

Theories and Practices in the Yogas of Switzerland

Yoga books -- book yoga : learning about yoga and learning yoga from books

Indology is one of the academic disciplines that constitute our interdisciplinary project. As practiced and taught at the university of Zürich, indology is a philological discipline working with language and with texts in historical perspective. As a summary of the indological contribution to our project the presentation outlined the logical connection between the different aspects of our work. Each aspect was illustrated by an example.

Research into the history of yoga based on books has to begin by (1.) reflecting about the philosophical justification for looking for yoga in texts. Such justification can be found in the fact that human experience is something open to reflection and consequently to communication. Given the decision that one wants to use texts as sources, we are nevertheless confronted with the fact that (2.) these sources do not cover everything (antecedent oral tradition, lack of documentation). Next, in order to understand how texts form a tradition, one should look (3.) at how the texts themselves reflect the textuality of such a tradition (e.g. references to earlier texts in the Yogasutras; use of "texts" -- mantras, holy scriptures, etc. -- in yogic practice). Evidently, in doing so we need to know which texts belong to which tradition and who has already published about them, i.e., the task is (4.) to collect information about books, to assemble a yoga bibliography. Since our (Western, academic) interest in yoga is itself one modality of encounter, we need to situate our approach in (5.) the history of (indological) research on yoga. One exemplary case in this history is represented by (6.) Mircea Eliade who studied in India under Prof. Surendra Nath Dasgupta. Concerning the history of yoga in modern India and its interaction with Switzerland, the exemplary case on which we decided to concentrate is (7.) the school of Tirumalai Krishnamacharya. Back on a more general level,

a methodological problem is constituted by the fact that (8.) yoga books are not only written, they are (or should be) read as well. The text reception of the Krishnamacharya school could be considered also under this aspect. But the written word, the book can indeed become an independent authority (9.), even to the point where it replaces the person of a teacher.

The challenge is to understand yoga on the basis of selected observations as a phenomenon about which general observations can be made, to reconstruct the history characterized by encounter ... and to achieve this by writing another yoga book for book yogis.

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