

Contemporary Yoga: Legitimizing Authenticity

Interviews with Founders of Yoga Schools in Rishikesh

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Is this figure seated in a yoga posture? This is a tan
steatite seal from the Indus Valley Civilization
(3300–1300 BCE). Some suggests that he is a yogi
(Kenoyer 1998)

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¹ For reference to picture, see Kenoyer, 2017.

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This study is based on a four-month fieldwork in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand in North India, and I want to give my most sincere thanks to all those who contributed with their experiences, beliefs, and knowledge to the contents of this study. I appreciate the overwhelming hospitality, the openness, and the help that I found in the most unexpected places. To those with whom I conducted interviews; I hope you find that I have placed your narratives correctly. I must also thank all those who helped me when I was so sick in Rishikesh – I am forever grateful for all the care and compassion you showed me.

I would also like to thank my supervisor Knut A. Jacobsen. Your seemingly bottomless knowledge on India's ancient and contemporary traditions has been an inspiration for accuracy and expansion of perspective. Lastly, thanks are due to my fellow students and to all dear friends who have lifted both my spirits and the quality of the contents of this study.

Point of Departure

My first personal encounter with yoga was in a Presbyterian church in Boone, North Carolina. It was church-yoga in a small mountain town in the United States back in 2008. As will be demonstrated here, the meaning of the term yoga is deeply dependent on the context in which it is being used, and for me, for many years, yoga was synonymous to any kind of class found on a fitness center schedule. The apparent characteristics were improvement of cardio, flexibility, strength, coordination and balance, and as all these treats appealed to me I started practicing yoga regularly in the gym with an American yoga teacher named Catherine. She told me that she, and many others like her, had learned yoga by Americans in the US. through lessons on practices like asanas (body postures), anatomy, introduction to Vedic philosophy, and a brief introduction to Sanskrit terminology. I later practiced yoga in various places in the US. and Europe, where typical characteristics of a yoga classes are that the teachers often put their hands together in front of their chest for prayer before and after class, bow their head, and greet us with “Namaste” – a word deriving from Sanskrit, often used as a greeting in many North Indian languages and dialects.

Many times, the teachers also invite the class to chant “om” together before or after class. “Om”² is commonly used as a mantra in Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, and that in Hinduism it is considered one of the most important spiritual symbols referring to Atman (the self) and Brahman (the ultimate reality, the supreme principle). Classes always end with few minutes of lying down on your back with your eyes closed; called corpse pose, or savasana – also deriving from Sanskrit. Besides these customs, I didn’t experience yoga as any different form other fitness-classes. Slowly I came to learn that there was more to the concept of yoga than what I first had thought. When visiting India two years after I first had practiced yoga in the US., I learned things about yoga that were similar, yet sometimes contradictive to what Catherine had taught me. As she had seemed so knowledgeable and confident, I was confused about what my first Indian yoga teacher was trying to teach me and I felt he had got it all wrong. When I asked her, Catherine replied that there are many, different styles of asana practice and many styles of pranayama (breathing techniques). She encouraged me to try many styles and ask questions of my teachers. She said that there is not one right answer, but I have come to learn that many claim to have the right answer about what yoga is, or what it should and should not be.

Notes on Diacritical Marks and Use of the Term Yoga

As this is an ethnographical research project, I have, in agreement with my supervisor, not used diacritical marks besides from doing so in direct quotations. This was done to avoid predicaments between where these marks should be included and where we can assume that the given words have become so common in the English language that they are not needed – such as yogi, guru, chakra, etc. In places where I use Sanskrit terms, these are explained in English.

When the term yoga appears with a capital letter, in a compound word, or in italicized letters below, it will be a direct reference to the publication or theory in question. Otherwise, when the word yoga appears by itself, it refers to no definition or system in particular, but implies context dependency.

² Also spelled “aum”.

Sammendrag

Dette prosjektet presenterer en analyse av hvordan grunnleggere av yoga skoler i Rishikesh definerer autentisk yoga. Analysen er basert på et fire måneders feltarbeid i Rishikesh, Uttarakhand nord i India som innebar deltakende observasjon og kvalitative intervjuer med åtte grunnleggere av yogaskoler i Rishikesh. I intervjuene ble de spurt om hva autentisk yoga betyr for dem, fortalte respondentene om hvordan de opplever yoga i en by preget av motsetninger mellom tradisjon og modernisering. Grunnet byens høye antall yoga skoler og spirituelle sentre, er Rishikesh i dag kjent som verdens yoga hovedstad, og tusenvis av internasjonale turister reiser dit årlig for å utnytte seg av de mange yogatilbudene i byen. Jeg vil presentere en dominerende akademisk diskurs som foreslår at man må se på førmoderne yoga og moderne fysisk treningsyoga som to ulike tradisjoner. I motsetning til dette er det mange yoga skoler i Rishikesh som spesialiserer seg på fysisk treningsyoga samtidig som de hevder at det de lærer bort er enten autentisk, originalt eller tradisjonelt.

Da jeg startet dette prosjektet hadde jeg som mål å finne ut hvordan grunnleggere av yogaskoler i Rishikesh ville legitimere sine påstander om at de lærer bort autentisk yoga. Jeg stilte spørsmål om det er mulig å sammenstille det tradisjonelle og det moderne, og jeg lurte på om retoriske formuleringer om autenticitet eller eldgammel kunnskap var mer enn bare effektiv markedsføringsstrategi.

Igjennom respondentenes beskrivelser lærer vi om hvordan deres holdninger og verdier vedlikeholdes eller forandres i en by preget av konsumkultur og et voksende globalt marked. Det jeg fant, var at sammenstilling av det tradisjonelle og det moderne er selve essensen av det som skjer i Rishikesh og at yogatradisjonene vi ser her, er en sammensmeltning av gamle, resirkulerte og nye tradisjoner. Mer enn en markedsføringsstrategi, kommer henvisning til eldgammel tradisjon frem som en del av identiteten til grunnleggerne av yogaskolene i Rishikesh, og det finnes komplekse tanker og forklaringer bak uttrykk som autentisk og tradisjonelt.

Prosjektet bidrar til den akademiske debatten om yoga ved å fremstille viktigheten av å forstå yoga relativ til gitt kulturell kontekst.

Map: Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, India



Glossary and Abbreviations

Asana(s)	Body posture(s)
Ashram	Spiritual center
Baba/Sadhu	Ascetics or holy men
BhG	Bhagavadgita
Kriya	Cleansing processes
NRM	New religious movements
Pranayama	Breathing techniques
TTC	Teacher training course
YS	Yoga Sutra

Introduction

“When you are becoming teachers, let’s try to keep yoga as authentic as possible.”

(Anonymous yoga teacher in Rishikesh, 2016)

This was said by a yoga teacher in a crowded room in one of many popular yoga schools in Rishikesh, northern India. I was surrounded by a group of men and women; mostly women, with the average age of 30, dressed in sport bras, tight leggings, and t-shirts designed with colorful mandalas. The majority was from Europe or the Americas, a small group represented Australia and Japan, and a few were from India. The teacher was Indian Hindu. His statement sheds light on a notable controversy between tradition and modernization of yoga in Rishikesh, India today, a country that, borrowing from scholar of religion Gavin Flood, on one hand have seen globalization and erosion of tradition, and on the other hand reanimation of traditional forms of knowledge (2005:1). I had come to Rishikesh to conduct fieldwork, a term that in the context of this study implies qualitative interviews and participant observation. As part of participant observation, I now found myself immersed in asana practice (posture practice), meditation, and pranayama lessons (breath-exercises).³

Rishikesh is located on the riverbanks of the Ganges by the foothills of the Himalayas in the state of Uttarakhand, North India, and is home to more than 200 yoga schools and ashrams.⁴ Due to the city’s rich mythology, its density of yoga schools/yoga centers, and its large population of yoga teachers and practitioners, Rishikesh is anecdotally known as the yoga capital of the world (Sarbacker 2014).⁵ Through online advertisements I found that many of the yoga schools in Rishikesh which specializes in various postural yoga traditions, claim to be teaching yoga in an

³ Asana and pranayama will hereafter be used without further explanation referring to body postures and breathing techniques.

⁴ Ashram is traditionally referred to as a center where a group of people can live religiously or spiritually, in seclusion. Today, an ashram does not necessarily imply religious living.

⁵ Also referred to as such by news and travel channels like BBC (McBride 2013), Wikitravel (Rishikesh 2017), CNN (Bishara 2017), the Times of India (Misari), Seattletimes (Jackson 2011), the Hindu (Upadhyay 2015), Norn Rev Travel News (Cosgrove 2017). And Strauss 1997:78 – 79. For more about Rishikesh, see chapter 2.4

either traditional, authentic, original, true, classic, pure, or ancient way.⁶ However, ancient traditions of yoga are disputed, the meaning of yoga is dependent on the context in which it appears, and the term yoga is found with a variety of ambiguous meanings in ancient religious and philosophical Indian scriptures dated to around 1500 BCE. During the last century, the collection of academic literature presenting research on yoga has become enormous and interdisciplinary. I will present a dominant academic discourse suggesting that there is no direct, unbroken lineage between the South Asian premodern yoga systems and modern postural yoga, and that we might study premodern yoga and modern postural yoga as expressions of separate traditions.⁷ In the light of this discourse, I found advertisements promoting postural yoga traditions as authentic and traditional, if not false, then perhaps untrue or shallow since the postural yoga traditions, as we shall see, grew out of the 20th century.⁸ To investigate how founders of yoga schools specialized in postural yoga traditions legitimizes their claim for authentic teachings, I spent four months in Rishikesh and Uttarakhand conducting interviews with eight founders of yoga schools who use words like authentic, traditional or classic in their respective marketing campaigns to promote postural yoga. This thesis presents an analysis of how eight founders of the yoga schools in Rishikesh define what they see to be authentic yoga. What was meant by “as authentic as possible”?

Today, yoga is part of global popular culture, the sale of yoga-related services has become a multi-million-dollar industry, and the term yoga is often associated with physical fitness and as a technique to improve mental health. Scholar of religion Mark Singleton argues that in spite of self-authenticating claims of many modern yoga schools, “the primacy of asana performance in transnational yoga today is a new phenomenon that has no parallel in premodern times” (Singleton 2010:3).⁹ He emphasizes that he is not suggesting that popular yoga today is isolated or “divorced” from prior traditions of yoga, but that:

⁶ From this point on, when one of these terms (ancient, original, true, pure, ancient, traditional, or authentic) appear by itself, the other terms are also implied as they seem to be used by the respondents in this project to express the same idea.

⁷ See e.g. Elizabeth De Michelis (2005), Singleton (2010), Alter (2004), Albanese (2007), Strauss (2007), White (2010).

⁸ For examples of these marketing campaigns, see Appendix A.

⁹ Singleton’s *Selling Yoga* variously refers to “transnational postural yoga”, “modern transnational yoga”, and “transnational Anglophone yoga”.

The relationship is rather one of dialectical homology, wherein structural similarities can still obtain, but where the composition of practical and theoretical elements, and the overall orientation of the system, proceed in markedly divergent fashion (Singleton 2010:16).

Scholar of religion Elizabeth De Michelis defines modern yoga as “the graft of a Western branch onto the Indian tree of yoga” and she states that most of the yoga currently practiced and taught in the West, as well as some contemporary Indian yoga, fit into this category (De Michelis 2005:2). Scholars Jeremy Carrette and Richard King contrasts premodern and modern yoga by arguing that the former is characterized by a selfless ethical agenda in service to society and even the greater cosmos, while the latter pacifies and accommodates consumers who are perpetually motivated to act by their self-interest (Carrette and King 2005:119 -121). Scholar of religion Geoffrey Samuels suggests that:

... modern yoga has become a significant part of contemporary western practices of bodily cultivation, and it should be judged on its own terms, not in terms of its closeness to some presumably more authentic Indian practice (Samuel 2007:178).

Further, Scholar of religion David Gordon White holds that “anyone seeking to reconstruct the history of yoga and yogis must resist the temptation of projecting modernist constructions of this body of practice and its practitioners onto the past” (White 2009:48). Yoga has been under academic scrutiny for more than a century and it seems reasonable to accept theories that suggests that premodern expressions of yoga differ from the expressions of yoga that we see today. Still, in online advertisements and on posters around town, many of the yoga schools in Rishikesh which specializes in various postural yoga systems, claims to be teaching yoga in ancient and authentic ways.¹⁰ In the book *Selling Yoga – From Counterculture to Pop Culture* (2015), scholar of religion Andrea R. Jain argues that “yoga has been perpetually context sensitive, so there is no ‘legitimate,’ ‘authentic,’ ‘true’, or ‘original’ tradition, only contextualized ideas and practices organized around the term *yoga*” (Jain 2015:xvi). If we assume such a position, the advertisements for the schools in Rishikesh seem somewhat contradictory.

¹⁰ For examples of these marketing campaigns, see Appendix A.

Oxford Dictionaries define *authentic* as; one: “Of undisputed origin and not a copy; genuine”, two: “Made or done in the traditional or original way, or in a way that faithfully resembles an original”, or three: “Based on facts; accurate or reliable” (Authentic 2017). In contrast to this first definition, the next section will demonstrate that the origins of yoga are disputed, but rather than being a copy, many scholars holds that expressions of yoga today are products of cultural developments through history. About being done in the traditional or original way, we shall see that consensus has not been reached in terms of what “the original way” was, which again makes facts about yoga disputable. Further, Oxford Dictionaries defines *ancient* as; one: “Belonging to the very distant past that is no longer in existence”, and two: “Having been in existence for a very long time” (Ancient 2017). The claim of something contemporary being ancient, becomes a paradox by this former definition. If we isolate the term yoga, the latter is unarguably true, yet we have seen that some scholars argue that modern expressions of yoga, in fact, have not been around for a very long time. Finally, *original* is defined by Oxford Dictionaries as; one: “Present or existing from the beginning; first or earliest”, two: “[...] not a copy”, and three: “Not dependent on other people's ideas; inventive or novel” (Original 2017). This latter definition becomes interesting when, as we shall see, some scholars assume a position suggesting that modern expressions of yoga are, in fact, solely based on other people’s ideas. Accounts for the two former definitions are implied in the discussion above.

Whatever intention behind the many advertisements promoting the teaching of authentic yoga in Rishikesh, it is a popular trend, something which, under the law of supply and demand, suggests that it promotes big business. This was illustrated in a guesthouse in which I lived for a short time during my stay in Rishikesh, where a poster on the wall stated: “Learn traditional yoga here”. At the time of my stay, no yoga classes were held, and the manager proudly told me that he had managed to acquire a false Yoga Alliance certificate, excitedly emphasizing that “it is in the wind” and that it harvests big business.¹¹ The advertisements of the schools in Rishikesh claiming to classical and authentic yoga reach out to a secular, nonaffiliated global audience, and invite them to centers adapted to facilitate a modern-day group of learners. Entrusted with this information

¹¹ See section 2.4 for Yoga Alliance; a globally recognized American-based organization who provides set requirements for what a yoga school certified by them should include in their teachings.

from the guest house manager, I started wondering whether these words are more than just mere part of a marketing strategy. Scholar of religion Amanda Lucia argues that the most successful global gurus appear to be those who maintain a core of traditionalism while innovating to incorporate the popular liberal ideals of Western late capitalism (Lucia 2014:235). Would that perhaps be how my respondents would legitimize their claim for authentic teachings? Appendix A illustrate a small selection of yoga schools who specializes in postural yoga, and we can see that e.g. “Rishikesh School of Yoga” market themselves with the following statement: “We dedicate ourselves to teaching and promoting yoga in its most authentic and holistic form while remaining relevant to the modern needs.” What does it mean to maintain “a core of traditionalism”, and does the juxtaposition of modern yoga systems and claims of authenticity have legitimized reasoning in the cultural context of Rishikesh? Lucia raises the question of whether innovation must change the course of tradition radically, or if it merely adds something new (Lucia 2014:244). In that regard, I was wondering whether the founders of the yoga schools perhaps saw themselves as performers of traditional teachings with additional modern innovations. After all, as sociologist of religion Pål Repstad points out, the attempt in qualitative research is to answer “what they see themselves to be doing” rather than answering what “I see that they do” (Repstad 1994:13).

By analyzing how the respondents define what they see to be authentic yoga, this project contributes to the academic debate on yoga by emphasizing the importance of seeing yoga relative to the cultural context in which it appears. Chapter one introduces Rishikesh, and to contextualize the narratives presented in the interviews, chapter two provides an outline of the historical development of yoga, as well as a discussion of how reference to values such as authentic, traditional, and ancient often are used to legitimize contemporary traditions. Chapter three accounts for methods and methodological approaches, and chapter four presents and analyses the interviews. A final discussion and concluding remarks are provided in chapter five.

Chapter 1 – Rishikesh: The Yoga Capital of the World

Nowhere in the world do we find a greater density of yoga schools and ashrams for yoga and meditation than in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand.¹² Yogis have inhabited the riverbanks of the Ganges River in Rishikesh for over a century and since the 1960's, the city has earned an international reputation as the “yoga capital of the world”.¹³ Today, thousands of Indians and foreign tourist alike come to Rishikesh to practice yoga, to worship, or to seek spirituality. This section will illustrate how Rishikesh melt together with the modern narrative of yoga.

Both the holy rivers Ganges and Yamuna originates high in the glaciers at the northern borders of Uttarakhand. Ganges runs through Rishikesh and the town of Haridwar by the foothills of the Himalayas before it reaches the Indo-Gangetic plains and run towards Varanasi. Cultural anthropologist Sarah Strauss points at how the state of is “replete with spiritual wealth” (Strauss 2005:24). She writes that the Pandava brothers, heroes of the great Indian epic Mahabharata, are said to have lived in the region, as well as the mythological sages Vyasa and Vashistha.¹⁴ Vishnu is said to have appeared in Rishikesh and Rama and his brother, described in the other major Indian epic *Ramayana*, are, according to Strauss, said to have come there to do penance for the death of the demon-king Ravana (ibid:24). Rishikesh is an important pilgrimage town for many Hindus

¹² See map above.

¹³ The term yogi has a long history in India and traditionally referred to ascetics. The word overlaps with samnyasin (the fourth life stage of a Hindu), a wandering ascetic. This meaning still applies, yet in the 19th and 20th centuries, yogi was also used to denote a variation of ascetics, magicians, and street performers. Singleton points out that the word often was associated with criminals, and came to symbolize what many middle-class urban Hindus claimed to be wrong with certain tributaries of the Hindu religion (Singleton 2010:4). Today many use the term to refer to those who “do yoga” and the term has a wide range of meanings. Yoga Alliance, as an example – a large American based yoga organization established in the 20th century (discussed below), self-proclaim to be founded by “American yogis” (Yoga Alliance 2017b). The term is also popularly used in brandings such the “Yogi Tea Organic Herbs” promoted by health stores in Scandinavia. For accounts on how yogis are accepted as the religious image of the Hinduism in the West, See Singleton (2010:69). For more on the term yogi, see e.g. Jacobsen 2011 (262-264). For a discussion about yoga practice vs. yogi practices, see e.g. (White 2010:17).

¹⁴ According to Witzel *Vashistha* was a Rishi and poet possibly from Iran, and he is mentioned in the Rigveda (Witzel 2005:70, 89). Vyasa, the compiler, is according to Jacobsen, a legendary figure to many Hindus. He is considered the who wrote the Mahabharata, compiled both the Vedas and the Puranas, as well as verses of law and legal procedure, and he is said to have written the commentary to the *YS Samkhyapracana* (Rocher 2005:109, Jacobsen 55,188).

with its many popular Shiva temples and numerous grand festivals and celebrations of characters from Hindu mythology, and many Hindus come here from near and far to take purifying baths in the holy river, or to worship the goddess Ganga (often known as Mother Ganga) at one of the evening Arti ceremonies.¹⁵ The mythology tells tales of how goddess Ganga (personification of the Ganges) attempted to flood the earth, but that the mighty Shiva tied her to the locks of his hair and released her in seven streams.¹⁶ On one of the hills above Rishikesh we find Shri Neelkanth Mahadev Temple, which is said to be the place where Lord Shiva drank the poison halahal and his turned blue.¹⁷ Neelknath is a famous pilgrimage destination and it is surrounded by temples dedicated to Shiva's life guards. On another hill, we find Kunjapuri Devi Temple which is arguably equally famous for its spectacular sunrises, and its dedication to the goddess Sati (the wife of lord Shiva, before she took birth as Goddess Paarvati). Jacobsen notes that Shiva is the great yogi and that he has been the most important god for yogis the past 2000 years (2010:61). Rishikesh is built around the riverbanks of the Ganges and most of the ashrams and yoga schools are located some kilometers upstream from Rishikesh town itself; in areas named Tapovan, Laxman Jhula, and Ram Jhula; jhula means bridge. The two latter are named after the two mythological important bridges and iconic landmarks crossing the Ganges and connecting the riverbanks. By the bridges one can see many Indians kneeling, bowing their head to the ground before and after crossing. In the myths, says Strauss, Laxman (brother of Rama) built Laxman Jhula with jute ropes, and Ram Jhula, with its mythological name connects some of the major ashrams in Rishikesh (Strauss 2005:24).¹⁸ In addition, Rishikesh has been and still is the embarkation point for the four holy, popular pilgrimage destinations of the Garhwal district, the mountain region of Uttarakhand: Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri –the glacier from which the Ganges derive, and Yamunotri (ibid:26). Strauss suggests two possible reasons for the name 'Rishikesh': First, one of many names for the Hindu god Vishnu

¹⁵ Arti is a Hindu ritual of worship, a part of puja, in which light from wicks soaked in ghee (clarified butter) or camphor is offered to one or more deities. Aartis also refer to the songs sung in praise of the deity, when lamps are being offered.

¹⁶ Shiva is often depicted with Ganges streaming out of his hair.

