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A History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism

By Elizabeth De Michelis



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A History of Modern Yoga traces the roots of Modern Yoga back to the spread of western esoteric ideas in 18th century Bengal's intellectual circles. In due course Raja Yoga, published by Vivekananda in 1896, became the seminal text of Modern Yoga largely because, the author shows, it reconfigured the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali along the lines of a then emerging New Age occultistic style of secularised and individualistically oriented religiosity.

With regard to 20th century developments, this book proposes a four-fold typology of Modern Yoga comprising Modern Psychosomatic, Modern Meditational, Modern Postural and Modern Denominational forms. Iyengar Yoga, one of the most influential schools of Modern Postural Yoga, is then analyzed in the light of this framework, while the conclusion shows how a typical Modern Postural Yoga session may be interpreted to reveal the forms and contents of a healing ritual of secular religion.



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Editorial Review

Review

'carefully researched and closely-argued . . . Far more than a reconstruction of the history of Modern Yoga, the book is an important contribution to the history of Orientalism, the Brahmo Samaj, and Neo-Vedanta.'
Prof David Gordon White Department of Religious Studies University of California, Santa Barbara

'A History of Modern Yoga is a timely work of astute, rigorous, critical scholarship. De Michelis has done an outstanding job' Prof Joseph Alter University of Pittsburgh

'...Likely to stimulate debate...researchers working in the fields that Elizabeth De Michelis spans will find this an interesting and, at certain points, provocative study.'

Volume 21, Number 1

(Gwilym Beckerlegge *Journal Of Contemporary Religion*)

'...De Michelis greatly adds to our knowledge of how contemporary presentations of yoga differ from earlier ones.'

(Stefanie Syman)

"A *History of Modern Yoga* makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the roots of yoga, the connections between Western and Neo-Vedantic esotericism, and ways in which Hindu reformers remained active agents in combating Orientalist constructions of Hinduism, even while influencing Western audiences....this book is most appropriate for graduate students or advanced undergraduates." — *Missiology* — An International Review, October 2005 (*Missiology: An International Review*)

De Michelis (faculty of Divinity, Cambridge) has made an important contribution to modern scholarship in religion with this history of yogic practice. Many readers will find her style dry in the extreme, but she is quite adept at unstitching the many complex strands of association and precedent that have gone into the modern concepts of yogic practice, from 18th-century Bengal to 20th-century America. A crucial addition to academically inclined libraries and an important eyeopener for larger collections.

(*Library Journal*)

Reference & Research Book News, August 2006

(mention)

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About the Author

Elizabeth De Michelis is Gordon Milburn Junior Research Fellow at Oriel College, University of Oxford, UK.

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