Patañjali, or the "yoga" that forms an integral component of the Śaiva Tantras, or the "yoga" of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and so on. In other words, although the word "yoga" as it is used popularly today is identical in spelling and pronunciation in each of these instances, it has quite different meanings and origins. It is, in short, a homonym, and it should therefore not be assumed that it refers to the same body of beliefs and practices as these other, homonymous terms. If this is admitted as the basis for further discussion, we are free to consider postural modern yoga on its own terms instead of in negative comparison to other traditions called "yoga." The apologist might then concede, with no sense of self-betrayal, that his or her practices and belief systems have indeed

changed and adapted, and that there is real value in investigating the historical course of these changes insofar as they relate to their own tradition. And the iconoclast might stop flogging a dead horse.

This is not to say that I take popular yoga today to be necessarily divorced and isolated from other, prior traditions of yoga. The relationship is rather one of dialectical homology, wherein structural similarities can still obtain (to a greater or lesser degree), but where the composition of practical and theoretical elements, and the overall orientation of the system, proceed in markedly divergent fashion. There are often, in short, far more plausible historical explanations for the way yoga is practiced today than the claim of direct, wholesale, genealogical affiliation to a tradition with the same or similar sounding name. As the next section shows, recent studies have made it amply clear that yoga, in its dissemination in the Western world, has undergone radical transformation in response to the differing worldviews, logical predispositions, and aspirations of modern audiences. These modern forms, it is also evident, were the result of a reframing of practices and belief frameworks within India itself over the last 150 years, in response to encounters with modernity and the West. Modern, popular yogas in and out of India bear the clear traces of this dialectic exchange. In this study I endeavor to present some of these reasons as they relate to modern postural practice. If they prove at all compelling, I hope that this will encourage further careful, intelligent discussion of modern forms of postural yoga and not merely their dismissal or jingoistic defense.

### **The Academic Study of Modern Yoga**

It is only since the 1990s that modern forms of yoga have begun to be examined within the humanities and social sciences. Among the first studies were Christian Fuchs's history of yoga's reception in Germany (1990); Norman Sjoman's study of the Mysore Palace yoga tradition (1996); Karl Baier's analysis of yoga's passage to the West (1998); and Sylvie Ceccomori's detailed overview of the history of yoga in France (2001). Two major works on modern forms of yoga appeared in 2004: Joseph Alter's *Yoga in Modern India: The Body between Philosophy and Science*, and Elizabeth De Michelis's *A History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism*. Alter's book is anthropological in approach and is substantially concerned with the medical and scientific experiments carried out by Swami Kavalayananda from the 1920s onward in the Bombay area (see Singleton 2006 for my review of this book). De Michelis (2004), who styles herself in this book as a historian of religious ideas (6), examines the Western esoteric influences at play in Swami Vivekananda's popular yoga synthesis of 1896, and traces these to the later teachings of the postural