
The volume (containing a programmatic introduction and nine articles in three parts) is committed to bridge the gap between practitioners and academics (some of the authors are both). If the selection is representative, contemporary practiced yoga is dominated by Ashtanga (Vinyasa) Yoga as taught by Pattabhi Jois followed by other branches of the Krishnamacharya tradition, Swami Sivananda and hatha yoga. What distinguishes scholarly, academic practitioners from others and from popular media is called “depth of analysis” (which makes ‘analysis’ the primary scholarly activity, ‘depth’ its distinctive quality).

In the introduction emphasis is put on diversity (which in an edited volume is less than interdisciplinarity) and on potential for further research (a gesture of modesty hardly necessary given the quality of the collection; at the same time a programmatic claim which provokes reflection on whether it is this type of scholarly research which should determine our knowledge about yoga). The editors introduce yoga in the modern world as “contemporary” yoga which creates a historical framework rather than a typological mould (as would have those who talk about ‘Modern Yoga’). The goal of a search of sources raises the question as to which primary languages are being exploited? The contemporary yoga here researched is a predominantly English speaking phenomenon.

The bibliographies for each contribution contain some overlap, as is natural given the thematic closeness. The references to unpublished papers conveys an impression of how closely knit the academic community of yoga specialists is (at least in the English speaking world).

If, as the editors concede, we do not yet know, how to define yoga or how to describe its modern, globalized forms (apart from calling them modern, contemporary, or globalized) the methods employed in the “terrain of Modern Yoga Studies” gain importance (granting that methodology should distinguish scholarly approaches from all others — and, after all, “cutting edge scholarship” (2) is what the volume claims to present). There are historical studies based on textual sources, anthropological studies based on field work; authors are representatives of religious studies or history of religions, sociology, philosophy, theology; and there is a persistant search for conceptual tools to describe, to classify, to “understand”. There are recurrent thematic motifs like authority, authenticity, experience or spirituality.

An ambiguity in the title of the first part (“Mapping the Terrain of Modern Yoga Studies”) helps to pinpoint the permeability of the border between
studied object and the study itself. The “terrain of Modern Yoga Studies” could announce a survey of modern studies on yoga but also an account of what these studies did or should study, in particular studies of Modern Yoga. The three contributions represent both.

Elizabeth De Michelis (“Modern Yoga: History and Forms”, pp. 17–35) begins with her knowledgeable summary of the historical background (on two pages!): Yoga is compared to a building, to understand it is to be able to describe its architecture — evidence of a kind of essentialist approach partly shared by the editors. To develop “models” is a scholarly activity relatively far removed from the sources. The generous bibliographical references (occasionally with qualifying additions) suggest a unanimity about “Hinduism” which can exist only in the perspective of such a survey. The postulate that contemporary practice should be “judged [sic] in its own terms” abandons the historical perspective in favour of (value) judgements which let the belief studied frameworks encompass the scholar who studies them. Comparison is practiced in historical perspective when “key differences” between modern and pre-modern forms of Yoga are registered, viz. differences of Thought concerning the kārma/samsāra/mokṣa complex. Secularization, privatization, commodification (viz. commercialization), modicalization are the catchwords around which a wide spectrum of characteristics, problem areas and questions are assembled — a case of theories which concern “modern” more than “yoga”?

The second contribution in part I by Joseph A. Alter (“Yoga Shivir: Performativity and the Study of Modern Yogas”, pp. 36–48) is methodologically the report on anthropological field work in India (thus about ‘yoga in modern India’), being the attempt to arrive at understanding by describing (gathering ethnographic data) and analyzing (here, the performances of yoga camps as “meta-commentaries on the nature and meaning of yoga in practice”). This allows to understand people’s concerns, hopes, believes about “yogic truth” and at the same time to tackle “the ethical problem of questioning truth claims while trying to understand how and why they are made” (38). Relativism, perspectivity and skepticism need not be abandoned when studying performativity. The example is provided by just one episodic description (Mussoorie 2007), with little historical perspective, and one (text-based) description of the institutional strategy of the Bharatiya Yog Sansthan.

The article by Sarah Strauss (“‘Adapt, Adjust, Accommodate’: the Production of Yoga in a Transnational World”, pp. 49–74) is the only one reprinted (orig. 2002), endorsed by the editors’ conviction that it should be known more widely. It presents a portrait (overview) of the Divine Life Society (founded by Swami Sivananda) and its objectives and strategies for the