¹⁷ Shiva is also known under the name of Neelkanth – the blue throated one.

¹⁸ Next to Krsishna, Rama is the most widely worshipped of the avataras of Vishnu (Brockington 2005: 121).

is 'Hrishikesh' and second, that it might simply be due to the many rishis (sages and seers) and yogis who has populated the banks of the Ganges here for so long (ibid: 25).¹⁹

Approximately 25 km downstream from Rishikesh lies the ancient pilgrimage town of Hardwar, which is regarded one of the most holy Hindu places, and where millions of pilgrims, devotees, and tourists congregate during the Hardwar Kumbh Mela every twelve years; a festival centered around ancient mythology about amrita – the drink of immortality. Hardwar is also the primary center of the Kanwar pilgrimage, in which millions of participants gather sacred water from the Ganga and carry it across hundreds of miles to dispense as offerings in Shiva shrines, including the Neelkanth temple referred to above. Scholar of religion James Lochtefeld also emphasizes the broad importance of the purifying power of the Ganga for the Hardwar locale (Lochtefeld 2010: 41). Lochtefeld, specialized in Hindu pilgrimage, notes that Hardwar is perhaps no longer a place best described as a site of religious pilgrimage in a traditional sense, and he observes that “although most Hardwar visitors have some sort of religious feeling, this does not exhaust their possible motives [for visiting the town]” (Lochtefeld 2010: 226). A journey to Hardwar (and Uttarakhand), he says, is not understood by all as a pilgrimage—for many it is a tour, a vacation, or an adventure trek. Further Lochtefeld points to how changes of political and economic climate (such as the arrival of the railway) transformed Hardwar from a seasonally important market center to a site of year-round importance, and he notes that tourism changes the region. As examples he points to controversies over new headworks for the Upper Ganges Canal (Lochtefeld 2010:88) and he observes that the city has become a focal point for Hindu nationalist movements.²⁰

Strauss asserts that Rishikesh had a marginalized status until the latter part of the 19th century due to the threat of illness and wild animals (ibid:26), and that the first large ashram to be situated in the town, Kailash ashram, was established in 1880. Prior to that time, she continues, we hear only of the existence of individual seekers and small groups of disciples who congregated on the banks of the Ganges, and of pilgrims who stopped by on their way to the high shrines (ibid:27). During the 1970's and 80's recreational tourism increased in India and Rishikesh has seen enormous

¹⁹ Rishis are the poets of the hymns of the Rigveda, and they are said to have been active poets, not merely hearers of the Vedas (Witzel 2009:703).

²⁰ Hardwar is also spelled Haridwar.

construction the last two decades. In *All India Travel Companion* (1990), Sangi claims that by 1990, half of the foreign tourists coming to India stopped by Rishikesh (Sangi 1990:488). Although that number is arguable, it demonstrates large traffic of tourists to town. Strauss argues that Sivananda Yoga, with its origins in Rishikesh, is one of the most important streams in the transnational distribution of yoga. In the 60's Rishikesh gained popular spiritual-touristic attention, especially after 1968 when the Beatles went there to study at the ashram of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Scholar of religion Mark Singleton states that the pop-band's visit to the town largely encouraged the attention toward the search of alternative lifestyles, practices, and philosophies (2010:20). In addition, Jain suggests that it was Sivananda's appeal to disciples from all over the world that made Rishikesh to a "major hub" for postural yoga practice (Jain 2015:40).²¹

Today there are around 200 yoga schools and ashrams in Rishikesh offering classes and courses, including yoga teacher training courses (TTC) recognized by an American organization called Yoga Alliance.²² I have found above 200 yoga schools online and visited ashrams and yoga schools in Rishikesh who do not have online registration.²³ I have not been able to retrieve any exact numbers over how many yoga teachers each of the yoga schools in Rishikesh certified annually, yet, for the purpose of perspective, I will introduce an estimated calculation: The 25 highest ranked yoga schools on bookyogaretreats.com (they present a list of a total of 189 yoga schools) offer on average eight to nine teacher training courses each year with space for an average of 15-30 students in every batch. We must take in to account that classes might not be full during low season (October – December), yet, based on online reviews and what I picked up in the field, classes are often overfilled in high season (February – July). If we allow ourselves to assume that the schools certify and hand out a diploma to around 75 per cent of their participants, out of which possibly 30 – 40 per cent proclaim themselves yoga teachers afterwards, each school on average certify about 60 yoga teachers every year. In total, we might then be looking at 15 000 yoga teachers

²¹ Swami Sivananda (1887 – 1963) was the founder of Divine Life Society in 1936, see chapter 2. For more on Sivananda Yoga, see chapter 2.

²² For more on YA, see chapter 2.4.

²³ For examples of listed schools, see Appendix B.

certified from Rishikesh each year. This number is, I must emphasize, a mere estimation and it might be lower.²⁴

Scholar of religion Alex Norman conducted a field research in Rishikesh prior to the publication of his book *Spiritual Tourism* (2011) and he calls Rishikesh a “supermarket for spiritual shopping” (Norman 2011:142). He points out that India offers a rich variety of traditions and experiences for the spiritual tourist, emphasizes that Rishikesh is a standout example, and he names the town “an international center for yoga teaching and learning (ibid:156). I must agree with Norman when he claims that upon arrival in Rishikesh, it is clear that yoga, meditation, and spiritual/philosophical lectures are the central attractions (Norman 2011:27). The cultural scene in Rishikesh constitutes a big melting pot of young and old, old and new. We can find centers ranging from isolated ashrams allowing entrance only by Brahmin men competent in the Sanskrit language, to fitness studios run by fit ponytailed eccentric characters from abroad, dressed in spandex and advertising mindfulness for the urban international spiritual seeker.²⁵ Hence the town fits its nickname “spiritual market place” (ibid:27, Strauss 2005:25). Rishikesh is also said by many to be the birthplace of yoga, a nickname retrieved from commercial online advertisements.²⁶

Norman reports that many of his informants during his field research indicated that they came to Rishikesh to go to the source or origins of spiritual practice (2011:33). He addresses a question that many might ask: Why go to Rishikesh when most, if not all, the practices that are offered there are available at home (ibid:139)? From his interviews with the spiritual tourists²⁷, he notes that many reports that yoga “at home” might be mundane or even part of routine, but that yoga in Rishikesh is purposeful and filled with meaning (ibid:45). During my stay in Rishikesh I addressed many fellow yoga practitioners with the same question. “What was your purpose for coming to Rishikesh?” Much like Norman reports, the replies often resembled the notion of seeking the source or origins of spiritual practice and yoga. Surprisingly I found that most people I spoke with

²⁴ For a picture of my own diploma, see bottom of this document.

²⁵ For an excellent depiction of Rishikesh, see Norman 2011, chapter 2.

²⁶ See also e.g. Kaur (2016), Main (2017).

²⁷ Defined as “[...] a tourist who undertakes a spiritual practice or seeks spiritual progression in the course of their travels, usually with the intention of gaining spiritual benefits” (Norman 2011:17).

agreed that an Indian teaching yoga in Rishikesh is more ‘authentic’ and ‘real’ than a foreigner doing the same thing, despite situations where the Indian is a less experienced teacher.

During my field research in Rishikesh I attended asana classes (postural yoga classes) in 31 schools and ashrams. A typical class lasts for one to two hours and starts with a session of relaxation, presence-awareness, prayers, or mantras. The class continues with asana practice according to the style of the teacher, and finishes with savasana and prayers or mantras in the end.²⁸ The teachers often perform their own rituals before pictures of the gods, and there is often a solemn atmosphere in the room or on the rooftop by the time the class starts. It is notable that besides from these presumably sacred rituals, a yoga class in Rishikesh does not differ much from yoga classes I know from the U.S or Europe. In a class I attended in Rishikesh, an American girl in the back of the room raised her voice enquiring about the mantras and prayers recited before and after each class. She wanted to know if that *really* was necessary. Before the teacher had time to reply, she was crossly interrupted by another American girl in the front of the room: “Because we’re in *India*, ok? *That’s* like the real yoga, ok?” As noted in the preface, it is a common practice for yoga teachers in the US. and in Europe to either recite the mantra “om”, and/or to put their palms together in front of their chest, bow down deep and say “namaste” before and after class. It is clear that the notion of referring to something greater, ancient roots, something verified by tradition, is of great significance to a great number of yoga practitioners.²⁹ The transnational interest in the non-academic and the academic and debate on yoga, as presented in chapter two, I argue, is due precisely to this fusion of modern expressions of yoga through secular physical exercise, and the widespread references to what might convince practitioners that they are part of something perceived as authentic or spiritual. The value of the actual content in the teachings seemed to fall in the shade of the value of legitimization by tradition. Alver (et.al.) points out that religion today belong to the consumer culture where the symbol-characteristics and the communication aspects of goods are as important as, if not more important, than their value (Alver et.al. 1999:14).

²⁸ For “styles of yoga”, see chapter 2. Mantras are recited sacred sounds used in rituals, meditation, and yoga.

²⁹ Cf. discussion about legitimization of tradition above.

Chapter 2 – Background

Contextualizing a global phenomenon through historical development

The study of yoga is a huge academic field and it stretches beyond the boundaries of this study.³⁰ I will, never the less, offer a brief historical outline to contextualize those topics that appear with frequency during the interviews upon which the analysis of this project is based. Today, yoga is viewed by many as a workout routine, yet the term is also found in ancient Indian scriptures and it denotes a variety of ambiguous meanings. The term yoga is deeply dependent on the context in which it is being used, and scholar of religion David Gordon White claims that the term yoga is so malleable that it has been possible to morph it into almost any practice or process one desires or chooses (2012:4). Yoga has become part of a large global enterprise, undergone scientific research in mental and physical health, and has been subject to both theological, political, archeological, and philological debate. Section one in this chapter discusses the terms authentic, ancient, and original looking at how referrals to ancient tradition often is used to legitimize contemporary practices. Section two introduces a brief introduction to the complexity of the historical development of yoga from premodern times until the 20th century, including a brief examination of how yoga appear in ancient religious and philosophical texts. Furthermore, the section provide references for readers wishing to learn more about the presented topics. Section three outlines the historical development of modern and postural yoga, and section four introduces some modern guru organizations who promotes yoga internationally today.

³⁰ Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism has no less than four chapters dedicated to the topic (Jacobsen 2011).

2.1 Authentic, Ancient, and Original

I have highlighted that numerous yoga schools in Rishikesh claims to be teaching either ancient, original, true, pure, ancient, or authentic yoga. The aim of this study is not to delineate or define authentic yoga, but to open for the respondents to explain how *they* define or delineate it in the scope of a modern global landscape. We have established that whatever underlying reason for the use of words like authentic in the marketing campaign of a yoga school, such rhetoric appeals to some global consumers and it results in an increased interest to the yoga schools. The founders of yoga schools who participated in this project were all Hindu, and we will see in chapter four that to them, yoga is part of everyday religious practice, not an isolated phenomenon. We will therefore get back to this current discussion as we analyze the respondents' references to traditions of the past. Authentic, ancient and original are loaded terms, and to examine why the use of such rhetoric seems so successful in the marketing campaign of the schools, we will discuss underlying assumptions with these terms; terms that are often used to legitimize new or re-defined religious traditions.³¹

Scholar of religion James R. Lewis suggests that there is prestige given to origins in almost all societies (Lewis 2003:142). Scholar of religion Siv E. Kraft writes in a Norwegian journal that one common criteria for a “real religion” is that it cannot be new (Kraft 2008:124-125). Kraft's argument resembles the attitude of the participants in Norman's field research in Rishikesh who are seeking to “get back to the roots”, and who perceive their yoga practice to be more meaningful in Rishikesh. Scholar of cultural science Torunn Selberg points out that referrals to past and tradition legitimize and authenticities ideologies and cultural identities in the present, and when ideas and practices are connected to something from the past, they gain authority (Selberg 2011:140). Anthropologist Thomas H. Eriksen argues that *the past* is ambiguous. He explains that it is described in selective and subjective ways, often reformulated or manipulated, and that that descriptions of the past might as well refer to problems of the present (Eriksen 1996:13). As the target group of the yoga schools I visited in Rishikesh include non-Hindus and international spiritual seekers, we will shed light on the new religious movements (NRM) that grew out of the late 19th, and the 20th century, and is still being shaped in 21st century. This is another large

³¹ See e.g. Lewis (2003) or Selberg (2011).

academic field and this study makes no claim to define characteristics of this movement.³² What is interesting to note in this context, however, is that many NRM builds upon ideas deriving from Asian traditions. Lewis and scholar of religion Gordon Melton argue that Asian philosophies and religions were made to reflect counter cultural, and later New Age ideas in the West in the 1970's and 80's (Lewis and Melton 93:56). Scholar of religion Olav Hammer points out that terms from a generalized Hinduism such as prana (breath), karma, chakra, aura, meditation, Ayurveda, and various yogic methods reappear with considerable frequency in in the New Age literature (Hammer 2001:128-129). Selberg emphasize that interests for the past in legitimation of cultural heritage, has been given increased attention and that stories including the past, contributes to create resonance to and give authority to modern spiritual ideas and practices (Selberg 2011:129). Hammer also interestingly suggests that individualism has led to an increasing reliance on personal experience as a source of legitimacy (Hammer 2001). Geographical areas might also serve as authoritative symbols for religious traditions. Hammer points to how successive stages of emic historiography are intimately linked with geographical locations at which "various events in the spiritual evolution of mankind are purported to have taken place" (Hammer 2001:89). He also notes that emic historiography contrasts sharply with etic history (ibid:91). We can see a direct correlation with these theories and a possible explanation for the success with appeal to ancient tradition. I here refer to success in the form of large numbers of annual visitors.

In the light of this, Selberg and folklore scholar Anne Eriksen raises an interesting question; is tradition a cultural heritage, or is it created in the present through a process of humans creating correlations between present and past? The former suggests, according to Selberg, a naturalistic perspective that sees tradition as a trait or feature of things and processes. The latter holds a perspective of tradition as a discursive term concerning legitimizing and creation of meaning. Understood in this way, Selberg says, tradition is meaningful both in creation and preservation of cultural identity, social control, and as an argument for certain actions (Eriksen and Selberg 2006:256). We will see that the participants hold a naturalistic perspective in the sense that they

³² Insiders in NRM often do not consider themselves as part of any umbrella definition such as New Age or New Religion. As this is a religious phenomenon still in the making, the research on this field is diversified. In this study the term New Religious Movements (NRM) are used to denote religious movements, often counter cultural, that started taking shape from the late 19th century onward – including denominations of established religions such as ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) and Mormonism, as well as New Age religions. For definitions, discussions and delineations, see e.g. Barker and Warburg (1998), Chrystides (2001), Gilhus and Mikaelsson (2007), Heelas (1996), Lewis (2003), or Wittgenstein (1953)

emphasize cultural heritage, national identity, and family lineages. Yet tradition becomes a discursive term when the participants use words such as traditional to emphasize cultural identity in their marketing campaigns.

Jain points to how “postural yoga giants” like B. K. S Iyengar and Pattabhi Jois serve as examples of how branding and mythologizing go hand in hand. She notes that both mythologize their systems of postural yoga in ways that tie those systems to ancient yoga traditions while simultaneously reflecting dominant cultural ideals and values by “claiming biomedical authority” (Jain 2015: 114). Quotes referring both to modern science and authentic values are typical advertisement for yoga schools in Rishikesh who specializes in postural yoga practices, an expression of yoga that only started in the second half of the 20th century.³³ Recalling the dominant academic discourse suggesting a that we might study premodern and modern yoga as expressions of separate traditions, we shall repeat that this study does not aim to determine whether or not there is such a thing as “authentic yoga”, or to define what that would be. This study rather aims to examine how the respondents themselves define authentic yoga.

2.2 Delineating Yoga – Historical Overview

Knowledge about the historical development of yoga is key to an understanding of the development of modern and postural yoga as postural yoga systems, including Ashtanga Vinyasa, must be seen as a continuation and/or reanimation of earlier expressions of yoga.³⁴ Yet, rather than providing a complete historical overview on yoga here, which arguably reaches far beyond the boundaries of a single chapter, the aim of this section is to introduce the reader to the complexity of the historical development of yoga and give an account for a small section of the large collection of literature dedicated to explain it.

The initial picture in the present work displays a figure seated in a lotus position claimed by many, amongst them archeologist and anthropologist Jonathan Kenoyer, to sit in a “yogic posture”

³³ See section 2.3

³⁴ Modern and postural yoga are contested terms that will be further explained in section 2.3.

(Kenoyer 1998).³⁵ The seal is found at the Indus River Valley archeological site of Mohenjo-Daro. In his survey of the Mohenjo-Daro site (1931), archeologist Sir John Marshall states that “it is clear that the figure on the seal is seated in a typical attitude of yoga” (Marshall 1931:52). More than seventy years later, Samuel states that all the archeological evidence from the Indus River Valley Civilization is so dependent on reading later practices into the interpretation that it is not adequate for a re-construction of the historical practice of yoga. He further argues that, though said by many to originate since the early Indus Civilization (2500 BCE) there are no certain proofs for this claim (Samuel 2008:8).³⁶

The term yoga is found in ancient Sanskrit scriptures, the oldest of which are the Vedas dated to between 1500 and 1200 BCE (Flood 1996:37). According to White and Sanskrit scholar Michael Witzel it is in the Rigveda, the oldest of the Vedas, that we find the earliest accounts of yoga (Witzel 2005:69, White 2012:3).³⁷ White notes that here, yoga meant, before all else, “the yoke one placed on a draft animal—a bullock or warhorse—to yoke it to a plow chariot”, and he further suggests a long list of applications of the term denoting an ambiguity of meanings (White 2012:3). Philologist and Sanskrit scholar James Mallinson points to an arguments claiming that yoga derives for the Sanskrit root yuj, “which has the sense of union” (Mallinson 2011:750). Jacobsen asserts that the primary meaning of yoga is effort in the shape of bodily and mental discipline to attain a difficult goal and he points out that in early Hinduism, yoga appears in union with samkhya – the philosophy of Hinduism (Jacobsen 2010:177, 184).³⁸ Scholar of religion Mircea Eliade argues that the first extant systematic account of yoga and a bridge from the earlier Vedic uses of the term is found in the Hindu Katha Upanishad dated from about the 3rd century BCE (1958:117). In this Upanishad, Jacobsen writes, the term yoga is used to describe meditation (2010:186). The Upanishads (the oldest perhaps composed around 600 BCE) are Sanskrit texts that make up the last part of the Vedas, they are also called Vedanta, and they are the last category of Vedic text

³⁵ See examples Singleton (2010), De Michelis (2005), Samuel (2008)

³⁶ See also for example White (2009:49) and Jain (2015:4)

³⁷ For further accounts on the Vedas and yoga in the Vedas, see e.g.: Brockington (2005), Bronkhorst (2007), Eliade (1958), Jacobsen (2004, 2005, 2010, 2011), Rocher (2005), Witzel (2005).

³⁸ For differences and similarities between samkhya and yoga, see e.g. Jacobsen 2011 and Malinar (2012a:41-48). Definitions of the primary goal of yoga different to this one, as presented by Jacobsen, are available in large numbers. Scholar of religion Robin Rinehart, e.g. suggests that “yoga in its original sense is a spiritual practice whose primary goal self-knowledge” (Rinehart 2004:21).

accepted as revealed. There is also a large number of yoga-Upanishads (dated more than 1000 years later).³⁹ Jacobsen points out that forms of meditation associated with yoga became important in the Upanishads and he further emphasize three main topics in the Upanishads, the third being the development of a term denoting the self (atman) tied to meditation and yoga (Jacobsen 2010:45,64,72,74).⁴⁰ Jacobsen explains that no religion has a larger collection of sacred texts than Hinduism (2010:44). In the centuries to come, references to yoga with a variety of meanings and goals are found in a wide selection of these religious texts, and the collection of literature presenting research on yoga in these, is encompassing. In the book *Immortality and Freedom*, Eliade (1907 – 1986) suggests that...

... Yoga was embraced by every one of India's religious movements, whether Hindu or "Heretical"; and because it absorbed into itself every sort of spiritual and mystical technique, it could not but be studied in its multiple forms, embedded in the vast compass of Indian religions (1958:359).⁴¹

As noted, this section aims to provide only an introduction to the complexity of the historical development of yoga, and this quote by Eliade illustrate a beginning of what White calls "an explosion of yoga studies" (White 2009b:xxv) including accounts for yoga in a in a large collection of various philosophical and religious texts from Hinduism as well as Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism.⁴² Jain suggests that by the end of the first millennium CE. yoga systems were widespread in South Asia, prescribed both by Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist textual traditions. She notes that by the 12th century, we even find the term yoga imbedded in Sufi mystical thought and practice, concluding that yoga was culturally South Asian, but did not belong to any single

³⁹ Witzel states that there is no absolute dating of Vedic texts, but that it is known from internal evidence that they were orally composed in Northern and Eastern India between ca. 1500 BCE and ca. 500 – 400 BCE. He points out how they've been transmitted orally and further states that the Vedas were written down only during the early second millennium CE. (Witzel 2005:69). This dating of the Yoga Upanishads is based on Ruff (2012:97).

⁴⁰ Various theories on the historical development of yoga circulates in academic circles. For instance, White (2012) provide an overview of the term yoga found in the Katha Upanishad. He asserts that that there are some characteristics of yoga that prevails across systems and that these "core principles of yoga" were more or less in place around the 5th century (2012:10) He suggests that in the Katha Upanishad, there are four sets of concepts and practices that "form the core and foundational vocabulary of nearly every yoga tradition, school, or system, with all that follows as simply variations and expansions on this common core" (ibid:10).

⁴¹ White calls Eliade's work a "kaleidoscopic survey of yoga traditions" as it both included abstract yoga theory and concrete yoga practice, and argues that it is "the first truly mature and comprehensive study of yoga ever written". White also argues that with this book, Eliade set the agenda for the next 50 years of yoga research (2009b:xxv).

