

Review

Yoga in Modern Hinduism: Hariharānanda Āraṇya and Sāṃkhyayoga, by Knut A. Jacobsen. London: Routledge, 2018. 242 pp., £97.99 (hb). ISBN 978-1-13808-059-1.

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As an anthropologist who, in part, focuses on the contemporary articulations of Yoga and yoga-inflected identity, I am fascinated by how often the assertion is offered that PYS1.2 is *the* one and only definition of Yoga. The binary, dogmatic, static, fundamentalist-like attitude of many producers and consumers of Yoga, today, fascinates me. If I could achieve one thing, it would be to communicate how the historiographical details of Yoga present a much more dynamic, arbitrary and contentious past to Yoga's origin and development. This recent book by Knut Jacobsen does an impressive job in presenting a clear and concise argument towards this aim of mine.

Yet, this is not all that it achieves. I refer to Jacobsen's comment on the final two pages of the last chapter (pp. 200–201), in which he asserts that 'the new orthodox yoga of Hariharānanda Āraṇya and Kāpil Maṭh is also a form of modern yoga in the sense that it was a product of the renewed interest in yoga in nineteenth-century Bengal, especially in the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, but it has instead meeting points with other aspects of modernity, such as the new puritan culture of the Bengali *bhadraloks* and the new Orientalist scholarship on Sāṃkhya and Yoga'. This comment is one of, if not, the main thesis of Jacobsen's project. The book draws this out over ten chapters by ultimately focusing on a contemporary religious institution, Kāpil Maṭh, which is a 'small tradition of followers of Sāṃkhyayoga, which emerged in the last decade of the nineteenth century' (p. 1).

While there are scores of books and articles written on interpretations of classical yoga, Indian philosophical systems, haṭha yoga, as well as Pātañjali, Sāṃkhya and the rise of modern yoga, this book pivots away from this well-trod path to tell us about a seemingly unknown, but not unimportant part of the development of modern Hinduism. It does this through explicating the historical development of Sāṃkhya philosophy and then working through an ethno-historical approach to richly contextualize the Kāpil Maṭh

institution within the dynamic decades around the end of the nineteenth century up to the present day.

This book ought to become standard reading for any graduate student interested in combining the disciplines of history, anthropology, philology and philosophy. One component that does make the book accessible to non-Sanskritists is the repetition of translating key terms in brackets when they appear. While the reader knowledgeable of these terms might find this frustrating, it seems to be not too burdensome a task to skip over the repetitions. But, for the layperson, these will certainly help to make the book easier to read by saving time having to search back through the glossary.

Over ten fascinating chapters we are first introduced to the subtle differences, historical development and similarities of Sāṃkhya, Yoga and Sāṃkhyayoga. Like all the chapters, it is brief and accessible, as the average length of each chapter is approximately 20 pages. Yet, Chapter 1 is a comprehensive overview, nonetheless. One interesting point of discussion that I found consonance with relates to this current 'cultural appropriation' zeitgeist, particularly with social justice issues around culture and identity within Yogaland. On pages 14–15 we find a discussion of the historical details around the idea that Buddhism most likely appropriated the key tenets of Sāṃkhya, which were then appropriated through a Brāhmaṇical attempt to appropriate yoga from the Śramaṇa tradition, as represented in the *Pātāñjalayogaśāstra*. I feel these are important historical things to know about when engaging in contemporary discussions of cultural appropriation with regard to racism and Yoga.

The level of nuance is fascinating and complicates the default narrative of the global yoga industry's reliance on a static, monolithic narrative of a timeless yoga. The first chapter would be invaluable to any yoga teacher-training course as a fundamental inclusion to the 'History of Yoga and Sāṃkhya' section that hopefully is taught in every course.

Another fascinating stream of insights comes through the discussions that complicate the way in which Advaita Vedānta has become emblematic of both Yoga and Hinduism. And how this evolved through the Hindu Renaissance (p. 203) of the Bengali *bhadraloks*. Important to this discussion is how the founder of Kāpil Maṭh, Hariharānanda Āraṇya, argued for an orthodoxy based on textual tradition that perceivably represents the oldest and 'real' philosophy of Ancient India, as 'authentic yoga' through a type of revival (p. 20). However, as Jacobsen so cogently articulates throughout the book, Āraṇya's brand of Yoga is also, ultimately, an invented tradition that is equally a consequence of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial period.