⁴² White (e.g.) claims that The Yogacara ("Yoga Practice") school of Mahayana Buddhism was the earliest tradition to employ the term yoga to denote its philosophical system (White 2012:5).

religious tradition (Jain 2015:18).⁴³ Both Jain and Samuel further points out that there was likely a tradition for exchange of religious and philosophical ideas between South Asian traditions, thus the traditions were constantly changing, and developments in the different traditions were closely entwined with each other (Samuel 2008:179, Jain 2015:13). This illustrates how we will never have an exact account for how expressions of yoga were in premodern times. To highlight this, Jacobsen emphasizes how yoga, in early times, was an oral tradition, that words were holy, not books, and that learning from books were frowned upon in Hinduism (Jacobsen 2004:20). Jain emphasizes that it therefore is likely that locally constituted yoga traditions were distinct from the textual ones (Jain 2015:5).

Already from premodern times, we can see that delineating yoga is no easy task and this study will make no attempt to do so. As this study focuses on accounts on yoga given by Hindu yoga teachers in Rishikesh, we shall continue with a focus on yoga in Hinduism and to account for expressions of yoga in modern times. Jacobsen asserts that since medieval times, the Hindu systems of religious thought have been classified into six schools (*sad-darsana*), yoga being one of them (Jacobsen 2012:459). He writes in his book *Hinduismen* (2010) that there are five meanings of the term yoga that can be distinguished. 1) As a disciplined way to reach a goal. 2) As a technique to control body and mind. 3) As a name for the philosophical systems found in religious texts. 4) Yoga in combination with other words such as *hatha* – (force), *mantra* – (sound), and *laya* – (resolution), referring to traditions that have specialized in special yoga techniques, and 5) yoga as a goal for yoga practice (:185).

⁴³ There is a large collection of literature on topics regarding emergence of yoga systems in various traditions. Examples for authoritative texts on the history on yoga, including yoga in the Upanishads, yoga in the Mahabharata, BhG, yoga in the Tantras, YS, various goals yoga practices: Alter (2012), Brockington (2005:125-126), Buhemann 2007, Eliade (1958), Flood (2005), Jacobsen (2005, 2010, 2011), Jain (2015), Larson (2012), Maas (2006), Malinar (2012b), Rocher (2005), Samuel (2008), Singleton (2010), White (2010), Witzel (2005). Especially Eliade and White focus less on the yoga philosophy and more on how the term was employed in the Upanishads, with a focus on supernatural powers, concepts of death, realization of the Brahman (the ultimate reality, supreme principle. Sometimes the premodern systems are fluid and Jacobsen emphasize that the word *tapas* (austerity) and the word *yoga* was used to denote the same meaning in premodern systems. Brockington points to how *Samkhya* (philosophical system) and *yoga* are juxtaposed in some traditions (2005:125) and Jacobsen also points to how *yoga* appear in early Hinduism associated with *Samkhya* (2010:186). All these examples, which are only few for the purpose of illustration, shows how the earliest scriptures to which we can turn to search for the original meaning of *yoga* is ambiguous. This again all illustrate how a unanimous definition of *yoga* is hard to come by and how *yoga* is deeply dependent on the context in which it appears.

The most widely cited textual sources on yoga are, according to White, the Bhagavad Gita (BhG) dated between the 5th and the 2nd century BCE, and the Yoga Sutras (YS) by Patanjali dated to around year 400 CE. (White 2012:3). The BhG constitutes chapters 23-40 in book six in the Mahabharata – a great Indian epic telling a story about the Pandava brothers and their fight for their kingdom (Jacobsen 2010:46). Jacobsen explain that the BhG sums up and synthesizes religious thoughts which had emerged through the ascetic’s critique of the Vedic sacrifice and their own revaluation of recognition and asceticism as ways to salvation. BhG introduce three alternative ways to salvation. As explained by Jacobsen, those are Jnanayoga (knowledge/wisdom), understood as recognition of the self as passive and separated from the body, the sense organs, and the mental organs, and cessation of all activities. Karmayoga (action) is a method for salvation characterized by participation in mundane worldly activities without interests for the fruit of the actions. The basis for karma yoga is to recognize that actions do not affect the soul, they belong to the world of matter; one should act, yet remain unaffected by those acts. Bhaktiyoga (worship/devotion) refers to discipline of worship which means to always turn one’s intentions towards god (brahman), and perform all actions for god or with god in mind. In bhaktiyoga in BhG liberation means devotion and union with a personal god (Jacobsen 2010:88-91). Scholar of religion John Brockington explain that all the yoga passages in the BhG have a strong emphasis on discipline and control of the senses, and on how the supernatural powers to which they lead should be avoided by the “true yogin”, for the proper goal is the attainment of Brahman or union with the one (Brockington 2005: 126).⁴⁴ The importance of the term yoga in the BhG is illustrated by how each chapter in the text ends by saying: “Thus, in the Upanishad sung by the Lord, the Science of Brahma, the scripture of yoga, the dialogue between Śhrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna ends [...]” (Hari 2015).

We shall see that, in addition to the Rigveda, the YS is the text which is the center of attention for the participants in this study, and they often refer to the YS as being the original source of yoga, and that whatever is written there is known as the “authentic yoga”. White states that the YS is a tightly ordered series of aphorisms so remarkable and comprehensive for its time that it is often

⁴⁴ The BhG has status as a text of its own, it is an important Hindu text, and in modern times, pleas have been made seeking to declare BhG as a national text suggesting it should hold significant value in matters of court. This was declined by the Supreme Court and established under the Indian Oaths Act of 1873 – Law commission report: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/91092388/>

referred to as “classical yoga”, also known as patanjala yoga, in recognition of its putative compiler, Patanjali (White 2012:5).⁴⁵ Jacobsen emphasizes that sutra-texts are mostly incomprehensible without explanatory texts to go along with them (Jacobsen 2010:174), something which suggests that references to the YS by the respondents are based on interpretations of the text, rather than the text itself. Jain argues that “evidence does not suggest that the YS consistently functioned as the primary source on yoga in South Asia [...]” (Jain 2015:12). Jacobsen further notes that there are many yoga traditions in Hinduism, all based on their own texts, yet the YS, closely associated with Samkhya, has received high prestige as the founding text of yoga generally (ibid:184, 188).⁴⁶ Hence YS was also adopted by yoga schools with other visions of the utmost reality than Samkhya and what the YS stand for. White suggests that the principal commentators of the YS first and foremost were philosophers rather than practitioners of yoga” (2012:5). As the founders of yoga schools promoting postural yoga forwards the YS as an important yoga-text, it is interesting to note that the YS does not explain postural practice. White discuss the YS and the BhG emphasizing that each devotes a total of fewer than ten verses to the practices of postures and breath control and are both far more concerned with the issue of human salvation, realized through the theory and practice of meditation (dhyana) in the YS, and through concentration on the god Krishna in the BhG (White 2010:3). Singleton notes that, despite the scarcity of information regarding asanas in the YS themselves, and in the traditional commentaries, the text is routinely invoked as “the source and authority of modern postural yoga practice” (Singleton 2010:27).

An incident mentioned by most books accounting for the historical development of Hinduism or yoga is Swami Vivekananda’s (1863 – 1902) famous speech at the parliament of the World’s Religions at the Chicago World’s fair in 1893. Strauss argues that it was after this that we saw a “shift in the orientation of yoga” that shifted the focus of yoga towards the promotion of two specific values of the modern world: health and freedom. She argues that “The presentation of yoga in the Western context was seen as a way to reconnect with the spiritual world, reduce stress and regain health and freedom – all without having to lose the productive capitalist base upon which Americans and Europeans had staked their futures” (Strauss 2005:5,6). “The flexibility of

⁴⁵ A brief account for the YS is given here, yet for a more thorough explanation, see e.g. Larson 2012 or Jacobsen (2011:745-742).

⁴⁶ In learned circles, YS is read together with its commentary *Samkhyapravacana* (Jacobsen 2010:188).

the yoga philosophy itself”, Strauss continues, “allowed Vivekananda to turn one simplified set of ideas and practices to two very different ends: the spiritual awaking of the Western public, and the spiritual rejuvenation of the Indian people” (ibid:7). Vivekananda was asked to lecture on the YS, a text he, according to Jacobsen (2017), did not have extensive knowledge about. White even goes as far as claiming that Vivekananda was a dilettante on the subject of yoga (2009:46). Jacobsen states that the YS had been of less importance for hundreds of years and only regained popularity in Bengal in the 19th century, promoted as a yoga philosophy (Jacobsen 2017). The YS was brought to global attention through Vivekananda’s book *Raja Yoga* (1896), that, according to Jacobsen (2017), became a best-seller. Jain asserts that “guru Vivekananda was responsible for systematizing and globally diffusing a narrow and modern version of yoga” (Jain 2015:31). De Michelis suggests that Vivekananda was the creator of modern yoga and that *Raja Yoga* form the core elements of “modern yoga” (De Michelis 2005:1-9). According to her, Raja yoga came to be identified as classical yoga by equating it with a narrow philosophical and meditational tradition based on a selective reading of the YS (De Michelis 2005:178). Strauss claims that what Vivekananda did, was to crystalize many different philosophical paths from hundreds of years of textual traditions into four key categories that could be offered to a public eager for practical instruction in spiritual progress (Strauss 2005:10). These categories (further popularized by Sivananda), were raja yoga (typically associated with Patanjali), karma yoga, bhakti yoga, and janana yoga; We recognize the three latter from the three ways to salvation in the BhG presented above.⁴⁷ Strauss asserts that the particular combination used by Vivekananda in his presentation of yoga reflects an eclectic mix of various traditional Hindu texts ranging from the BhG to Tantrism and Buddhism, from Advaita Vedanta to the more dualistic “classical yoga of Patanjali”, as well as ideas about rationality, charity, equality, and individualism (ibid:10). Vivekananda discouraged and opposed hatha yoga and asana practice, which is ironic if we consider him partly responsible for the modern yoga, which today, indeed, often is associated solely with asana practice. Singleton points out how Vivekananda and other modern yoga reformers such as Mme. Helena P. Blavatsky and the theosophical society, sought to avoid to be associated with the yogi figures popularly pictured in twisted contortions (Singleton 2010:44).⁴⁸ Jain points out that hatha

⁴⁷ For more on these four categories, see e.g. Strauss (2005), De Michelis (2005).

⁴⁸ For more on early translations of Sanskrit texts avoiding hatha yoga practices and asana practices by authors such as e.g. S. C. Vasu, Max Müller, Richard Schmitdt, and by the theosophical society, as well as accounts for modern esotericism and occultism

yoga was dismissed as an extreme, barbaric, and antisocial practice and that British colonialists, Christian missionaries, and Indian elites who sympathized with either or both causes, thought of hatha yoga as a backward and savage religion (Jain 2015:27). It should however be emphasized that Vivekananda did not seem to have made the link between asana practice and physical culture (Singleton 2010:100); Singleton points out that Vivekananda was an ardent supporter of the Indian physical culture movement, was outspoken in his belief of the necessity of physical culture for the Indian youth, and that he had a clear message of the utmost importance of the development of bodily strength for the spiritual evolution of the modern Hindu (ibid:100). White asserts that Vivekananda's influence has had "a trickle-down effect" on yoga scholarship and ascribe this the reason for both the identification of the content of the YS as "classical yoga" and the ignorance to proportions of the YS that fall outside of the modern day common sense (White 2009: 47).⁴⁹ For instance, the contrast between raja yoga and hatha yoga, notes White, is found neither the YS, its commentaries, nor elsewhere prior to Vivekananda and he states that the term "raja yoga" does not appear prior to the advent of hatha yoga whose doctrines, according to him, was first promulgated by the founder of Nath Yogis, Goraksanata (White 2009:46).⁵⁰

Finally, a brief account will be given for hatha yoga and a text repeatedly referred to in the interviews called *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* dated to the 15th century CE (Mallinson 2011:770).⁵¹ Mallinson explains that hatha yoga is "yoga that uses the techniques of *hatha*" and is first referred to by name in Sanskrit texts dating to around the 11th century CE, yet some of its techniques can be traced back at least a thousand years earlier (Mallinson 2011:770). Further, Mallinson explains that the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* is the first text that "explicitly sets out to teach Hatha Yoga above other methods of yoga". The text became the root text of hatha yoga, says Mallinson, because "all

see e.g. De Michelis (2005), Singleton (2010 chapter 1 and 2) and White (2009:46). Singleton highlights the Theosophical Society and their constructions of yoga as profoundly influential in shaping contemporary ideas (2010:77). For more on the Theosophical Society and yoga, see e.g. Jacobsen 2011, Jain 2015, Singleton 2010, Gilhus and Mikaelsson (2007).

⁴⁹ For non-patanjala definitions of yoga (e.g. by Vasudeva) see e.g. White (2010:263).

⁵⁰ For a dichotomy between raja yoga and hatha yoga, see e.g. Singleton (2010:77). According to scholar of religion Nancy M. Martin, the Nath tradition was a strong formative influence and continues to be a part of the religious milieu of India. Nath Yogis looked back at Shiva as the quintessential yogi ascetic and practiced hatha yoga with the aim of controlling the physical body in an integration of physical and spiritual attainment (Martin 2005:185).

⁵¹ Mallinson explains that the text originally is called *Hatha Pradipika*, and it is only in secondary literature that it is called *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (Mallinson 2011:471), but as the respondents call it by the latter name, this is what I will call it in this study.

subsequent Sanskrit hatha yoga anthologies and commentaries refers to it, and, most take its definition of the practices of Hatha Yoga to be authoritative”. The text is also the first text of yoga to include asana among the techniques of hatha yoga; teaching 15 asanas. (ibid:772). Mallinson notes that by the 17th century, “hatha yoga had become an integral part of most formulations of *yoga*, including those based on Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra* [...]” (ibid:771).⁵² The content of the text is centered around religious beliefs, such as in this illustrative example from chapter one, first line: “Salutation to Adinatha (Siva) who expounded the knowledge of Hatha yoga, which like a staircase leads the aspirant to the high pinnacled Raja Yoga.”

We will conclude this chapter by referring to Jain who points out that many scholars have preferred to attend to particularities of yoga traditions which vary based on the social context made up of a variety of complex ritual, religious, philosophical, and narrative traditions, suggesting that premodern yoga systems never appear out of social context. She emphasizes premodern yoga’s context sensitivity, heterogeneity, and malleability, rather than any central quality or essence presumed by some to be present across systems (Jain 2015:4).

2.3 Modern Yoga

We have now reached the beginning of the 20th century, a century during which yoga grew to become a multimillion-dollar industry attracting housewives and hipsters, old-aged and New Ager, spiritual seekers, believers, and non-believers. Today, yoga is as much a major global trend, a money-making industry, a path to self-realization, and a fitness regime as it is a religious, historical, or philosophical school of thought. Jacobsen states that yoga is one of Hinduism’s most meaningful contributions to mankind’s common religious heritage (2010:184). Yet, yoga as it is expressed today, is different from the yoga that we know from early Hindu sources. This section will now provide a brief overview of the historical development from the early history of modern transnational yoga until today.⁵³

⁵² For thorough explanations about hatha yoga, see Mallinson 2011 or e.g. Burley (2000) and Rosen (2012).

⁵³ The following overview largely relies *Yoga Body – The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (2010) where Singleton traces the emergence of postural yoga and how the physical aspect of yoga has become what many people today associate with yoga. And

In a collection of surveys from a number of authors and magazines, Singleton (2010:211) reports that, for example in the US., the number of yoga practitioners in 1994 was over six million, a number that more than doubled in ten years, and that mounted to 15 million Americans practicing yoga regularly in 2004. He also notes (based on a report by *Yoga Journal*) that while the number of people practicing yoga stabilized, the spending on classes, yoga vacations and products was almost doubled in 2008. From a regional male dominated tradition characterized by religious philosophy, deep concentration, and meditation, yoga has now also come to constitute a variety of traditions worldwide, including the secular phenomenon that has come to be known as postural yoga practice. Rather than being accessible through ascetic practices, scrutiny of ancient texts, and devotional studies under a learned master, yoga is now available in fitness centers, through various guru-organizations (discussed below), on youtube, in books suggesting fitness programs or improved lifestyle choices, and more. In December 2014, the United Nations declared the 21st of June as the International Yoga Day, a resolution proposed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and later endorsed by a record of 175 member states (United Nations 2017). In his address during the opening of the 69th session of the General Assembly, Modi said

Yoga is an invaluable gift from our ancient tradition. Yoga embodies unity of mind and body, thought and action ... a holistic approach [that] is valuable to our health and our well-being. Yoga is not just about exercise; it is a way to discover the sense of oneness with yourself, the world and the nature (United Nations 2017)

During the assembly, emphasis was put on the health benefits of yoga and member states were encouraged to help their citizens reduce physical inactivity, which, according to the World Health Organization, is among the top ten leading causes of death worldwide (ibid:2017). It was also emphasized how yoga is more than physical exercise, and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also pointed out the global benefits of Yoga in a statement suggesting that: "Yoga is a sport that can contribute to development and peace. Yoga can even help people in emergency situations to find relief from stress" (ibid:2017).

Selling Yoga – From Counter Culture to Pop Culture (2015), where Jain argues that yoga, beginning in the 19th century, was deconstructed and reconstructed both within and beyond South Asia, leading to a new transnational tradition, and that postural yoga is a product of a consumer culture in which consumers choose products and services based on individual desires and needs (:21, 108).

The fact that yoga was defined, widely accepted, as “a sport” in a UN. assembly, underlines many people’s association with yoga as physical exercise. This is, for example, underlined by the International Yoga Sports Federation (IYSF) who arrange annual yoga championships where contestants are asked to demonstrate demanding asanas. They present winners from (amongst others) Thailand, Italy, Mexico, and the US. – illustrating the wide range of participation from a variety of continents. The IYSP reports cooperation with several yoga federations around the world with the aim to make Yoga Sports an official Olympic sport (IYSF 2017). These examples illustrate the enormous attention yoga has received worldwide, also outside of academic circles as discussed above.

Again, this study does not aim to account for the full historical development of yoga, nor does it claim to provide an encompassing summary of it. The aim is rather to outline the international and interdisciplinary complexity of the historical development, a fact that these few, yet significant examples hopefully have illustrated, and in the light of which it is interesting to repeat that asana practice (i.e. postural yoga practices or hatha yoga) were highly disregarded in the early development of modern yoga.⁵⁴

Singleton (2010:80) asserts that hatha yoga and asana practice was taboo for English-speaking transnational gurus from Vivekananda onward. Jain, in her account for the historical development of modern yoga, presents what she calls a “tragic controversy” and tells the story of Ida C. Craddock (1857 – 1902) from Philadelphia (2015:22-25). In 1899 Craddock established what she called The Church of Yoga, promoting a sexual reform for married couples based on tantric components of hatha yoga based on *The Esoteric Science and Philosophy of the Tantras, Shiva, Samhita*. In 1902 she was convicted for an illegally obscene and blasphemous radical agenda in a New York court and was imprisoned for three months. When she was threatened with additional prison time by an upcoming federal trial, says Jain, Craddock took her own life in order to die a free woman. Jain argues that Craddock lived in a time where the US. was in a period of religious

⁵⁴ When referring to yoga in an international and global culture it must be noted that there seems to be limited academic scrutiny on yoga practices in contemporary Africa and the Middle East. Still, a quick google search does invite you to a large number of yoga retreats especially in Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Morocco, and Israel. One of my respondents reports that in Kenya, there are none who practices yoga except from Indian immigrants living in Indian establishments or Westerners in expensive hotels – something which might suggest a limited national yoga trend at least in Kenya. Most of the literature discussing transnational yoga that I rely on in this research refer to Europe and the US., yet Australia and Central and South American countries have also witnessed establishments of guru organizations such as the Divine Life Society and the Vedanta society.

questioning considering emergent modern historical and scientific analyses that challenged the dominant Christian orthodox ideas about the way the world was and why it was that way. She points to a Protestant Christian normative cultural and legal standard and argues that Craddock was the very antithesis to that standard. Jain suggests that Craddock's story reveals the extent to which turn-of-the-century mainstream populations feared modern yoga, especially when it emphasized various body practices. Hence modern yoga was not generally welcomed by mainstream populations, but was instead often deemed a threat to prevailing religious and social orthodoxies. Although we must keep in mind that this narrative is placed in a US. context, Jain also points to similar incidents in London.

So how did assumptions about yoga in the society change from disregarding (and even punishing those who promote) asana practice, to something that today has been declared in a UN. assembly to be a sport beneficial for the global society? Strauss argues that "yoga has moved from India to elsewhere in the world and back" (Strauss 2005:xix). In the light of that argument we must consider an emphasis made by Jain who suggests that to retain an opposition between the East and the West, or a notion of a static, isolated Indian culture or American culture, or otherwise, is unreasonable (Jain 2015:xii). She points to a common trope that the popularization of yoga in the contemporary world reflects the transplantation of a cultural ware from "the East" to "the West" and argues that such statements does not take into account that people of all religions and nations today are intertwined in many of the same cultural processes. Singleton devotes no less than five chapters to outline the development of a global physical culture and he states that postural yoga, to a large extent, came into being in the first half of the 20th century as a hybridized product of colonial India's dialogical encounter with the worldwide physical culture movement (Singleton 2010:81). He emphasizes that the first modern bodybuilding on display took place in 1893; the same day that Vivekananda came to the US., that Raja Yoga came out the very same year as the first Olympic games were held (1896), and he refers to a trend by individuals and states in the late 19th century obsessed with visions of improving collective national or racial bodies (Singleton 2010:81-84). Jacobsen (20017) explain that although Vivekananda's preaching of Hinduism and his *Raja Yoga* was a milestone in making yoga an epidemic with high status (see above), and that this lead to Indians experimenting with yoga for the sake of health – something which, Jacobsen states, was the beginning of health yoga – this was not alone the beginning of modern yoga. It was

Krishnamacharya, says Jacobsen (2017) that was the founder of modern yoga and who brought it a step further by combining postural positions inspired by hatha yoga, Swedish gymnastics founded by Per H. Ling, Danish primitive gymnastics, British military exercises, bodybuilding, Indian wrestling traditions, and perhaps other traditions. Krishnamacharya combined these postures in fitness programs making yoga a physical exercise. Hence, according to Jacobsen, it is Krishnamacharya and the Mysore school of yoga that is the foundation for postural and physical fitness yoga (see section 2.4). Singleton highlights that there is little or no evidence that asana practice (excepting certain seated postures for meditation) has ever been the primary aspect of any Indian yoga practice tradition – including the medieval body oriented hatha yoga (2010:3). De Michelis points out that in the first half of the 20th century, yoga was limited to developed urbanized areas (De Michelis 2005:4). Jain adds that, modern yoga was, until the second half of the 20th century, made up of controversial, elite, or countercultural movements opposed to prevailing religious orthodoxies (Jain 2015: 21), pointing at how yoga, in this way, went global, but did not yet represent a pop culture product, something embraced by the general populace. Singleton places utmost emphasize on simultaneous development of modern postural yoga and the global physical culture movement and lists numerous examples of early 20th century exercise regiments constituting a synthesis of physical culture and yoga, and he states:

The first decades of the 20th century, then, were a period of intense and eclectic experimentation within nationalist physical culture, with manifold techniques and systems being borrowed, adapted, and naturalized to suit India's needs. Modern asana practice emerged from this crucible as the imagined essence of Hindu physical training (Singleton 2010:109).⁵⁵

We must also make a brief mention of, to steal De Michelis' (2005) expression, "yoga in dialogue with modern science". Looking at how yogis around the world combine ideas about biology,

⁵⁵ See Singleton (2010 chapters 4-5:81-174) for a thorough examination of the development of postural yoga in dialogue with global physical culture, and more about the development of yoga in the light of these traditions as referred to by Jacobsen, as well as the YMCA. It is also notable that Singleton emphasizes the inclusion of Ling's gymnastic system (concerned with the development of the "whole person" in a way that prefigured the "mind, body, and spirit") in Indian educational institutions (:85). Singleton also here present a discussion of the possibility for these physical exercise systems to have derived from "ancient therapeutic techniques of Indian yoga" (:87-88). Another notable aspect is Singleton's discussion of physical exercises disguised under yogic training as part of a guerrilla resistance movement against the colonial power (chapter 5). For a through overview of significant characters in the development of postural yoga and hatha yoga "pioneers" such as K. V. Iyer, Sundram, Baleskar, Ramamurthy, Swami Kavalayananda, and Shri Ramakrishna, see chapter 6. Finally, it must be noted that Singleton's account for yoga and the physical culture movement also is based on a large body of academic literature dedicated to examine the topic. See also De Michelis (2005) for a thorough examination of the roots of modern yoga.

physiology, and anatomy with those of transcendence, metaphysics, and magical powers, Joseph Alter argues that yoga's transformation into a popular activity idolized for its health value, is based on modern ideas about medicine and science (Alter 2004:10). Singleton also emphasize a widespread understanding that asanas were meditative and curative in function, something which made yoga popular in circles of Nature Cure in the 1930's and 40's, and again contributed to the increased attention to yoga (Singleton 2010:86). He also points out (based on Yoga Journal) that some fourteen million Americans are recommended yoga by their therapist doctor, illustrating a late consequence of yoga's assimilation into medical science that began in the mid-19th century.⁵⁶

Reaching the conclusion of this section, we have now come to the second half of the 20th century; a period in which the diversity of world religions was brought into public consciousness and young people began to reflect more on the many opportunities for spiritual experiences. The post WWII years were characterized by economical boosts, increased travel opportunities, a break with social and religious conformity, independence movements, and counter-cultures that created increased awareness on environmentalism, civil rights, and equality in relation to gender and sexual orientation. Scholar of religion Nils G. Holm (and e.g. Hammer 2001, Lewis 2011) points out that the 1960's and 70's witnessed a rise of NRM, many with their roots in India (Holm 1998:99). Lewis and Melton states that Vivekananda's picture of Hinduism as India's spiritual gift to the material world, gradually filtered into the American culture and was thus readily available to the fifties beats, the sixties counterculture, and the New Age movement of the 1970's and 80's. They further state that "Asian philosophies and religions were made to reflect counter cultural (and, later, New Age) ideas" (Lewis and Melton 93:56). As referred to above, terminology from the Hindu religion appear with considerable frequency in in the New Age literature and Holm points out that yoga was especially under the loupe of academic research on sociology of religion in the context of NRM (Holm 1998:99). Increased opportunities for higher education provided a young population with intellectual insights to other cultures (Oliver 2014:130) and scholar of religion

⁵⁶ On accounts for yoga and modern medicine and science, see e.g.: Alter (2004), De Michelis (2005, chapter 6), Hammer (2001 :201-330), Jain (2015), Singleton (2010, chapter 6). For accounts of naturalistic wellbeing, see e.g. Oliver (2014:117-128), for accounts for some of the ways science is invoked in spiritual contexts in India, and accounts for how e.g. Osho, a controversial guru who gained wide international following when he amalgamated Eastern religion with Western psychoanalysis and sexual freedom, see e.g. Frøystad (2011). For research on yoga and cognitive science, see e.g. Goldberg (2005). For Iyengar and his "biomedical dialect", see e.g. Jain (2015:83). These are only sections of the academic literature examining the modernization of yoga.

Paul Oliver suggests that the 1960's saw a gradual change from an emphasis on religious teaching to an emphasis upon religious experience (ibid:131). Oliver speculates that:

There are no key beliefs to which all Hindus are expected to adhere, and no absolute moral principles by which Hindus are expected to live. This provided the counter-culture with a spiritual system which was very liberal, and gave its adherents considerable freedom to search for their own spiritual pathway through life (2014:53).

Vivekananda's (and other modern gurus') preaching about world peace and universal brotherhood, as well as central characters like Mahatma Gandhi and promotion of non-violence contributed to change in the global landscape that had seen two world wars, the rise of nuclear power, the Vietnam war, and a wave of independence movements on the African continent (to mention a few). One notable incident was that constrictions of emigration from Asia to the US. were removed by the 1965 Immigration Nationality Act and from the 60's we see many cases of gurus (teachers) traveling internationally to establish guru organizations and of young people traveling to Asia in search of a guru (or spiritual teacher).⁵⁷ It is in this period that we see the rise of an association with yoga as a postural physical exercise. Jain argues that three developments enabled the global popularization of postural yoga, the first being "the new freedom of physical mobility (2015:43). Second, she points to the widespread disillusionment with established religious institutions where "new gurus or *godmen* broke into the competitive spiritual market", and third, she highlights how postural yoga increasingly intersected with the emergent global consumer culture. Jain further emphasizes that the history of modern yoga is in stark contrast to the yoga we see from the 1960's onward, illustrating this by referring, amongst other things, to the American Jew Richard Hittleman and his TV program called *Yoga for Health* that brought the awareness of yoga into many households and invited practitioners to exercise with him from their homes (2015:42, Oliver

⁵⁷ Modern gurus are briefly discussed in section 2.4. See also e.g. Lucia (2014) and Singleton and Goldberg (2014) for a thorough overview on modern guru organizations. It should be noted that there are many aspects with modern guru organizations that are left out of this project. E.g. Baba Ramdev is a famous figure in India today who combines his ideologies and yoga philosophy with politics, and he has participated in public demonstrations against government corruption, as well as created his own brand selling "made-in-India-products" only.

2014:136). By 1960, says Jain, postural yoga was a product that people across the world were choosing as part of their everyday body maintenance regimens (:68).⁵⁸

2.4 Postural Yoga and Popular Yoga Systems

Modern guru organizations and modern postural yoga systems have been frequently referred to in this study with front figures such as Krishnamacharya, B. K. S. Iyengar, Pattabhi Jois, and Sivananda. The following section will briefly account for some of these yoga systems as we do encounter them in the interviews, as well as the fact that the schools I visited promotes some of these systems. Krishnamacharya, as referred to as the founder of modern yoga by Jacobsen (2017), was a modern guru who, during the period from 1930 to 1950, elaborated a yoga system whose central component was a rigorous series of asanas supposedly based on a system learned from the Himalayan guru Eammohan Bramacri on the basis of a five-thousand-year-old text by Vamana Rishi called *Yoga Kurunta*.⁵⁹ Krishnamacharya worked under the personal direction of the Maharaja (ruler of the kingdom of Mysore) and was entrusted with the task of popularizing the practice of yoga. The Ashtanga Vinyasa system of Pattabhi Jois and the hatha yoga system of B. K. S. Iyengar are direct developments of this phase of Krishnamacharya's teachings (Singleton 2010:176-77, 184). Jain points out that it is a popular assumption by followers of yoga giants like

⁵⁸ Yoga's roots in religious scriptures are causing confusion around ethical guidelines and its wide range of reaching has led to contradictive definitions and conspiring claims. To further illustrate the international complexity of the debate on yoga, also outside of academic circles, I will offer a few anecdotes: Speculations about the origins and meanings of yoga reach beyond India and South Asia; NRM author Muata Ashby claims in numerous publications that yoga originates from ancient Egypt (Ashby 1996). Online movements warn that yoga is satanic worship (e.g. Anson 2015 and Bassangler 2015), and in the book *Freedom of Religion Under Bill of Rights* (1998), Niluksi Koswanag reports that the National fatwa council of Malaysia in 2008 discouraged yoga as blasphemous, and sought to prohibit Muslims from practicing yoga, stating that "[yoga] can destroy the Muslim faith" (Koswanag 2012:98).⁵⁸ In Canada 2015, the University of Ottawa had a case where free yoga classes offered for free to physically disabled people were cancelled after ten years, and according to Journalist Foote of CBC news, the instructor reported that "There were some cultural sensitivity issues and people were offended". Further she stated, according to Foote, that she guessed "it was this cultural appropriation issue because yoga originally comes from India", and that she plans on changing the name to "mindful stretching" so as not to offend anyone (Foote 2015). The question is then: Should we impose restraint in the natural evolution because it, if so be the case, will affect memories from an ancient idea? For more on "Yogaphobia", anti-postural yoga movements, claims of yoga as a homogeneous static Hindu system, and ownership debates over yoga, see e.g. Jain (2015 chapter 6).

⁵⁹ The origins of the *Yoga Kurunta* are hard to prove, as the text is no longer, (if it ever was), available (Singleton 2010:177) – interesting to note in the light of the presented discussion about legitimization by ancient authorities in section 1.

B. K. S Iyengar (etc.) that there is a direct historical tie between the yoga that they practice and ancient yoga traditions (Jain 2015:1), and Mallinson emphasizes that the hatha yoga taught by Iyengar is not the same as traditional hatha yoga (Mallinson 2011:770). Iyengar-yoga, as it is commonly known, typically use props such as ropes and blocks for alignments. One of the most widely recognized “do-it-yourself” yoga manuals is *Light on Yoga* by B. K. S. Iyengar, who, in the 69th assembly of the UN. was referred to as “one of its most famous practitioners” (United Nations 2017). The Ashtanga Vinyasa system of Pattabhi Jois constitutes set series with different levels of difficulties of dynamic asana practices. Sivananda Yoga, as referred to by Strauss and Jain earlier as being one of the most important streams in the transnational distribution of yoga, was founded by Swami Sivananda, founder of the Divine Life Society, a NRM established in 1936. There are Sivananda yoga ashrams around the world, yet the largest one is located in Rishikesh, and rumor has it that that ashram alone constitutes a large percent of the economic growth in the city. In modern times, there are countless of different yoga traditions like Bikram yoga, power yoga, Anusara yoga, and creative innovations such as yoga with one’s dog, called doga, acrobatic asanas practiced with a partner, called acro-yoga, or yoga in a heated room, called hot yoga. Various forms for meditation centers building on yogic philosophies are also spread around the world.⁶⁰

Lastly we must also account for Yoga Alliance (YA), a non-governmental organization (NGO) that originally started in the US. and that later spread to both, Canada, Australia, India, and YA Europe. The organization outlines a set of minimum requirements that a yoga school or a yoga teacher must meet in order to be recognized by them. Since their establishment initiated by self-proclaimed American yogis between 1997 and 1998 (Yoga Alliance 2017b), YA has become one of the most widely recognized authorities on yoga school curriculum in the world.⁶¹ Most yoga schools in Rishikesh who teaches in English are, or claim to be, approved by YA, and the YA approval are used fiercely in their marketing campaigns. YA will be discussed further below as the respondents to the interviews presented in chapter four have given ambiguous statements about

⁶⁰ For elaborations on these systems and more, see e.g. Singleton (2010), about Krishnamacharya and Mysore School of Yoga, see Singleton (2010 chapter 9:175-210), De Michelis (2005 chapter 7). For transcendental meditation, see e.g. Sutcliffe and Bowman (2000).

⁶¹ See more on YA in section 4.5.

the organization that ended up highlighting my interest in the link between modern yoga, branding, and consumer culture.⁶²

2.5 Concluding Remarks

In the introduction, I demonstrated how a contemporary academic debate suggests that modern and premodern yoga systems can be studied as two separate phenomena, illustrated with statements by Jain, Samuel, Singleton, De Michelis, White, Carrette, and King. Furthermore, Jain states that postural yoga is radically distinct from premodern yoga (Jain 2015:11) and White opposes an approach to evidently name the depictions on the artefacts from the Mohenjo-Daro site a “yogic posture”, calling it “a modernist assumption that [...] a complex program of bodily postures combined with breath control has been the perennial hallmark of yogic practice” (2009:49). Finally, Singleton propose that a valid and helpful approach is to:

[...] consider the term yoga as it refers to modern postural practice as a *homonym*, not a synonym, to the “yoga” associated with the philosophical system of Patanjali, or the “yoga” that forms an integral component of the Saiva 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 should therefore not be assumed that it refers to the same body of beliefs and practices [...] (2010:15).

On the one hand, the advertisements in Rishikesh, referring to postural yoga systems as authentic, seem somewhat contradictory in the light of this academic discourse, and I feel safe to say that my experiences of yoga when I was first introduced to it, indeed does not resemble traditions of the past. Yet, on the other hand, I also noted in the introduction that Lucia suggests that the most successful global gurus appear to be those who maintain a core of traditionalism while innovating to incorporate the popular liberal ideals of Western late capitalism; an argument that perhaps best reflects the initiating statement by the yoga teacher who asked our international group to “try to keep yoga as authentic as possible”. What does it mean to “maintain a core of traditionalism”, and is that what the founders of the yoga schools try to do? From these questions arises an important

⁶² For examples, see Appendix B.

consideration regarding perspective; I can certainly isolate the fitness center yoga classes in the US. as just that: a fitness class. I argue that this is because I had no connotations to yoga, and the many implications of the term before the 19th century resembles nothing from my own background and traditions. For Indians, on the other hand, this is a much more complex and interrelated tradition. This brings us to the discussion of emic and ethic perspectives on tradition that I will explore further in section 3.3.

Chapter 3 – Methods

This project offers an analysis based on a fieldwork with a four-month duration, including interviews with eight founders of yoga schools who use words like authentic, ancient, or original in their marketing campaigns promoting postural yoga. Section one in this chapter introduces the planning process of the fieldwork and outlines choices of methods. Section two discusses implementation of methods and methodological approaches, describes the process of sampling and recruiting participants, and discusses measures for anonymity. Section three will discuss reflexivity, ethical concerns, and give a description of the interviews

3.1 Planning the Fieldwork: Introductory Description

I spent four months in Rishikesh and Uttarakhand conducting field research including participant observation and semi structured interviews with founders of yoga schools located in the areas of Tappovan, Ram Jhula and Laxman Jhula. This section will give an introductory description of the fieldwork and discuss my choice of methods. In the essay “Field Research: Participant Observation”, Graham Harvey points out that “a researcher seeking to define a project might select a current critical debate and ponder which group [...] might most usefully be engaged with for the purpose of making an advanced contribution” (Harvey 2014:229). The current academic critical and nuanced debate on yoga has been presented and to understand how the expression of yoga can be so different in Rishikesh, where thousands of international yoga teachers are certified each year, the founders of yoga schools in Rishikesh was naturally the group most useful to engage with. What do they mean by authentic and ancient teaching?

I planned for a field work with the triangulation between semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Sociologist of religion Anna D. Bremborg (2014:310) points out that, within religious studies, the qualitative interview is a very useful method since people’s beliefs are diverse and multifaceted, aspects that can be hard to capture in quantitative data. She further emphasizes that the main purpose of this method is to understand and interpret people’s thoughts, beliefs, ideas, and conceptions; hence it would meet the ambitions for this research. Scholar of organizational

and social research Alan Bryman emphasize the flexibility in a qualitative interview where the interviewer has the opportunity of deviating from the initiate interview guide to elaborate on topics that he or she experience as important to emphasize (Bryman 2016:467). With clear intentions of what I wanted to ask, at the same time as I wanted to leave room to pursue topics of particular interest to the participants (ibid:468), and avoid entrapping participants within conceptual boundaries determined by the researcher; semi-structured interviews would serve this research best. Several aspects of the motivation behind the marketing of the yoga schools observed in this study would probably have remained undetected in a survey limited to predetermined response options typical to a structured interview or a quantitative research. Scholar of cultural studies Trude A. Fonneland suggests that a combination between interviews and participant observation in many cases will be crucial for the researcher to find deeper meaning in the culture she is studying. Fonneland points out that a common experience gained through participant observation might give a better flow to the conversation and that participant observations might give pointers as to who we want to conduct interviews with (Fonneland 2006:224-225). Scholar of religion and research Studies Ronald L. Grimes argues that “Participant observation is the keystone for ethnographic research” (2014:44). To gain first-hand data, a trip to Rishikesh was planned.

Most yoga schools in Rishikesh advertise specialization in either in Kundalini, Ashtanga Vinyasa, Iyengar, hatha yoga (which in in the context of yoga schools in Rishikesh, seem to include any kind of loosely defined asana practice), or any other specific school of yoga. To target the schools fusing (if nothing else, at least in rhetoric) postural yoga and classical or authentic yoga, I planned to narrow my focus of research to schools advertising for specialization in Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga, the postural yoga system introduced by Pattabhi Jois in the 20th century. Section 3.2 will discuss how this approach was not as straight forward as I had expected.

My first concerns regarded criteria and methods for the recruitment of participants. Since the founders of the yoga schools I read about online clearly aimed to promote themselves, my initial thought was that it would be rather easy to establish contact with them. Even if I thought it to be easy, I still had to figure out who I should contact and how I would establish that contact. I excluded the options of attempting to do so over email or the phone early in the planning due to several reasons. Most importantly, it was to eliminate the possibility for any misunderstanding due to language barriers and cultural differences that might unknowingly communicate themselves over

long distance communication. I also had to account for the possibility of fraudulent online information, something I would be less vulnerable to when going to Rishikesh in person. Bremborg emphasizes that it should be a goal to reach theoretical saturation in the interviews and that it is impossible to know in advance how many persons you must interview and how to find them (Breborg 2014:314).⁶³ Still she does refer to an average of five to 25 interviews in a qualitative research, pointing at how it is more expedient to have fewer but better prepared and thoroughly analyzed interviews, rather than many. Regarding the duration of my stay and the time frame of this research project, I aimed for eight to ten interviews. My aim was to recruit participants with an as broad variety as possible within the following criteria: That they 1) were founders of a yoga school that advertised for authentic/traditional/original/true/ancient or pure teachings, 2) were sufficient in the English language, and 3) specialized in Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga. Later I added the preferred criterion that they also offered drop-in classes – the possibility to come by for a one-time lesson.

Then came the questions about how to gain access to the field and how I would be able to sample and recruit respondents. I had been in North-India once before, so I felt quite prepared for the cultural differences that I knew I would encounter, yet I had never been in Rishikesh and I knew no one there. Through online research I soon found that one of the most booming yoga businesses in Rishikesh today are yoga teacher training courses (TTC) stretching over the course of two to three months, typically recognized by a YA. Courses like that are typically open to a non-experienced international audience, and offer encompassing schedules that suggested potential for a thorough introduction to a variety of yoga systems. As I had only touched upon yoga as a fitness regime previous to this research project, I was determined that a TTC would be a milestone lesson, as well as a potential gateway to the field. Maneuvering through a jungle of forums, references, reviews, and recommendations, I finally ended up booking a 200 hour Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga TTC over four weeks at one of the oldest yoga teacher training schools in Rishikesh. The final choice was made based on the following premises:

⁶³ Theoretical saturation is the idea of carrying on with sampling theoretically until a category has been saturated with data. That no new or relevant data seems to be given, that the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and the relationship between categories are well established and validated (Strauss and Corbin 1998:212)

- They advertised for teaching “the true and very ancient knowledge of yoga” (wording changed for anonymization purposes).
- The schedule (presented below) was diversified and seemed promising for a thorough introduction to Sanskrit vocabulary as well as a variety of different yoga techniques.
- The course demanded 90% participation from 6:00 to 19:00 every day except Sunday. This had two potential benefits. One, that it would be a concentrated learning experience, and two, I hoped that with one day off every week, I would have the chance to peek around town, getting to know the field I was about to study.
- It was one of the oldest schools, suggesting an experienced staff.
- Curriculum was included in the prize (I was unable to retrieve information about the contents of it beforehand).
- The yoga school (ashram) had many and good reviews from former participants
- And finally, the school was located in immediate proximity of other yoga schools, something that hopefully would enable visits on free days without having to travel too far.