This is encapsulated in the fourth chapter (pp. 52–69); which focuses on the 'rebirth of Yoga and the emergence of the *bhadralok* yogin'. It was through the transition from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century that the modern, educated, upper-class groups of Bengal came to gradually

give Yoga a higher status. This reconstituted a previous ambivalence, if not disdain, into a positive, inquisitive sentiment through the fact that the *hatha* yogin was historically excluded due to being perceived as an agent of ritual pollution for caste Hindus (p. 53) and that yogins tricked people with fraudulent practices (p. 56). This impression of Yoga and yogins amongst the elite changed; which, initially, had nothing to do with the common assumption found today that Yoga equals *Patañjalayogaśāstra*. This, however, led to the 'emergence of a 'bhadralok yogin', a new yogin who was associated with [sic] *Yogasūtra*. He belonged to India's modern educated upper-class elites, who had started to become interested in the old tradition of yoga philosophy of the *Yogasūtra* ... These new yogins were able to gain admiration and attain sponsorship from the Indian elites who were looking for and experimenting with new religious role models' (p. 57). This exploitation of a marginalized social class and its culture by the dominant elite sounds eerily familiar.

While Chapters 5 to 9 focus more on the historical origins and tradition of Kāpil Maṭh, including its institutionalization and the routinization of charismatic authority through communal articulation (p. 189), the reader is provided with an intriguing glimpse into this purposely small and little-known community. Of particular ethnographic note is how the guru of this tradition willingly submits to almost total isolation within a purpose-built 'cave' that they are sealed into by a mason. This is meant to enable the guru to attain the aim of *kaivalya* and to be a constant reminder to the congregation; but, also, still enable him to dispense *darśana* on prescribed days of the month, albeit through the only small hole in the wall (p. 33). This is part of the reason as to why and how Kapil Maṭh evolved its material religion to create the semblance that Sāṃkhya yoga is a living monastic practice.

These later ethno-historical chapters build on the second and third chapters; which set the frame for addressing the common assumption that Sāṃkhya does not have a (continuous) living tradition. Jacobsen presents a persuasive argument based on historical documents and the accounts of people still alive today; that, even though this tradition does *live*, albeit through a guru who can dispense instructions through an oral tradition; essentially, it has been revived and rearticulated through absolute reliance on creating a new type of *saṃnyāsin* based entirely on the key texts: *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* and the *Tattvavaiśārādī*.

Still, this tradition was filtered through a modern, educated, upper-class sensibility; which, ultimately, relies on a rather large appeal to tradition and purity in an attempt to bring the earliest tradition of Sāṃkhya to life. It does this by aspiring to exemplify the 'ancient ideal of the renunciant living outside of society found in Jainism and Early Buddhism, and promoted in Hindu texts such as the *Samnyāsa Upaniṣads* and the *Dharmaśāstra* literature' (p. 205).

However, even though Āraṇya tried to distance himself from the more syncretic yoga-inflected, new religious forms that the Orientalists and

Theosophists revitalized interest in and promoted with the help of print media; his supposedly unadulterated 'ancient' version and its dissemination were just as much based on the similarly imagined, neo-Romantic impulse. Even though his doxographical project differed slightly through a dogmatic interpretation of the fundamental sources of Sāṃkhya philosophy.

I am not sure if part of Jacobsen's intention was this, but one of the key strengths of this book is how it systematically and convincingly destabilizes the modern yoga edifice around the mystery and intrigue of what Yoga was and is imagined to be, not just 120 years ago, but today. It achieves this through excavating down to the core of the narrative through following sinuous primary textual references to show the irony of how the *bhadralok* yogin tried to distance himself 'from much that was associated with the contemporary yogins and their yoga practices, which represented different and mistaken traditions of yoga, according to Āraṇya' (p. 205). It is as if Jacobsen is talking about the ongoing turf wars between innumerable yoga tribes promoting their own syncretic, ahistorical narratives and identities of Yoga within Yogaland today.