The daily schedule published online included one hour with pranayama and meditation, two hours with asana practice/Ashtanga Vinyasa, one hour mantra chanting, one hour anatomy lesson, one hour philosophy lesson, and 90 minutes with asana practice/hatha yoga, as well as cultural programs some of the evenings. My aim for joining the TTC, was that it should work as the gateway into Rishikesh and the culture there. Participation in a course like this promised benefits in many ways. First, it included accommodation for the first month in Rishikesh and would enable me to adapt to the culture before attempting to conduct the planned fieldwork. This includes language skills (Indian-English sure is of its own kind!) – including body language, customs, and simply how to behave when presenting the project. Second, I hoped that the time there would enable me to learn more about the yoga schools in the area where I lived, and, at best, I could manage to establish contact with some of the founders of those schools. Third, the content of the course presented above would provide a broader set of knowledge about texts, vocabulary, references, and yoga systems that I would encounter during the further fieldwork. The daily asana classes would make me better equipped for the participant observation both physically, and because I was aware that asana classes in Rishikesh are taught with the Sanskrit names of the asanas. I would also get insight to the approach to yoga practice by the teachers of the school so

that I would have direct cultural references to yoga within the social context of Rishikesh when I started to conduct the interviews. Hence, the participation of the TTC was conscious methodological approach.

Before arrival, I chose to keep my intentions for participation a secret to the staff and the other participants for one very specific reason; The TTC had 31 participants and I expected that many of them would come there for sensitive and personal reasons such as connecting with spirituality or finding themselves. Prior to the field work I had heard many such statements from review videos online, and the assumption that this also would be the case on the course in which I participated, was confirmed through conversations upon arrival. I respected their motivations for being there and I had no intentions to interfere with the space they needed to reach whatever goal they had. If I had shared my motivation for being there as a researcher, I had to account for the possibility that they would feel observed, even though the participants were not subject to my research. By announcing my motivation, I would also somehow distance myself from the rest, something which again would disrupt the notion of group feeling. I saw no direct issue in sharing my motivations with the teachers, but had I done so, I would be in no control over what they would share with the other participants. For those reasons, I decided not to share my intentions. Issues regarding overt and covert observation are addressed in section 3.2.

I arrived in India in August 2016, had a thriller of a ride through insane traffic from New Delhi to Rishikesh, and I was soon set on a hard mattress on the fourth floor of a run down, yet beautiful brick building with a nice view over a neighborhood filled with cows and colors. From the balcony, my new roommate and I could hear distant chanting, honking of horns, the flow of the river, and we could see buildings with colorful posters advertising for courses in yoga, Ayurvedic medicine, and meditation.

3.2 Design, Recruitment, and Anonymity

The previous section explained the planning process of the fieldwork, the choice of methods, criteria for recruiting, as well as expectations to the TTC. This section will elaborate on the process of sampling and recruiting, and discuss the implementation of the methods, as well as measures to ensure anonymity.

Framework

Participant observation in the form of attendance in classes offered by yoga schools in Rishikesh was conducted over the course of four months. Guidelines for ethnography and fieldwork given by Bryman (2016:407-464) – planning, access, roles of ethnographers, field-notes – were used as a structural basis. Eight founders of yoga schools established in Rishikesh during the last 15 years were interviewed. Due to necessary measures taken for anonymization, one interview unfortunately had to be withdrawn.⁶⁴ Guidelines by Bryman (2016:466-499) – preparation, developing interview guide, interviewing, recording and transcription, and analysis – were used as a structural basis. Interviews were conducted either outside in a (fairly) quiet place, in the entrance hall of the respective yoga schools, or in the respondent's office. The participants were recruited by oral invitation during visits at their respective yoga schools, sometimes through their secretary or other employees, and in a few cases after a phone call or an SMS correspondence announcing my arrival. I carried an audio recorder, the respondents were asked not to give any identifying information during the interviews, including the name of the school, and no pictures were taken of the participants. Ethical measures were taken under guidelines by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). Two participants gave their consent after having read a printed project description, the other six regarded an oral presentation as sufficient information and had no interest in such a document.⁶⁵ The project description introduces interview questions rather than research questions (Grimes 2014:48), and avoids technical vocabulary to account for limited English skills, and to assure adequate understanding (designed for the field rather than to scholars). Furthermore,

⁶⁴ See section 3.4.

⁶⁵ See Appendix C.

to avoid priming the respondents and combat biased responses, the project description constitutes a limited explanation of my project. Besides an oral consent of participation from the participants, no formal consent was given. Everyone was informed about the project, when and where it will be published, and they were invited to listen to the recording and read through the transcriptions of the interview within a week after the interview; only two respondents were interested in doing so – one read the transcription and added some information. All participants were given the guarantee of anonymization.

Covert Observation

The first four weeks in Rishikesh was spent at an international yoga school as a means to gain access to the field. The TTC was a kick-off start and it provided valuable insight to and information about the field. As Grimes put it: “It is almost impossible *not* to observe while participating” (Grimes 2014:46). In the hindsight, perhaps the most valuable observation was gained through the curriculum we were given, some of it published by the founder of the school himself. By being lectured on this curriculum introducing, among other things, philosophical discussions from the YS, I received insights to how this specific school legitimized their claim for authenticity. Through perspectives from the teachers, a general approach to the interviews started to take shape.

Bryman argues that one of the key, yet most difficult steps in ethnography is gaining access to a social setting relevant for your research question and he suggests that one way to ease that challenge is to assume a covert role; undercover research (Bryman 2016:425). To some extent the participation at the TCC can be identified as a ‘soft’ case of covert observation (Harvey 2014:236) as my motivation for being present in the course never was shared with neither the participants, nor the staff. Bryman lists four disadvantages with the covert method out of which only one is relevant in this case; namely ethical problems (Bryman 2016:427). First, in covert observation participants are not given the opportunity for informed consent, and secondly, it entails deception and it might be regarded as a violation of rights to privacy. Despite ethical measures, I argue that this soft case of covert observation is rather non-problematic for the following four reasons: First, the classes I participated in must be considered, if not public, then a non-private arena as the school also is open for people to “drop by” and participate in the classes day by day. These drop-in

participants do not go through any formalities besides paying a fee to participate. Second, besides from providing a general idea on how to approach later respondents, no information about the school would be used directly in my project. Third, my observations focused neither on the participants of the course, nor the teachers of the various classes, hence they were not direct participants in my project. I was interested in the point of view of the founder, a man I only passed in the hall-way or met on special occasions such as the inauguration ceremony, an event, which again, was not subject for my focus of research. Finally, the forth reason is that I chose not to make any attempt of recruiting the founder of the school as anonymization would be hard to guarantee. I did, however, share thoughts around my project with him after the course had ended, and told him that I aimed to conduct interviews to find out how founders of yoga schools define authentic yoga. I was delighted to learn that he, not only was interested, but also eager to give me advice that has helped inform the overall analysis.

When the TTC finished, time had come to start the main part of the fieldwork. Ambitions to adapt to norms and customs, find accommodation, expand my vocabulary, and to learn more about postural yoga systems as expressed in Rishikesh, were met with undeniable success. I now lived in an ashram with immediate proximity to around 50 yoga schools of interest to my project and it was time to unpack the audio recorder.

Recruitment and sampling

The criteria for recruitment was, we shall repeat, that the participants spoke English, that they were founders of an ashram/yoga school that advertises for postural yoga practice as being authentic, traditional, original, true, pure, or ancient, and that they agreed to participate in the project. The former criterion was implemented to avoid having to recruit a translator and because yoga schools and ashrams who had non-English speaking founders often advertised themselves either in Sanskrit or in Hindi, so mapping their marketing campaign would imply additional challenges. Keep in mind that those who speak English possibly also might be those who have been under the greatest influence by an international discourse. It is at least safe to say that they have had more direct contact with an international audience, hence non-English speakers could possibly have presented a different perspective. A benefit with this method is the obvious advantage of not having

to recruit a translator. The methodological literature used as guidelines for this research, though discussing many issues around the translation of texts, fails to account for the issues of having a translator during interviews in qualitative research. Scholar of religion Allan Williams does, however, point to a list of questions raised by translation. Some of those are of immediate relevance, such as “what is untranslatable?”, “is translation cultural theft?” and, not the least; “how is translation more than a linguistic phenomenon?” (Williams 2014:422). Finding a translator both willing to participate in the project, and with the awareness of these central issues, whom also could be trusted not to add biased modifications in his translations both ways, was a challenge I chose to avoid. In short, performing interviews in English would minimize the chances for misunderstandings or for information to get lost in translation. Rishikesh has been a popular tourist destination for more than half a century, and I thereby presumed that I would be able to find founders of yoga schools proficient enough in English for me to conduct interviews without a translator.

As stated above, participants were recruited through oral invitations during personal visits to their respective yoga schools. Many of the founders that I contacted declined my invitation for participation and those declines were solely explained by lack of time. Some agreed to participate, yet postponed it so many times that I gave up attempting to conduct interviews. I suspect that this might have been indirect ways to decline due to other reasons as well. As most of the schools are competitors, and most of the time had little interaction with one another, I was not in a situation of ongoing access to the field, where access to one school automatically made it easier to gain access to the next. Many times, I had the feeling of “starting over again” – though I did develop skills for how to encounter the founders of the schools every time. The most important of which, undoubtedly, was patience. What probably best describes my initiating method of gaining access to the field, is the “hanging around method” explained by Bryman (2016:429). As I was intimidated by the idea of entering a yoga school about which I had no knowledge and enquire about the founder, my method was to ride a bicycle around Rishikesh visiting yoga schools who advertised for authenticity and who offered drop-in classes for asana practice (hatha, kundalini, Iyengar, or Ashtanga Vinyasa) and participate in those. I had either read about the schools I visited online, or I passed them on the street by chance. In this way, I had time to get to know the school in terms of structure, which, if any, religious affiliation was explicitly expressed, and the school’s

general expression of yoga, providing direct cultural references. Initially, I approached the founder of the schools only after class; only one of my respondents taught the class I participated in himself.

After a few attempts of the “hanging around” method, I experienced something I had not accounted for and that called for change. When I approached the founder of the school after a class, I was met with a welcoming look, but when I presented my project, however, I got the feeling that he became, if not hostile, then reserved. It was as if he was pushed into a corner where he replied politely to my request, but it seemed that it now had become a matter of duty rather than a matter of interest. It is a cultural custom in North India to treat guests with utmost hospitality, and I speculate that by staying in the school even after class was over, I might have been considered as their guest and hence created a role conflict when I unexpectedly introduced myself as a researcher, hence it might have come across as intrusive.⁶⁶ As I still swore by my method to participate in class, or classes, before interviewing, I started to do one out of two things: The first was to arrive early enough to talk to the founder of the school or ashram before class, yet so late that there would be no time to conduct the interview, and second, in rare cases, I called or had an SMS correspondence to let the school know that I was coming. I then shared that I was a university student from Norway and asked if there would be any chance to speak with the founder after class. In this way, I gave the possible respondents the chance to prepare for a request out of the usual within a certain timeframe, and I still got to preform participant observation before the interviews. The result was that, as the two first interviews were conducted with a rather rushed and informal feeling right in the entrance hall of the yoga school, the other six had a sense of preparation to them and the respondents were more open and tentative to my needs; such as how much time would I need, the place for the interview, as well as building a more informal relation.

⁶⁶ This interpretation is a result of my learning process in the engagement with the field. I spent many nights in the homes of families, attended local meals, festivities, and funerals; learning expressions and customs, and adapted slowly to the North Indian culture. Many Indian families live by a social conduct encouraged by a Sanskrit expression saying: “atithi devo bhava” (अतिथिदेवो भव), meaning something like “the guest is equivalent to god”, which again implies that all guest should be treated with utmost hospitality. It must be noted here that I have no knowledge of Sanskrit and this interpretation is based on empirical information. I speculate that if I was considered a guest, by the founder of the school, he could possibly be bound by that social conduct. If this was the case, chances are that it could be perceived that I used my position as a guest to recruit him for an interview.

As I mentioned before, my aim was to narrow the research down to founders of yoga schools specializing in Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga, but during the interviewing process I found out that this was an approach that was challenging to implement. As I, wearing specs with glasses colored by literature and impressions from a Western perspective, easily saw the Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga system to be of its own kind, it became evident that my respondents did not. Stuck in my own intent to investigate legitimization of claims of authenticity in the light of the famous postural yoga system, I failed to recognize how Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga, to my respondents, only was part of a larger asana-practice narrative. For that reason, I kept insisting to find yoga schools specialized in the Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga system, and it was only late in the process that I allowed myself to realize that I would have to change my specs and broaden my perspective. We did, indeed, as we shall see below, speak about the Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga system, but I came to learn that the respondent's focus on this system says more about the consumer's demand than what it says about the supply. The first five respondents are therefore founders of yoga schools with an emphasis on Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga in their marketing, while the final three are founders of yoga schools with a focus on asana practice in general. This is an illustrative example of the learning experiences gained by the fieldwork and how ethnographical work informed on aspects that possibly would be difficult to pick up in a quantitative research.

Initially, the aim for recruitment, despite set criteria, was a diversity in participants in terms of age, gender, nationality, and religious affiliation. The final result however, is not as diversified as initially planned. All the participants are Indian male from various parts of the country between the ages of 30 and 55, and all are Hindu expressing a special devotion to Shiva, common for Hindus in the region due to the mythology accounted for in chapter one. Summarized below are suggestions for possible explanations for the difficulty of recruiting a more diversified group:

First, although we find many foreign yoga teachers in Rishikesh, I did not come across a yoga school founded by a foreigner who both had a clear focus on asana practice and who advertised for teaching of authentic or ancient yoga traditions. This is interesting as it implies a possibility for this kind of rhetoric to be tied to Indian identity.

Second, as a yoga teacher certificate recognized by the YA is considered sufficient for many yoga schools outside of India, these terms and conditions do not seem to be valid among the Indian yoga

teachers in Rishikesh. They put emphasis on experience, and as we shall see, most of the respondents have higher education from yoga institutes recognized by the Indian government. This is likely one of the reasons why I did not come across founders of yoga schools who were younger than 30. The lack of anyone older than 55 might be random, although I did meet two elder founders who fitted two criterions, but whose English was not sufficiently enough to conduct interviews.

Third, when it comes to religious affiliation and that all respondents are Hindu, I suggest that this is a natural result since Rishikesh is a Hindu town. Teachers at the various yoga schools explicitly express their affiliation to Hinduism through images of the gods, small shrines, and prayers and mantras during classes. Examples are references to Shiva as “our” master of yoga, or explanations of how yoga will bring us to union with the lord Shiva. I visited 30 – 40 yoga schools, and besides the category of schools founded by foreigners, I did not happen to find schools that fitted my criteria and where affiliation to Hinduism was not explicitly expressed.

Fourth and final, when it comes to gender, the following observations are relevant for the study: The first is the most evident of all; many Indian women are housewives, something which automatically suggests a predominance of men in the business. This does not mean that no founders of yoga schools are women, and I did meet more than a handful female yoga teachers. However, only two of them fitted my criteria, and even if one of them seemed to be interested in my project, none of them ended up participating despite several attempts to recruit them over countless cups of tea as well as an attendance in a wedding. One of them would have been of particular interest as her husband also was teaching yoga abroad and I believe her perspectives would have been beneficial for this research. Another observation of relevance is regarding life stages and rites of passages in the life of a Hindu. For men belonging to the three upper classes in Hindu society there are traditionally four life stages during each of which the dharma (duty, moral code) is different. The first, a stage he may choose to stay in, is a stage in which the dharma is to move in with a teacher/guru, observe celibacy, and study the sacred texts (Rocher 2005:103).⁶⁷ Though not always practiced with orthodoxy, these life stages are part of a complex system and I experienced that it was often referred to in everyday life in Rishikesh. One of the respondents repeatedly referred to

⁶⁷ For elaboration on the life stages, see e.g. Rocher (2005).

how he was now a grhastha⁶⁸ and was preparing for the two final stages; the last of which is total renunciation of the material life, by saving up money to leave for his family. What might be relevant to consider in this case, is that the only rite the passage for women, notes Sanskrit scholar Ludo Rocher, is marriage (ibid:103). Regardless of orthodox following of tradition, this arguably implies a more natural path for men to learn the sacred texts, teach them, and hence also become teachers of various systems of yoga. In a lecture by Mallinson published online, Mallinson emphasizes yet another aspect important to consider when looking at yoga teaching and gender in India. He refers to a collection of ancient texts describing the practice of hatha yoga and points out that these texts are always written from the perspective of a male participant. Although some evidence might imply that women also have participated in the practice, Mallinson says, the practice is always geared towards men (Mallinson 2016).

Anonymization

During the execution of this project, ethical measures were, as stated, taken under guidelines by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). I did not plan to collect personally identifiable information, including e-mail or IP addresses. Due to experiences of challenges with communicating formalities over e-mail from earlier correspondences with Indians, both early in the planning of this project, and in earlier NGO work (AFS, IDEX), the aim was to eliminate this procedure. My limited knowledge of communication styles and cultural values involving high context and indirect communication styles might be explanations for this. Besides the mentioned opportunity to read through unedited transcriptions and listen to the recorded interview, the project design did not involve planning for the participants to read through their narratives during the processing of the data.

The Norwegian Data Protection Official (NSD) gives ethical guidelines regulating research.⁶⁹ A test conducted online, approved that no notification of the project was necessary. Besides direct identifiable personal data, information can identify participants indirectly through a combination

⁶⁸ Householder, second stage.

⁶⁹ <<http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvernombud/en/notify/>> - Do I have to notify?
<http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvernombud/en/notify/notification_test.html> - not necessary for notification.

of background information such as place of residence or institutional affiliation, combined with data on age, gender, occupation, diagnosis, etc., by being traceable to an e-mail or IP address, or through a number referring to a list of names. If you register anonymous information exclusively, the project is not subject to notification (NSD 2017). After completing the test, I called NSD to discuss my project further and shared my plans. I asked whether I still should notify the project to be certain, and was told that to access the notification form, I would have to imply that I did indeed plan to collect identifiable information, and as that would be a deviation from original plan, I was advised not to do so. We discussed the procedure of sharing the finalized project with the participants, something to which NSD replied that e-mails sent to eight – ten schools out of hundreds, will not indirectly identify the respondents. We also discussed whether it was likely that the participants would be indirectly identifiable through background noise and other factors, and saw this as no possibility as the collected data would be retrieved from eight to ten out of approximately 200 founders of yoga schools, all within a small area. Thus, the project was carried out as planned.

There can be made audio recordings of interviews if the interview guide is designed in such a manner that no personal data will appear in the recordings. (NB! Voice combined with background information about the informant may in some cases be personally identifiable. When using audio recordings, this type of information has to be omitted or limited in such a way that individuals cannot be recognized in the data material (NSD 2017).

One participant did, however, announce the name of his school during the interview and since “all electronic data processed through the entire research process has to be anonymous in order for a project not to be subject to notification” (NSD 2017), all material was thereby immediately deleted and this participant is not included in the project. In a conversation over the phone with NSD this March, they again confirmed that the project sounded liable without notification.

Names of schools and ashrams are withheld for anonymization purposes, and so is their birthplace, other cities of residence, the foreign countries where they have taught, and the institutions where the participants earned their degree in higher education. All participants are given fictive names.⁷⁰

3.3 Collecting Data in the Field

This section reflects upon the relation between interviewees and emic and etic perspectives. It also discusses reflexivity and ethical concerns and gives a further description of the implementation of my methods and the interviews.

Interviewing and the Researchers Role

An important consideration when conducting qualitative research is the relation between the interviewer and the interviewee. Fonneland problematizes how friendship or near relations with the participants might develop during the process of gaining access to the field and expressing empathy and respect in participant observation and fieldwork (Fonneland 2006:232-235). She points to how this might imply ethical challenges in the establishment of the role as a researcher and the expectations from the participants. I have addressed how I experienced my role as a guest in the school inflicting with my role as a researcher, and how I solved this. Beyond that, the ethical challenges discussed by Fonneland did not apply in my case as I always moved from one yoga school to the next, only spent short periods of time with my respondents, and my role as a researcher was always clear in relation to the respondents. Fonneland also addresses the hierarchy of power structures in the interview situation suggesting that the interviewer is the one to define the situation and create a framework around what is about to happen (Fonneland 2006:232). In my case, this invites for an interesting observation as the founders of the yoga schools were highly respected in the community and rather than addressing them by their name, the community often

⁷⁰ Very likely, there are founders of ashrams in Rishikesh who bear the names I have chosen for my participants, they are, in that case, not part of this project.

addressed them as Swami Ji, Guru Ji, or Yogi nickname Ji.⁷¹ When they were addressed to as such by the community, it was natural for me to adapt by doing the same. When doing so, although my role as a researcher was clear and that I, by introducing myself as a master student, separated myself from other Westerners who participated in the classes, I was still expressing humbleness to his higher position in the community both as a yogi, swami, or guru, and as being older. So, despite that I was the interviewer, hence, as Fonneland (2016:232) points out, the one who knows best what it will be about, the respondents were, in all cases, the ones to decide when and where the interview would be conducted. They often had me wait, not only for minutes, but sometimes for hours or days (noteworthy here; this is a general tendency in India). In the start phase of some of the interviews I also experienced that the respondents took charge and we recited mantras preparing for the interview or performed meditation on our intentions guided by the respondent. Thus, it is my interpretation that the hierarchy in the interview situations was experienced as more equal and, at times, shifting. In some cases, I experienced that the respondents either ignored or interrupted my questions, or became insistent on being the one to ask the questions. Common deviations were e.g. “Do you know what is the essence of the muladhara chakra? Well, let me tell you!” (Deepak), or “I am sure you don’t know the secrets of the kundalini opening, I will just now explain it to you...” (Shivam), or “How many hours do you do meditation every day? You Western people having so much stress and all over there” (Arpit). My initiate interview guide included the question “Why do you do yoga? Why is it important to you?” as an introductory question, but after having asked that question twice, I learned that this led us to deviate too far from the topic as it invited long theological monographs about sacred energies, omniscience, and connections with the universe.⁷²

[...] Within three months you can awaken your kundalini, but kundalini is like an electricity power, high electricity power. And your body and mind should be ready to bear that power. [...] But what nature give us, you have abundance of power inside you, in the shape of kundalini. Then beej mantra also work. Om, lang, bang. Each and every chakra has a specific beej mantra. You just

⁷¹ Ji' is a gender-neutral honorific used in many North Indian dialects and languages, in Hindi and in Punjabi and it can be used as a term of respect for a person or relationships.

⁷² For interview-guide, see below in this section.

pronounce the name of that chakra – lam – so that chakra start to: oh! Someone is calling me! [...]
(Aript)

As emphasized, my aim was to leave room for exploration of topics experienced as relevant to the respondents, however, elaborations on specific religious concepts are time consuming and was not the focus of research. I removed this question from my interview guide, but I still sometimes struggled to establish my role as the one to keep the conversation on the topic of authenticity, legitimation, and traditional values in the meeting with global market capitalism. The burning question I had, was whether the respondents really did see the teachings that they give, as part of authentic tradition, and if so, how would they explain and legitimize this? From my own perspective, I could, as stated above, easily assume a position suggesting that we can study premodern and modern yoga traditions separately, but how is this perceived in the perspective of the respondents?

Emic and Etic Perspectives

Jain states that one response to postural yoga has been to ignore emic accounts, to instead analyze yoga based exclusively on etic accounts.⁷³ She argues that many scholars dismiss postural yoga as part of popular spiritualities that are mere commodities of market capitalism, and that many disregard an emic perspective of postural yoga since “from their perspectives, it can be reduced to impotent borrowings from ancient yoga traditions put in service to capitalist values” (Jain 2015:99). Looking at the critical academic debate in the light of which I was conducting my research, these perspectives are important to considerate. Remembering De Michelis’ argument “that most yoga schools today” fit into the category of modern yoga, we must be open to the fact that yoga in Rishikesh perhaps cannot be separated as a phenomenon on its own terms (De Michelis 2014:51). Grimes points at how the distinction between emic and epic often is unclear (Grimes 2014:51), and here it should be noted that when we consider emic or ethic accounts for yoga today, we are met by the challenge that there are different levels of whom we might consider as insiders to yoga. On one end, the insider to yoga is religious, belonging to a South Asian religious tradition,

⁷³ Emic accounts are accounts from the perspective of those who live *inside* the relevant body of practice, accepting its basic worldview, rituals and values. Etic accounts are accounts from where people live outside the body of practice.

or a NRM that directly connect its theology to yoga practice and philosophy. On the opposite end, we have secular frequent postural yoga practitioners, or religious frequent postural yoga practitioners who do not belong to a tradition with a theology directly connected to any aspect of yoga. Somewhere in between there is the category of people identifying themselves as non-religious, but as spiritual, and considers yoga as a means to deepen their spirituality, and sometimes even take them closer to God.⁷⁴ Depending on how we choose to define an insider to yoga, people in all these categories might be identified as such; and this is probably not an exhaustive list. Considering that I had participated in a TTC, I could perhaps be regarded by some to be an insider to yoga, hence having an emic perspective. Yet, in the case of my fieldwork, giving an account for an emic perspective, includes regarding postural yoga as part of a body of religious practice and everyday lived religion. Through our perceptions of yoga in the light of religion and tradition, the way my respondents and I approached yoga was different. As we are looking at thousands of years with historical development, I had come to Rishikesh with an understanding that the expressions of yoga in early times naturally differs from the expressions of yoga in modern times. My respondents, on the other hand argues that the yoga they are teaching is an original expression of ancient tradition. An etic account allowed me to see yoga, and Ashtanga Vinyasa, as set apart, something isolated from other aspects of life, but through the interwoven practice of cultural traditions, religious rituals, and yoga, it became clear that to my respondents, there was no clear division between lifestyle choices, religious practice, and yoga. Yoga cannot, as we have established, be accounted for outside of its social context, hence the approach mentioned above, ignoring emic accounts, and to exclusively give an etic account of postural yoga, would then be to ignore an important aspect of yoga as it is practiced in Rishikesh.

To summarize the argument so far, in the social context of Rishikesh I had an etic perspective on yoga, and to understand my respondents I would have to take account of an emic perspective, here, as part of a religious practice anchored in cultural traditions. This resembles a hermeneutic approach; the need to understand from the perspective of the social actor. In the context of social sciences, the term hermeneutic concerns the theory and method of the interpretation of human

⁷⁴ For accounts on spirituality and religion, see e.g. Barker and Warburg (1998), Chryssides (2001), Gilhus and Mikaelsson (2007), Heelas (1996), Lewis (2003), or Wittgenstein (1953). For a contrasting view on religion spiritualism, see Heelas and Woodhead (2005). For discussions on an interesting empirical research on religious vs. spiritual in the US. see Ammerman (2014).

action (Bryman 2016:691). An incident where this was particularly evident was before my interview with Pawnesh. He had taken me by motorbike to his “usual meditation spot” by the Ganges to conduct the interview there, but as we sat down, he told me he didn’t want to do the interview after all. He would rather just sit together. He wanted to talk about me, my background and my spiritual journey in Rishikesh. I tried to avoid talking about me and rather kept asking about him. Soon he started telling stories about the spirits and the energies found there and twenty minutes had gone by when I carefully asked if I could press play on the recorder. When he seemed appalled by it, I let him try it, we recorded a few seconds, and he finally said it was a nice tool and that we could leave it on, but that then he would not be able to speak so much. I expressed my understandings and suggested we would probably forget that it was even there. Finally; the interview could start, though in a rather unstructured way.

Another of the respondents introduced our interview by a mantra that he later explained:

If you see the meaning. It is a prayer between teacher and student. We say Om Sahana Vavatu – May we be protected. So, I am praying for both of us to the Shiva. If we are protected, this interview can happen very easily [...] Protection is the first and foremost, may we both be protected. Sahana vavatu – may we both be nourished, may we grow together, may this interview that we are having be a growing experience for you, and for me as well (Shivam).

Apart from the interviews presented here, I also had many encompassing conversations in the field that gave me valuable insight to how culture, yoga, and religion were all intertwined in Rishikesh. At the TTC the teachers were deeply religious, performing rituals to pictures of the gods before class or chanting mantras from ancient Vedic verses – many of them translated into English. Before each philosophy class we recited “Oh, god. Lead me from death to immortality”,⁷⁵ and the teacher would often include good physical health, meditation on a god name and union with the god, all in one sentence. During a visit in one of the many caves along the river banks of the Ganges, home to ascetics or samnyasins, called sadhus, renouncers, or holy men, I was told by the Baba there that being a yogi is equivalent with having long dread locks, and if I wanted to continue my asana practice, I should also make some. I learned that asana names in Sanskrit sometimes was included in everyday language, and I sometimes saw that the boys on the corners, rather than passing a ball

⁷⁵ Brahadarnayaka Upanishad, I, 3, 28. (Eliade 1958:118).

around, were trying to do the best performance of complicated asanas. Norman notes that in Rishikesh, yoga is explicitly spoken of in terms that separate it from the purely physical practice of home (Norman 2011:31). I found that the various subdivisions of yoga had become part of the natural daily language both for myself and for those around me. We did not simply speak of yoga, but rather of the specific system or style of yoga that we referred to. The fieldwork also involved many conversations with yoga teachers and founders of the schools that are not presented in the study, and these conversations deepened my knowledge, thus informing the overall analysis.

Interviews and a Constructive Epistemological Approach

This study assumes a constructive epistemological approach that emphasizes how the interviewer's background, pre-understanding, and personality all can be considered to have significance for the result of the interviews. Rather than seeing knowledge as something given, waiting to be discovered, this approach argues that understanding knowledge as something that must be produced, interpreted, and constructed (Bremborg 2014:311). Knowledge is interpreted culturally, contextually, socially situated, and temporary, meaning that factors such as time and space, the intercultural setting, and the chemistry between respondent and interviewer all can affect the knowledge created during the interviews. A constructive epistemological view brings the interviewer as a person more into focus, achieving meaning through relations between the interviewer and the interviewee (Bremborg 2014:311). On topics like prayers and mantras, as well as significant texts, and on the topic of postural yoga, I got the feeling that some of the replies came from a place of automated defense. In the same way as I had some expectations to the interviewees, the interviewees also had certain expectations to me. It seemed evident to me that many of them had been met with skepticism when combining yoga and religion as they were eager to explain to me how yoga is not about religion, sometimes even out of context:

Authentic yoga is based on Vedas and Patanjali. Ok? What Patanjali say about yoga? “Yogas cittavrttinirodhah”. This is authentic yoga. Yepp. They are the collection of knowledge. There is written about medicine, there is written about engineering. I don't think any religion book have these things. Engineering? They are having medicine, the whole Ayurveda, a treatment system. Is that religion? No. That's what I'm saying. It's not religion. Even if you ask a Hindu person, they

will say: “Oh! Yoga come from Hinduism” but then you must study. Hinduism came later on, yoga was first, then Hinduism. So, yoga is not from Hinduism. Authentic came from God (Sumit).

Yoga not a religious thing. If you are, suppose Christian, then first start to pray to Jesus. And kundalini is also existing inside you, which nature give you, awaken your kundalini, with the help of asana, with the help of pranayama, with the help of meditation. And during meditation, Jesus? That is ok. God is one. Name is different. I believe on Shiva, maybe my wife believes on Ganesha, maybe the Hanuman. God is one energy... Super conscious energy! Muslims can believe on Allah, they can do their asanas, pranayama, and when they start meditation, they start with Allah, kundalini start. Religion never affect this. Because God is one. Yoga is not religious thing. Really. Authentic came from the God (Aripit).

These explanations came even though I had not mentioned the word religion. Though there is no space to further explore it in the present study, two things should be emphasized; firstly, that the notion of religion and the notion of god seems to resemble different categories in these narratives. From an etic perspective it seems that rather than separating yoga from religion, they aim to separate yoga from any specific religion, which then further informs their emic account for yoga as part of a body of religious practice. Secondly, this also emphasizes a point made above – about how English speaking founders of yoga schools arguably are more affected by an international discourse, again informed by a synthesis of traditions, worldviews and beliefs. Understandings about how the world works are intimately tied to language, and as English is the second, or often third language of the respondents, we might do well to keep in mind that implicit information here can get lost in translation. Conscious of complications around discussions about notions of “god” or a “supreme reality”, we will leave this observation as a food for thought. Looking at these rather defensive narratives, and looking back at the American girl introduced above who crossly questioned why we were asked to recite mantras in class, it is imaginable that these are questions that are asked often. Likewise, it seemed evident that the respondents themselves, were sceptic to those trying to set yoga apart as a program only for physical health; this was a point they all underlined even if I had not asked about it: “Now a days... People... The modern society, they don’t understand about authentic yoga. About this journey” (Pawnesh). “In modern times, people don’t understand that yoga is incomplete without the philosophy, without the meditation, without pranayama” (Manesh). I suggest that my appearance as a “young westerner woman” triggered

expectations leading to such apologetic or defensive language.⁷⁶ I will explore this further in chapter four.

As emphasized by Fonneland, the context one chooses as a background for the interview can be crucial for what the respondents choose to share (Fonneland 2006:227). In addition to the awareness of taking an emic perspective into account, I was conscious of my own suspicions, before starting the fieldwork, that the references to authenticity, in some cases, sometimes were mere part of a popular marketing strategy. To avoid bringing my own pre-suspicion into the interviews, the phrase “marketing strategy” or “marketing” was therefore never mentioned. I did, however, put emphasis on how scholars make a distinction between what is modern yoga and what is traditional/classical/authentic yoga in the written description of the project.

I kept the interview-guide in a small notebook, however, early in the interviewing process, I experienced that when I took it out, or even just looked down at the open pages, the respondents either took a break in their story (possibly to give me time to read), or asked whether everything was ok. Being a good interviewer implies being a good listener, and as I experienced my notebook to be an object of distraction to my respondents, I decided to avoid it unless absolutely necessary as a measure for better listening skills. The solution hence became to read and re-read the prepared questions before conducting the further interviews. On the downside, reviewing the material after the interviews, revealed that by using this method I had, in some cases, forgotten some of my questions. Yet on the positive side, the flow of conversation worked much better. I still carried the notebook for emergency, but it was mostly left out of sight.

Questions included in the interview guide were:

- Can you tell me about your background, how you first encountered yoga, and which path you took before establishing this school?
- I have read that we can come to this school to learn authentic yoga. What does authentic yoga mean?⁷⁷

⁷⁶ “Young Westerner woman” is what they often would call me.

⁷⁷ This was adapted to the specific advertisements, thus the word ‘authentic’ would be exchanged with ancient, traditional, original, true, or pure where applied in the advertisements.

- Where does that knowledge come from?
 - Which texts are important to you? What is the curriculum in the school?
- What is the connection between yoga practice and the prayers that we recited in class?⁷⁸
 - How are the mantras chosen?
 - What does it mean to you if the students who come to your school to learn does not identify with the prayers to god that we recite?
- You are part of Yoga Alliance. They have created guidelines for what a school must teach to get recognized by them. Can you say something about this?

Besides the first question, the others were rarely asked in chronological order, many times several questions were answered under one, and follow-up questions were often added. The interviews were transcribed and the transcribed data was analyzed thematically (Bryman 2016: 584-589, Bremborg 2014:317). The analysis is explained thoroughly in the next chapter.

⁷⁸ Keep in mind that I had always participated in class prior to the interviews.

Chapter 4 – Interviews and Analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed in their full length excepting parts where we experienced interruptions or parts that constitutes conversations that clearly deviates from the topic, such as lengthy descriptions of chakras and energies or detailed explanations of specific techniques, and chats about mundane things like construction work on the school, or how I was recently bit by a monkey. As mentioned above, all participants were given the option to see the transcriptions; yet only one was interested in doing so; he added some information. This chapter presents the interview material categorized under six themes: Background; Defining Authentic Yoga; Modern and Postural Yoga; Other Texts and Influences; and Business Aspects. The four of the latter are then divided into subthemes, each explained under their respective section.

Thematic Analysis

I did a thematic analysis wherein I constructed an index of central themes and subthemes deriving from overarching themes provided by the research questions, as well as thorough reading of the transcriptions. The main themes informed by the research questions were the following: Background, defining authentic yoga, Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga, and marketing. To break down and reduce the data, I developed a coding scheme constituting of frequent recurring motifs in the interviews (Bryman 2016: 584-589, Bremborg 2014:317). Those included: higher education in the field of yoga, family heritage, references to Indian identity as authority, yoga as union, “yoga not only asana”, intention, Patanjali and YS (these were mentioned as authorities on yoga by all but one participant), further texts and influences, gurus, and finally, mantras and sound. When the transcriptions were thematized and coded, I could identify the six themes presented below as the most essential topics elaborated on by the respondents, and I could then draw them into a structured analysis.

The first theme will function as an introduction to the participants and their yoga school, as well as an analysis of how yoga became and is a part of the participants’ lives. All themes concerns the main research questions to some extent. We will see that some places the topics glide over in one

another. Some of the material has been re-written for grammatical purposes and words like “uhm” and “like” has been removed for the benefit of textual presentation (Bremborg 2014:319, Fonneland 2006:229). My own comments in this chapter are limited to introductions to each topic, brief reflections, and contextualizing comments. A finalizing discussion will be presented in chapter five.

4.1 Background

Initiating each interview, I asked the respondents to share their background, their first encounter with yoga and their path towards founding a yoga school in Rishikesh. When participants share the name of the institution where they got their higher education, this appears in square brackets as “[higher education]”. The institutions from where they got their degrees are: Gurukul Kangri – ancient university in Hardwar, National Institute for Yoga, Varanasi Hindu University, and Kaivalyadham Institute.⁷⁹ When participants share where they have lived in India, this appears in square brackets as “[Indian city]”, and when they share the foreign countries in which they have taught, this appears in square brackets as “[foreign countries]”. In some cases, they just refer to “Western countries” and this has been left as it is. The first three respondents introduced here was introduced to yoga through following the footsteps of their family and they later report having pursued higher education in the field of yoga:

I born in Vedic family and all members used to chant Vedic mantras and practice yoga daily, so from family I got it. And then I learn with so many, many great masters, a lot of philosophy. And then yoga sports, then I doing my diploma in one year yoga from specialized institution which is dedicated for developing the yoga under government of India. After finishing school education, I went for study in college in bio-science stream with yoga as optional subject and also master of education which teach me teaching and explaining yoga anatomy and physiology. In college, I was in yoga sport in India interuniversity yoga championship, during this period I meet many famous yogis and learned different styles of yoga. Then I go to [higher education] for one year diploma in yoga along with yoga therapy and then I teach yoga in Western country. I finished my Master of

⁷⁹ For information on these schools, see:

<http://www.gyanunlimited.com/education/list-of-yoga-universities-colleges-and-institutions-in-india/9477/>

Science degree in yoga and engaged in giving yoga teachers training and visited [seven foreign countries] to spread knowledge and education of yoga. Then I go to Himalayas with my spiritual teacher Swami Ji and did spiritual practice and awaken the kundalini power and learned thousand types of breathing and meditation techniques. Then I become founder of this yoga school giving the teachers training to more than 10,000 yoga teachers up to now. So, first I start teaching basic level, then I start going deeper and deeper, and then I going deeper in meditation and other things, and it really different journey. Totally (Sumit).

In his narrative, we see that Sumit emphasizes family heritage, higher education, and his Swami Ji and “great masters”. He also reports having participated in Yoga Sports, spent time in the Himalayas, and taught abroad. We see a similar narrative with Vishnu here:

I grew up in a traditional Brahmin family. The wealth of Indian traditions was part of my life since I was little. It was in early age I already felt a strong urge to develop deeper into the mysteries of nature and life. I met many yogis and saints, but the real turning point towards a holistic yogic life was in early twenties. While I was building up business I realized that modern life ambitions were not giving me the quality of life I was looking for. Peace and satisfaction were missing. This turned me back to my traditional roots. A long period of intense yoga sadhana and self-study followed. My mentor, Guru Ji is my spiritual father. A great Indian sadhu who is guiding me on my spiritual path. Guru Ji performed his sadhana back in the forest and high Himalaya for over 35 years, I was with him in Himalaya. He was and still is completely focused on the science of self-realization. His presence is a tremendous blessing and the ashram has been founded with the blessing of Guru Ji. It is Guru Ji’s wish to offer true traditional yoga from the source. This is why the name is according to the tradition. I teach in [four foreign countries], in Asia and in Europe. I have graduation from University in Political Science and Sociology, and more important I also obtained a Master Degree in Yoga and Philosophy (Vishnu).

Like Sumit above Vishnu emphasizes family heritage, higher education, reference to his guru and “many yogis and saints”, time spent in the Himalayas, and that he has taught abroad. Besides the latter, Shivam and Manesh, the two next narratives, also emphasize these things. We saw that Vishnu also added aspects of mysteries of nature and a “spiritual path”, similar to what we will see in Shivam’s narrative here:

Most people say: I chose yoga. Because of this, or because of that. For me, it happened the other way. Instead of me choosing yoga, yoga chose me. I was born in a yoga ashram; my parents are

also yoga teachers. So, yoga just came as a heritage. I just completed my teacher training course, six month, and after that, I wanted to share this knowledge. I got a calling from mother Ganga and I came to Rishikesh. [...] My father teaches traditional, classical, Patanjali yoga. Our [not with his father] school is now in a place called Rishikesh, which is considered the world capital of yoga. The beauty of this place is, as you can see. On both sides, there are mountains. And in between there is mother Ganga flowing. We have spiritual inspiration from many great masters and spiritual gurus. [long list of names including Pattabhi Jois.] In my early childhood, I met with a lot of great saints and learned from them about yoga. After I graduate, I left my home and traveled all over India in search of God and a deeper spirituality. I settled in a temple in Rishikesh for three years where I worked as a priest and continued my Sadhana. [...] Then I moved to [Indian city] for many years and there I studied the paths of yoga more deeply. Then I earned yoga diploma from the [higher education]. After that I was living in jungle in Himalaya for deeper sadhana practice. So, I got my yoga master from the world famous [higher education]. After I left I continue teaching and spreading the knowledge of yoga all over India ever since leaving. (Shivam)

In addition to the former two, Shivam also makes an early reference to the geographical significance of Rishikesh and to his religious affiliation, reporting that he worked as a priest. He has, perhaps, a more spiritual approach, talking of “a calling from mother Ganga” and how he was “chosen” by yoga. The next participant, Manesh, also emphasize cultural heritage, spiritual aspects, and how he was chosen:

How I come to this point is, because of my parents, because of my gurus, because of my elders, because of my culture. If I become a yogi, not because of me, but because of Bharat, India. This country, the tradition of the country, make us something different. The parents, morning till evening, were pushing us, encouraging us with a very hard discipline in the home. My grandfather, my great grandfather, everyone wants me to be a yogi. And they make my life like this. And they teach me from the very childhood, how to be in my life, [...]. Strict life. So, (silence). That’s why I am fortunate to have this kind of a family. A spiritual family, a yogi family. [...] in my family, at least one person from one generation must be a yogi. He must leave home and dedicate for the universe and dedicate for the world. And they have chosen me! I learn from my family, and when I get initiation of gayatri mantra, and I was able to practice and learn, and then I start teaching also, in the very early age. And, so, now I am turning my children also to teach in the early age. I earned my master in Sanskrit and yoga from [higher education], I live long time in cave in Himalaya, learning very high spiritual inspiration text, I will guide the people to peace through yoga (Manesh).

The gayatri mantra referred to by Manesh here, is found in the Rigveda (Jacobsen 2010:24). So, by reporting that they inherited yoga culture from family and pursued higher education in the field of yoga, Manesh, Shivam, Sumit, and Vishunu constitutes the first category of respondents. The next two participants do not report having been introduced to yoga through family, although the first, Deepak, as he reports having had yoga as a subject in early schooling, might have been even if he does not say so. Both reports higher education in the field of yoga:

So... The background, I don't have so much background. Only I can tell you I study. I studied with schooling education, go to the uni, and did all the education system, then do the PhD., so PhD. also was the purpose of researching. Like what you are studying. Like what is ancient, what is the yoga, what is the energy? And what is liberation, what is samadhi? [...] meeting lot of monk, going in Himalaya, in monastery practice, so this is my background. I go to school, from the very beginning yoga was subject. Then I go higher education. But again, I read so many books, but the subject is practical. You need to search inside and outside. There can be guidelines in the book, but this thing you should research inside. You lead your light inside and outside. Now I teaching many foreign countries and peoples (Deepak).

Less elaborated on his background, Deepak emphasizes his education, and as he points it out, his emphasis likely was shaped by what he thought would be interesting for me to hear as a student. He has also taught abroad, and emphasis also made by Arpit below:

When I was 20, I started the yoga journey. Because I was very much interested in awakening my kundalini. Kundalini power attract me first, and how to awaken kundalini? First you have to do asana. First you have to purify your body, and along with it, you have to do lots of pranayama [...] So, I joined the Sivananda ashram first. Because there is more authentic yogis. I joined that ashram for two months, residential course [...] Then two years master degree in human consciousness and yogic science at [higher education]. From the very ancient [higher education]. Then I joined famous big ashram in Rishikesh as a senior teacher only two months, then I went [Indian city], many years and teach yoga, not Kundalini, yoga and yoga therapy. Pranayama, stretching, asanas. Then I move to many foreign countries. Then I become tired, then I thought: Now – Himalaya! Then I found this place, take one year to construct this kind of building for yoga study. My family don't practice the yoga, not finding the kundalini opening (Arpit).

Arpit's note on how he joined the Sivananda because there are more authentic yogis there, is interesting as that ashram is established by Swami Sivananda, introduced in chapter two as the founder of DLS established in the 20th century with focus on modern science and medicine. Sivananda himself is referred to as "prophet of new age" on the organizations website (Divine Life Society 2017), and the DLS is known for modern reinventions and new expressions of yoga – more on his account for this below.

The last respondent, Pawnesh, did neither get introduced to yoga by family, nor take formal education. He places an emphasis on religious affiliation.

So, in beginning when I was child I just decided to, like our family where I was living... When I was sitting in meditation, generally, like our family does dutifully, like traditional, so mostly I was going in temple and all and everywhere just to meet the god. So finally, I was seeing in the television a movie, you know? I saw so many big, big saint doing meditation long, long years and they find to god, the god will come directly to them. Same, story, I read, a devotee of the god, so high level of the devotee! So, I thought when I was child, I feel also like my real father is the god, and my real parents, the god. So, then I decided, oh I need to find my real father, my life, and why I came here. So, this kind of the question I find now I need to focus, I need to find my father and mother, that's all. My real. My soul father and soul mother. [...] And I need to return my god home. So, since then I have start to try to prepare to how to let the family know. So, I was very young when I left from there. I don't think so any family accept this, so I thought better need to escape, either no way to go in the mountain and go in the jungle to find your way. So... I read a lot of book and from the television about the spiritual places. So, then I come to Hardwar. Then I was in the mountain 300 km from here, and very nice, very happy. Then I start to walk in mountain, because I am looking to where is the place where the people will not come really. I meditate long time in the cave (Pawnesh).

We see that things many of the respondents share in common is, first, Sumit, Vishnu, Arpit, and Deepak reports having taught yoga abroad, second, Manesh, Vishnu, Deepak, Pawnesh, and Shivam reports having spent time in the Himalayas to deepen their practice (not excluding the possibility for the others to have done the same), and third, three participants referred to higher education in yoga involving the term "science". Sumit said: "I finished my master of science degree in yoga [higher education]", Arpit reported "two years' master degree in human consciousness and yogic science at [...]", and Sumit said "I went for study in college in bio-science

stream with yoga as optional subject”. Finally, Vishnu, not referring to higher education, reported that his Guru Ji “is completely focused on the science of self-realization”

4.2 Defining Authentic Yoga

(Or true/ancient/original/traditional/pure/ancient)

This section presents a mix between the respondent’s elaborations on what authentic yoga is to them, and which motivations and intentions they have behind their school. We will see a fluidity between this section and the next (presenting accounts for postural/modern yoga) as they often overlap in the interviews. Since the overall research question for this study includes the advertisements for the yoga schools, the interview question leading to the following answers was initially: “I read that at your school we can come to learn authentic yoga. What does authentic yoga mean?” The first narrative presented here is from the interview with Manesh. When trying to get in contact with him I made an interesting observation. During the visit to his school, I was not able to get in contact with him, and when meeting with his secretary over tea, I presented my project and was told that Guru Ji did not participate in such interviews. I left the print-out of the project description and my phone number, and a few days later I was contacted and told that we could make the interview after all. Manesh expressed his gratitude to me for highlighting such an important topic, and when we met at his office, he initiated the interview by saying: “Thank you so much for being here and allow me to speak something about yoga. Good. You’re thinking to know about yoga is very beautiful”. The reason why I found that interesting, is that it suggests that the topic of this research also might be interesting to people in the field I was studying.

Although I had assumed that some respondents would, I was surprised to find that all of them had very clear opinions with which they answered the question of what authentic yoga is according to them. Under this theme of “Defining Authentic Yoga” I have divided the data into three subthemes. The first present a frequent recurrence of defining yoga as union, the second presents a common tendency among the respondents to lay emphasis on the YS and on Patanjali, and the third presents other ascribed authorities

Defining Yoga as Union

In chapter one, we saw that Mallinson refers to an early meaning of yoga deriving from the word *yuj*, which means “to yoke” or “to unite”. The curriculum given to us at the TTC emphasized that definition in the introduction of the booklet published by the founder of the school, claiming that this explains that yoga means union between breath and movement, and between us and the universe. Brockington, as noted above, also explain that all the yoga passages in the BhG have a strong emphasis on discipline and control of the senses, and that the proper goal is the attainment of Brahman or union with the one (Brockington 2005: 126).

Authentic yoga means union! Uniting everything of yourself, one pointedness of yourself. Example: Sunlight cannot burn the paper, then everything would burn! Understand? But still, the sunlight has the power to burn. To burn something, you need that magnifying glass. But if I take the glass out, it cannot burn. Why? Because the sunlight is divided everywhere! When at least some power gets together, that can be one power through the glass. If, in our life, we are united, we have unlimited power. Your energy is divided into food, sleep, sex, fear, living, job, money, power, education; Divided! When? Morning till evening. That’s why it is essential to bring all the mind, all the thoughts to get one-pointed. One pointed focus is called authentic yoga. Yogi means union. Yoga means union. What is the meaning of union? Uniting ourselves... With what?! Union with what?! In what?! We are scattered, divided into pieces. Even the garbage, you divide the garbage at home – you throw the paper here, here the plastic, and so much everywhere things!⁸⁰ Then how the rooms look like? You like that room? If everything was here and there... No! You collect everything and put in one place, also fine. That is called yoga (Manesh).

We shall recall Eriksen’s suggestion that the past often is described in selective and subjective ways, often reformulated or manipulated, and that that descriptions of the past might as well refer to problems of the present (Eriksen 1996:13). Seeing the emphasis on daily issues in relation to ancient techniques by Manesh here, arguably illustrate such a manipulated presentation of the past. Lewis argues that nascent movements often attempts to justify a new idea or a new social order by

⁸⁰ This unavoidably calls for an unrelated digression about trash. With an inattentive eye, one might not notice this nonsensical statement, but in India one does not divide the trash at home. However great they are at reusing all thinkable kinds of material, North India has a dysfunctional garbage system. When Manesh makes this statement, he does not refer to his own home, but actually juxtaposes recycling systems with other norms and habits coming with modernization, from countries outside of India, that scatters the mind. Does he see it best avoided? In the context, this comparison was to absurd to be left unmentioned.

attributing to it the authority of tradition, but that is usually only through radical reinterpretation of the past that they are able to portray themselves as the true embodiment of “tradition” (Lewis 2006:11).

Self-realization. That stage is authentic yoga. Self-union; uniting all the intellectual parts of the body, mind, your breath, your eyes, your ears, all when working, or not working, all with *you*. That moment, we say, real authentic yoga. So, preparing body for it, preparing breath for it preparing mind for it, so those teach asana, pranayama and meditation (Sumit).

Sumit here also mentions “self-realization”, referred to as a science by Vishnu in the previous section. The concept of the self (atman, purusha) tied to meditation and yoga, we shall recall, was, as presented by Jacobsen, one of three main topics in the Upanishads (Jacobsen 2010:74). Jacobsen further notes that the Upanishads hold that there really is an immortal self (purusha, atman) in the inner being and that to know reality, you go from the outer to the inner. He explains that the goal for this is knowledge of the self as different from the body (matter), the senses and all mental organs. The goal, he continues, is to free the self from karma and samsara. Although we see here that the respondents place emphasis on the self, (Jacobsen 2010:76) samsara and moksha are never mentioned in the interviews. In the YS, Jacobsen explains, the self comes forward as a pure, unchangeable consciousness when the activity of the mind stops (ibid:186). Self-realization is also a term that has spread in the spiritual and secular global culture, and thus might also arguably appeal to modern individualistic approaches to yoga. Norman notes how happiness, well-being, self-realization, and the orienting of the self are heavily questioned in some modern spiritual environments (Norman 2011:125).

This is the simple things, meaning the ancient yoga and the yogi. So many things we must complete before we can complete the authentic yoga. It is like the Ganga. Many different river is not the spiritual, so they must run all the way to the Ganga, then they become spiritual! Real yoga kriya mean like become union with truth. Yo mean soul, you can say like this, and ga means god, so when soul and god come together it become yoga. Between there you need to go through a process. Any technique, doesn't matter. That is called yog kriya. Means through that, or pranayama, this is kriya! Slowly slowly. In kriya, what happen? Helping you to become yogi. So, our soul dissolve into the god (Pawmesh).

Pawnesh explicitly here refers to “union” as the union with God. Kriya as he refers to, means cleansing processes. At the TTC we performed kriyas every morning in order to, we were told, prepare the body and mind for “an improvement on the spiritual path”, and we were explained that all cleansing processes might be kriyas, even brushing the teeth.⁸¹

Patanjali and Yoga Sutra as the Source of Authentic Yoga

As stated in chapter two, the YS received increased attention and came to be referred to by many as the “classical yoga” starting from the late 19th century. Manesh made a reference to Patanjali as “the classical” yoga in his background narrative and we will here see that all the respondents except Pawnesh emphasis on YS, and we will see that yoga in YS sometimes is described as the classical, ancient or authentic yoga. Regardless of what the students are willing to learn, the respondents argue that teaching about the goal to manage stillness one’s thoughts, control of one’s mind, means to teach authentic yoga. Deepak, in the following narrative, also lays emphasis on the Rigveda, which is where, he claims, the knowledge in the YS come from.

The authentic is the ancient Rigveda, you know? From that book so many, many other book come. So there... Even the same technique explains even how you should practice the yoga. So, that is those who follow from the system, from the Rigveda, that’s known as the ancient. So, they have given the technique, system, practice, meditation, and in the future, it has become a big tree. And it was same followed by all the Rishis and yogis and yoga very powerful. They follow the same tradition from the Rigveda. And then it’s come to the Patanjali, and the YS come from the Rigveda. And then become known by everyone. [...] There is no calendar, no time, no period. If someone say the ancient... So, follow the scriptures. Follow Patanjali, and further the system. I did research on Patanjali. Because I respect him, I like him, I like his spirit. Because no one have seen him, never ever. That was Patanjali. But there is a lot of, not lot of, but some literature about the life. Like the sutra, Sanskrit grammar. So, I was very much impressed, I did PhD on his name, and then! When I came in the work, on the ground, to do, I decide to let the school have the focus on Patanjali (Deepak).

⁸¹ For more on kriya, see e.g. Jacobsen 2011:775)

Deepak makes references to the texts Rigveda and the YS, to Patanjali, and to the ancient. Without going into further detail about what he likes in the essence of these teachings, he rather places emphasis on the fact that it is “the ancient”. Again, I suspect his replies to be adapted to what he thinks I wanted to hear. He puts less emphasis on what Patanjali did, and more on the literature he knows about Patjanjali, and the fact that he did a “PhD on his name”. In contrast, in the following narrative, Shivam explains more in detail what he find important in the YS.

Truly speaking, yoga is not something that can be taught. Yoga is always meant for citta. When we pray, we say “yogena cittasya”. Classical, traditional, authentic yoga is that yoga which focuses more on citta. YS contain the very philosophy. All yogas, no matter, even the most classical, and the modern form of yoga... They are all based on the YS of Patanjali. That cannot be denied. But if you go through the sutras, no practices are mentioned. Only the philosophy behind it. The very first commentary that was written was by Vyasa, and he writes in his commentary: yoga can be learned through yoga. It is the yoga that teaches yoga. The YS was written 2000 years back. How can we apply it in today’s time? This is what I try to experiment with my life, and based on my practical experiences, I explain the same sutras in modern terms. For example, Patanjali says [...] you don’t need anything from outside, you don’t need any philosophy from outside to get into the state of yoga. Cittavritti means all these thoughts of fluctuation. Nirodhah means to get rid of. The moment you get rid of all these extra things, then you come to this very present moment. You come in yoga. Patanjali says, when you’re eating food, just eat food, when you’re sitting with the Ganga, just be with Ganga. And it that moment, when you just transcend this, when you just become one, you realize yourself. This is what we teach, this is what we make people aware of in this one month TTC (Shivam).

From this narrative I would like to repeat a quote: “All yogas, no matter, even the most classical, and the modern form of yoga... They are all based on the YS of Patanjali. That cannot be denied.” This is interesting as the YS is, as we have seen, not the oldest text explaining any form of yoga, yet it is here presented as an undenied classic.

It could be yoga was also diluted also in past. Very much possibility for that, and probably that’s why Patanjali wrote the YS, so that the essence of yoga remains (Vishnu)

He also points to something the others never do: that yoga might have been diluted in the past. He hence underlines the point about the importance of the right intentions.

We are providing the most authentic of yoga. Authentic means... Yoga as it should be, as it was before, as it was originated, and then what change come in it, and then what is the present form, you have to study all this, right? In YS it is said: when there is no modification in your mind, in your brain, then you can see yourself. We are busy now, all the time, doing this, that, this, that, planning, analyzing, whatever, all time busy. The moment you get still and silence totally. What will happen? (Sumit)

The way Sumit here refers to the YS, it is as if he assumes it to be innate knowledge that what is written there, is the truth. The next narrative by Vishnu legitimizes the knowledge given by the YS with geographical spiritual areas and with authority in long, long time.

What is ancient? So, the Patanjali, no one knows him. The text he wrote was found out about 5000 years ago. But he wrote it long, long time before that. It appeared to the Badrinath, and the place has the very mystical energy. This knowledge is shared from Rishis and gurus. But the question comes: The yoga, how did it appear back then, and what is ancient? The oldest book in the world appear in the Sanskrit and is known as the Rigveda. The scripture. So, it's known in the world that the Rigved language that this is where the knowledge grew out of. And also the YS. Like how the baby grow from the navel (Vishnu).

Like Deepak, Vishnu also emphasizes the Rigveda – the oldest authority. As Manesh and Shivam has referred to how there are no asanas in the YS, the next narrative here by Arpit, deviates from these:

Yes, I will tell you. Authentic yoga is that which is coming from the ancient text. Direct knowledge. What is authentic yoga? It means you should be master of controlling your mind. It is explained in YS very nicely. And we are not changing that knowledge. The same process. How to do meditation. So, the process of meditation, the traditional meditation process is this. But what we are doing? We including some bell sounds, different, different creations. So... it is distracting. Ok. Maybe, that thing is working, but we don't use that. We are just stick on the authentic because the authentic and traditional knowledge is more authentic. I think. Like with Ayurveda. Same ingredient, same quantity as thousands of years before, they write down, and we follow right now (Arpit).

Arpit then shared a story about how knowledge about Ayurveda medicine was developed through first being transferred from plants to guru, from guru to text, and then given to guru Whang Bat:

He say “now I give the project to you. Now you will see this knowledge is authentic or not. Go among the people and do this. Ok, here, ok, for cough problem the turmeric is very useful. He just use the turmeric like this. And within two days cough problem finish. So, he said: Authentic! And other things. Authentic, authentic. He spent his whole life to do experiment on that, then he find that everything is authentic. That’s why Ayurveda is authentic.

In the way he tells his narrative, it seems evident that the way he use the word authentic is synonymous to approved, correct knowledge, or true. He continues: “Same with Patanjali. Patanjali start to invent with asana, hatha yoga. The YS have so many asanas! 84 000.” As explained, the YS does not describe asanas, so I told him that this was my understanding, and I asked him to explain:

Just you cannot see! Even you don’t think so, there are so much asana in YS! And then they’re refined. 8400, then 800, then their more refined, 84 asanas. Then *more* refined. Ok. No people have enough time, 18-20 asanas which is more important. So, lots of asana in YS. That is why asana is also authentic. How to keep body fit and this. They give the descriptions also. How to perform that asana, where you will perform, the atmosphere, which kind of atmosphere, where you will do pranayama, which timing is better. Lots of instructions for authentic things. There is no side effect because this knowledge is authentic. So, traditional things, we just have to stick with traditional. Because otherwise, power yoga, Bikram yoga. We can create. Ok we can create. But first you have to know what is the traditional things (Arpit).

His staunch emphasis on the apparent asanas in YS is interesting, especially as he refers to postural yoga systems like Bikram yoga as “created”, but to what they do, Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga, and Kundalini as postural practice with focus on the breathing techniques, as he referred to in his background narrative, as “sticking to the traditional”. Arpit is not the only one who refers to the Patanjali as an authority on asanas. Singleton, e.g. points to Bhisnu Charan Gosh Yoga Asana Championship arranged by the Bikram Yoga College of India headquarters near Hollywood, and observes that there, the competitors are asked to perform asanas “drawn from the 84 asanas as derived from Patanjali” (2010:209). In this regard, Singleton argues that “Experiments to define the particular nature of *Indian* physical culture led to the reinvention of *asana* as the timeless expression of Hindu exercise” (Singleton 2010:5).

Ancient Roots and India as Authorities

As predicted in the recruitment process where I could only find Indian founders of yoga schools who claim to be teaching authentic yoga, it is clear that the appeals to ancient tradition is linked with the Indian identity.

Authentic yoga? Imagine a question. You see the two persons, one person drink, have a cow at home, he drink milk, he is healthy, strong, energized. One person say also I drink cow milk. But he doesn't have a physical, a mental any, but he says I drink milk. So, but you say, how you drink? He says: I buy in market. They are both very different. So, then it makes sense that he is not drinking authentic milk. It is not natural. Something invented. Because I can see if someone is drinking real milk! He looks like healthy. So, same thing: if someone is practicing, ancient times they practicing very powerful, energetic, and you are practicing, and you are not, you are suffering common physical problem. So, to say I'm drinking milk, and one drinking not real milk. Both things are very different. This is my opinion (Vishnu).

Does Vishnu here argue that modern yoga is not real? Below, Sumit appeals to the Indian identity and heritage as an indication for quality:

I think doing yoga degree from India, from any school, is more than that affiliation. Because yoga originated here and you have real good quality of it Sumit

In addition to the Indian identity, Manesh appeals to family lineages as an authority for authenticity:

India... Have the culture, have the traditions. For millions of years, not thousands. And this, the culture, is very much kept in a proper authentic discipline. In India, gift is yoga; yoga was originated here! People think that 5000 years, 10 000 years... Speak for the others! But for Indian, this is a very small amount of time. If you want to know who was my grandfather before 1000 years, I will tell you! The knowledge in this school is the ancient knowledge. Authentic yoga is not academy, this is not university, this is the school of life. Where you serve your teachers (Manesh)

4.3 Modern and Postural Yoga Opposed to Authentic

The narratives in this section are direct continuations of the previous ones. Although the respondents did have some independent explanations of what they perceive to be authentic yoga, it seems that it was easier to explain it in contrast to modern yoga. An interesting question thus arises: would there be any interest in outlining what authentic yoga is, was it not for growing attention towards yoga solely focused on physical fitness? This section is divided into three subthemes; the first displays ideas of opposition between modern and authentic, the second regards Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga, as I did, indeed, try to focus on that yoga system in the initial interviews. Under that subtheme we will also see some comments about Iyengar yoga and other postural systems. Finally, the third displays narratives where the respondents appeal to science.

Authentic Yoga is more than Asana

The narratives under this subtheme display general tendencies by the respondents to oppose ancient and authentic yoga with that which only regards asana practice. In some cases, solely asana practice, is even deemed not to be yoga at all.

So, traditional way called asana just mean keep spinal straight as much as you long, then you can practice any kriya. When you make body movement all the time, I don't think so you get the real yoga. Because if you make silence, you grow inside. Your whole concentration go more deep, more deep, more deep, more deep, inside! But before the meditation become spiritual, first we need to complete the asana. To complete one position for at least three hours without any pain, without moving, without go toilet. That is complete asana. Then do the kriya, and that process is the yog – the Sanskrit word. So, when people do like all the asana and think they go to yoga, I think we can say like asana exercise. When people say they want to do spiritual yoga and I want to learn spiritual things, I say ok, for you, you don't need to go anywhere, and you don't need to do so many asana (Pawnesh).

In the previous section Pawnesh emphasized that one must through a long journey to reach “the real yoga”, highlighted here by stating that asanas, rather than being explained as part of yoga, they are necessary for the meditation to become spiritual. It is also he also notes, as many scholars

have, that asana in its traditional sense, did not refer to the physical exercise that we know today. His presentation about the “complete asana” – staying still in one position for more than three hours, are closer to the kind of asana practice from the late hatha yogi traditions avoided by e.g. Vivekananda and Blavatsky. It is also notable that he reports to be sharing his own view on yoga when students come to enquire about “spiritual things”. In the next narrative, Deepak emphasizes how yoga is inseparable from life, not only about asanas.

Now everyone just think asana is the yoga. But the asana is just to tell you what is the body. So, somebody say: what is this? This is the hand, this is the finger, this is the index finger, so then where is the body? So, body is everything. Yoga means everything. Even how to sit, how to sleep, how to live, how talk, how to walk, how to drink, what to eat. Yoga means consciousness. Yoga is not only to stretch. Authentic yoga means – the tools for meditation. Meditation mean realization. Only sitting is not meditation. How does it work? If you are practicing padmasana [sitting with legs strait, spine strait], so you can sit properly, but for padmasana, you need to open your hips. How to open your hips? You do asana. So, all the positions are for meditation. For self-realization. Asana is not the only yoga. Asana is *for* the yoga. So, we don't teach Rigveda, we teach that in a brief form, a small form, the technique. The technique means that we give the information, and it depend on the student to follow or not follow the authentic. The information means to understand what is the ancient. They need to understand the difference of the practice of today, and the practice of the ancient. The system Patanjali wrote in the Sutra come from the Rigveda but in different form. And then, the time change, even earth move, everything change... Climate change, and the mind change, and people change, and now everyone focus on... only stretching. So only stretching known as yoga. And then further person, they go on more and realize how to enjoy yoga, so yoga come in the hammock [demonstrate hammock] ... more fun, more enjoy, more exercise, more sweating. But those who follow the system of Rigveda, that is what is ancient. If you say that anyone is doing the authentic, on the hammock, on the surfing board, this is everyone just working on physical work. This is the bad. But what does the ancient education say? The ancient education believe that your body is not only body, the body is the symbol of the universe. And in the universe there is a lot of energy and power. Same in your body, you have lot of energy and power, so you need to search it. If you believe that, you can do authentic also in hammock (Deepak).

Again, as we saw in Pawnesh' narrative, asanas are emphasized as a tool for meditation, not as yoga. As Manesh and Shivam has done above, Deepak, here, also emphasize how the students must put their intentions to understand what it is that his school is trying to teach them, and there

is a great overlap in Manesh and Deepak's story considering how anything can be yoga, as long as the intention is right. We also, again, see a reference to "self-realization".

A yogi is not that one who show you a posture, how you make it like this. A yogi is the one who show the humbleness, the simplicity, and natural living. If the students have the faith, then only they can learn yoga. Modern yoga is yoga teacher training course. Practicing for health, practicing yoga for the harmony and for the body culture. You go for the yoga with the nice dress: Ah! Very nice yoga-mat on your back, very nice, tight, fitting dress... This is the modern yoga culture. After practicing this much yoga the whole life, do you think: What are you going to change in your life? Only the physical body and peace in your mind. But the purpose of your life will be missing. Yoga... Traditional yoga, allow you to understand the purpose of your life. Not only the goal of life to be healthy, to be happy. To become healthy is selfishness, but to become healthy is also very important in our life! You have to become healthy. But what will happen when you become healthy? Help others to become healthy. That is different between the modern yoga and the ancient, the authentic. The traditional way, the ancient way of learning, it is about remembering the beauty, in the modern way, students must understand. That's why yoga is polluted by the modern concept. Yoga is not giving that benefit what it should be giving. Because... We are using yoga for only health. We are not using yoga for the peace in the world (Manesh).

In accordance with e.g. Singleton, Manesh emphasizes how yoga today practiced as part of "body culture". He brings faith into the story and argues that only if there is faith, there can be yoga. When Manesh shared about his background, he stated that "I will guide the people to peace through yoga", a statement from which we must see this narrative as a continuation – it is not only yoga for you, but also for others. Although he himself never spoke about it directly, the people who knew Manesh, as well as his school's home page, would elaborate on the great deeds he has done for mankind, such as helping the hungry and the sick, even when he had nothing for himself. Manesh's narrative was generally colored by stories about charity- and sustainability projects his school was doing in the local community. Shivam, in the next narrative, makes less of an opposition between modern and ancient ways of practicing yoga, but rather focuses on the fact that in modern times, according to him, the intention has changed. To him, most things can be yoga as long as the intentions are right:

Yoga has become popular now, but the very essence of yoga is getting lost in body exercise. If you read the entire YS, you will not find the technique of even a single asana. Those practices were

present, but not the essence. Asana was there. Even before. But the very essence has to be kept alive. And that is the second aim of our ashram; to keep the essence of yoga alive. The first aim is to promote yoga. It has become diluted. You go to some yoga classes, and yoga is completely missing from that class! I'm not saying that physical practices are not yoga. They are. But only if the approach can somehow be made inward. Some classes have started many, many new types of yoga. You do yoga on top of each other, holding your dog pet. Well, even that can be a yoga. Why not? If it is guided properly, you are with your pet, you feel the energy of your pet, you're moving around. If you are in that present moment with your body, with your pet, it can be yoga. But if you're doing it to get a very good profile picture on your facebook, or whatsapp, then it is not yoga. If the intention is: How is my expression coming on the camera? How do I look to others? So, then yoga is becoming more of a show off. When that intention is there, the essence of yoga is getting lost. You can do yoga on top of each other also, when the intention is not to show off, but to go inward. So, our aim here at the school is to spread the knowledge of yoga throughout the world. And when I say "the knowledge of yoga", it is not only asana! You may be a great asana teacher, and at the same time, you might not be a yoga teacher at all! (Shivam)

Even if Shivam does indeed assert that the very essence of yoga is getting lost in body exercise, his focus is mostly on the intention behind actions as being yoga. The actions can be yoga if the approach can somehow be made inward. It is when the wrong intention is there, that the essence of yoga is getting lost.

And modern yoga, at times, to make it interesting, to make it accessible to common man, we design the postures in such a way that it is more focused on the physical body. Because body is something one can relate to. That can be a very good starting point! Because, if the mind is disturbed... To get into meditation, or to perform classical hatha yoga, is very difficult. When you do a posture, the focus is on the body movement. But more focus is as you are raising your leg, what changes are happening with your breath? What changes are happening with your thoughts? In authentic yoga, you are more aware of these things (Vishnu).

In contrast to any theory suggesting that words like ancient and traditional are added in his marketing campaign to appeal to costumers, Shivam says that it is the asana practices that are added "to make it more interesting". In this next narrative, Sumit also places more focus on the intention and the inclusion of what he calls a holistic system. Vishnu continues:

So, our Ashram, we have TTC in which we teach a synthesis of traditional yoga as well as modern yoga. We are re-identifying yoga because yoga was always changing. When a student come here, they come with the attraction that in one month, they will become a yoga teacher. And the attraction is mainly to learn the modern form of yoga, one want to be perfect in the physical movements like the Ashtanga jump, perfect chaturanga [kind of plank-pose], one wants to touch the head to the knee, and one wants to know how they can teach. But, yoga is incomplete without the philosophy, without the meditation, without pranayama. A long with what the students want, we also give what authentic yoga *is*. This is first and foremost thing we teach (Vishnu)

Here it is interesting to note that at the same time as he wants to teach authentic yoga, Vishnu does recognize, as so many scholars before him, that his school is part of “re-identifying yoga because yoga was always changing.” In regards to Vishnu’s statement about teaching a synthesis of traditional and modern yoga, we shall refer to a statement by Jain who notes that the first two modern yoga institutions were characterized by combining non-dogmatic loosely structured yoga systems with physical culture. Those two institutions were the Yoga Institute of Santa Cruz, Bombay (Mumbai) established in 1918 and the Kaivalyadhama Shrimad Madhava Yoga Mandir Samiti at Lonavla (near Pune) established in 1921. More than 90 years later, we might be safe to argue that they did indeed, set a trend. Yet Jain also points out that Krishnamacharya and Sivananda’s students were the first to construct yoga brands and mass-market those to large audiences (Jain 2015:76).

In the next narrative, Sumit started by stating that “[...] for example yoga sports, you cannot compete with yoga!” In his background narrative, we can recall that he was part of the India interuniversity yoga championship, so I interrupted saying: “And yet you did!”

Yes! In one sense, it promotes in low level. Not bad. It promotes yoga and then you join it due to any reason. But you cannot reach the deeper level, the real level, the authentic level. It’s not the authentic level, but it’s not bad. It is the beginning towards authenticity of yoga. But not the correct step totally. It’s ok. But authentic yoga is a holistic system that take all the components. If you just go to Iyengar, then it is not complete. In that sense. Because there is less focus on pranayama, less focus on meditation, but they do! But not that much focus. So, you go to another school which focus on pranayama, you go to another school which focus on meditation, you can combine. It is not bad actually. I see it beautiful. You have this specialty in this college, in another university you have this, and then you become complete your education. So, I look all these schools like that. I

don't want to criticize any school. They are all part of authentic yoga. They are all part. But you need to know what their focus is. Then it is good. Because authentic yoga is a combination of all these components which are needed. It's kind of history question. Authentic yoga. According to me, most of the schools are teaching authentic yoga, but nobody is going on the top of it. People remaining on the body only. They don't work on the mind; they don't work on the breath. They're just working on the body, physical fitness (Sumit).

Even if Sumit is careful not to criticize modern yoga schools, and talks about the ways in which we can combine different systems to reach "the authentic" level of yoga rather than making an opposition between the modern and the ancient, he does highlight that staying focused on the body only, is not authentic yoga.

Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga

Here follows accounts for Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga as a postural yoga system.

They [Pattabhi Jois, Iyengar, 20th century gurus] are the asana teachers. They only care about asana. Some teachers only care about pranayama. We can say that they are half, or that they are not complete. So, before Pattabhi Jois also, there are many yogis that only focus on the asana. But then asana was different! The one asana they do for months, for years, and they achieve Samadhi. Understand? Because... They are more conscious. That is asana! Asana is unmoving meditation. That is the authentic! But, if there would be no asana in this world, how many people do you think would practice yoga? I don't believe even 1/5! Do you think? (Vishnu).

Like Pawanesh did above, Vishnu here refers to asana as body postures that were or are held for hours continuously, rather than dynamic physical fitness programs. Similar to Sumit, he refer to these postural systems as yoga, but only "half". Shivam, below, does not comment on whether he thinks the modern yoga systems are authentic, he rather praises them for having promoted yoga.

Yoga was there in the world before, but it was not very popular. And we Indians are very thankful to *some* Indian masters. Like B. K. S. Iyengar, Satyananda Saraswati, Pattabhi Jois, Baba Ramdev Ji, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar Ji. They promoted yoga. And many Westerners who promoted yoga even more than the Indians! Now, many Indians are attracted towards yoga because many Westerners are doing it. These great legends of yoga have spread yoga from door to door, shore to shore, but!

One thing... May be... They might not be very satisfied with... Yoga is becoming diluted (Shivam).

Already in his background narrative, Shivam referred to Pattabhi Jois as a great master and spiritual guru from whom his school has gotten “spiritual inspiration”. In his narrative about what he regards as authentic yoga Shivam, put emphasis on the intention behind yoga practice, and that yoga has become diluted; something which perhaps suggests that he might think that systems promoted by the gurus he mentions here, have been interpreted wrongly.

Now people come for fitness more than yoga, so I will say very less people are doing real authentic yoga. Even if you want to teach it, very few people want to do it. That’s another thing. All the schools teaching... But if they just fully focusing on business, and they focus on only certain parts, and they forget, ok, their make different confusion like flow yoga... Like Ashtanga flow yoga ... So, it is kind of taking you from the authentic (Sumit).

In chapter three I explained that thorough the fieldwork I came to learn that to the respondents, Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga was part of a larger asana practice narrative and that the specialization in Ashtanga Vinyasa often says more about the demand of the students than what it does about the intentions behind the schools. This becomes apparent Sumit’s narrative; even if he reports a desire to teach what he regards as authentic yoga; that is not what the students come to learn. If you want the business to run, you must supply what the customer demands. When seeing it from that perspective, the yoga practitioners are suddenly not practitioners, but costumers – a topic that will be explored further in section 4.5.

So, traditional things; we just have to stick with traditional. Because otherwise, power yoga, Bikram yoga. We can create. Ok we can create. But first you have to know what is the traditional things. Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga, like we are teaching in this school, is the traditional, the really authentic from a man I will tell you about, he is name Krishnamacharya; one guru who was having two students. One is Iyengar, and one is Pattabi Jois, so Iyengar start the hatha yoga with alignment. Pattabhi Jois they start with flow kind of thing. More dynamic. Ashtanga. Whenever it is start. Recently Vinyasa teacher training will give the certificate. Vinyasa asana is also coming, the root is hatha yoga. They are not coming from the different world. If you see the hatha yoga postures, you will find same Vinyasa! But flow. With breathing. Not anybody creating, the new commerce created the asana. The asana is same and you can perform that asana in different, different way, but

the asana should be same. Suppose our ancient text say: you catch you're here [pointing]. This is, suppose, traditional. And somebody something doing [point again]. Ok? This is ok. But somebody starts to teach from here – it is not that thing. So we just stop. So we just follow that thing. It is more scientific. More authentic. All asanas we teach, even the Ashtanga Vinyasa, they are the traditional, not self-created asanas. Which kinds of asanas are traditional? [List of seven asanas]. And after complete that asana, relax. Because you have to relax you heart beat and breathing normal. Then you are able to perform another asana. So this is the internal kind of asana. And external? Ashtanga Vinyasa, also the authentic as described in the text. Whatever they write down in mantras, that is till now, that is more, 100 % authentic. But somebody make little bit mix. Then this thing also and this thing also, so it is not authentic anymore! Maybe some side effect will come, you'll see in future (Arpit).

In this explanation by Arpit, I find it interesting that he says that when “somebody make little bit mix”, it is not authentic anymore, yet Ashtanga Vinyasa is. I experience this explanation as an answer that gives him a repellent to questions that put him in a predicament between what he perceives as authentic and inauthentic teachings. He legitimize Ashtanga Vinyasa by referring to Krishnamacharya as an authority and by sticking to that, Jois does not have to be considered as someone who “make little bit mix”. Regarding answers that, to me, seems to have been created to function as a repellent to sceptics, I experienced something similar during a previous fieldwork conducted in a Pentecostal church in Norway. The members of the community there, told me that when people claim that the earth was not created in only six days as the bible suggests, hence deeming their faith as illegitimate; they just laugh. They explained that people say such things because they just don't know that to God, one day constitute one billion years, hence the earth was created in six billion years, just as science suggests.

Appeal to Science

In chapter two, I presented that one of the ways through which yoga has become popular, is in dialogue with modern science, and in the background narratives we saw that Arpit, Sumit, and Vishnu correlated science with yoga. On the topic of references to yoga and scientific research, Frøystad examines contemporary appeal to science within New Age and guru movements that target the urban middle class in India. She argues that scientific rhetoric from these groups is

reserved mainly for public outreach, in some cases only for non-Hindu and non-Indians (Frøystad 2011:79) Lewis discuss what he calls legitimation strategies and in addition to legitimizing through tradition and past (often reinterpreted to legitimate innovation), he adds that many NRM uses charismatic appeals, such as an appeal to direct revelation, and he emphasize that many modern movements also appeal to the authority of reason and science (Lewis 2006:11-14).⁸² The participants did not talk much about science, yet I deemed this subtheme relevant for the overall analysis since these appeals seemed significant to the respondents. In this first narrative relates science to correct teaching of asanas:

I love teaching, I start teaching, and, another thing, I saw people are giving injuries to others when they are teaching, I saw they are teaching back bending wrongly, backbone get compressed, they're teaching inversions wrongly, like you teach headstand to a beginner, they get neck pain, so I was thinking it is very good science through which you can heal anyone. But in place of healing, negative side going on, so people are losing their interest, so then I decided, it was very natural in me teaching asanas (Sumit).

In the first meeting with Sumit in chapter three, we also saw how he referred to science in the Vedas as a proof for them not being religious.

Before, a saint was scientific of the spiritual... Scientist of our religion, the sanatana.⁸³ Before we were not Hindu. Before the Christians came, we say, 'what is your dharma', we talk about sanatana. Because I am not Hindu, I have the dharma. We accept the sanatana. And we follow it, ok? [...]. Example: In ancient time, if a big, big king have sanatana, then a saint want to go for years for meditation in the jungle to do the science of the spiritual, nobody need them, so kingdom support everything whatever they need because they do scientific research in the forest, and then to

⁸² Another legitimation process discussed by Lewis (2006) is that of appeals to characters of authority through reinvention of mythology. He exemplify by stories of "The Hidden Life of Jesus Christ" and organizations such as the secret life of Issa deploying Jesus to legitimize Eastern spirituality in a Christian dogma (73-78).

⁸³ According to Jacobsen (2010:21), sanatna dharma is nearly tantamount with the word "religion", although that calls for a much wider discussion, as defining one ambiguous term with another will inevitably imply further disagreements. He suggests that sanatana dharma is an expression many Hindus call their religion, "especially those from the intellectual elite", and he notes that the meaning of dharma includes words like "law", "righteousness", and "support". He refers to dharma as what "maintains the eternal order". According to Rocher, Dharma is one of the most central and fundamental concepts in Hinduism and one out of three (or four) goals in the life of a Hindu. Although some associate the word dharma with "law" or "religion" – including Indians, Rocher says that dharma has no equivalent translation in English. In short, dharma encompasses the right way to maintain order and balance in the universe. Animals, plants, sun, water, animals, and humans must act according to its dharma in order to maintain overall balance (Rocher 2005:102). Ones dharma is primarily determined by two criteria: Social class and stage of life.

meditate. Then they become like so higher, powerful saint, become what we call a spiritual swami. This is traditional way. Ancient way. He always had support in kingdom (Pawmesh).

4.4 Other Texts and Influences

In the previous section, we saw that all but Pawmesh put great emphasis on the YS by Patanjali, and some of the participants Manesh, Deepak, and Vishnu also emphasized an importance on the Rigveda. This section, divided into two subthemes, will elaborate on further influences reported as important to the participants in shaping how they understand yoga. Perhaps more than illustrating the relevance of other texts than the Ys, this first theme illustrate a smaller emphasis on other texts. The second subtheme discusses teachers and gurus.

Textual Influences

We will see that the texts that are mentioned are *Ramayana*, *Bhagavata Purana*, and *Gheranda Samhita*, yet they are not elaborated on.

The inspiration for my yoga practice since childhood is *Ramayana* and *Bhagavata Purana*. The stories of Rama and the story of Krishna change the life. So sweet stories. The whole world must follow them! Then I have been studying the YS for ten years. Still I am a small baby. But this text come to me later. When you are a child, you cannot understand the YS in that way (Manesh).

Previous Manesh has focused on how yoga is a complete and peaceful lifestyle, something highlighted by how he here refers to these stories as stories all should follow, stories that teach about yoga, hence, to him, stories teaching about a lifestyle beneficial to all.

Some hatha yogic practices are mentioned in traditional text, like, in which you find techniques of various asanas, various pranayama; e.g. the *Gheranda Samhita*, we follow those (Shivam)

I have noted that the interview with Pawmesh ended up being rather unstructured, rather than semi-structured, and few questions were asked by me. In the previous narratives, we have seen that all but Pawmesh names various religious and philosophical texts. Though Pawmesh does not, he did

share that he was inspired by devotees that he had seen in movies or that he had read in books. I asked: “What kind of books did you read?”

I don't have, no text. Nothing I read, no. Just I read my own nature. Yes. For the spiritual things you don't need to read. Really! Because the kriya is the 99% practical, then nothing for read. Yes. Who need to go to the philosophy, to teach the people the philosophy, to do a spiritual teaching, maybe they need to read. For us, we don't need to read. Anything. We need more practical things. That's all. If no practical, there is no help. Not one per cent even. But if we don't read, then only practical, 100% support! Really. Because all the kriya is not for the reading, because you need to feel that, taste that. The ancient yoga only is teaching from the mouth of the guru. Buddha, he was holy man, he never read, just sit under the tree, the God give to him the ancient knowledge (Pawnesht)

On that note, we shall recall how learning yoga from books, was frowned upon in early Hinduism.

Notions about Guru

In their background narratives, we saw that many of the respondents referred to their Guru Ji, or to gurus and masters in plural. Above, e.g. Vishnu emphasized that his Ashram was started with the blessings of his Guru Ji. And Manesh said: “I learn ten years from my Guru Ji. Then I stated this yoga center. When asked to share something about their guru, we will see here that many of the participants rather set out to explain to me what guru is. Sumit explained it short and simply: “Actually, guru and teacher is.... Guru is Hindi, teacher is English.” Initiating this project, Jacobsen suggested to me that to avoid “mystification”, I should use the word teacher, rather than the word guru. Lucia suggest that Gurus, by definition, are charismatic religious figures who aim to transmit their ideals through teaching others (Lucia 2014: 241). To Arpti, Shivam, and Pawnesht, we will see that the word guru has further connotations:

There is a difference between guru and teacher. Teacher just teach you and ok, fine, it is my profession, ok, you learn or not learn, it's up to you. A teacher is like this. In school or everywhere, you will see the teacher. You are learning or not learning. I'm teaching, and this is my fees, ok, I'm

gone. This is called a teacher. But guru is the different thing. Once you make guru, it is a lifetime bond. You are not doing? Why you are not doing? Which kind of obstacle you find? Guru is personally involved, and you complete your course, etc. and you went your home. Then there you feel... Then you know you have guru. This is the connection. This is the lifetime connection. And guru always lifetime is take care of their disciples. And this is the process, this is the relation between guru and teachers. Some authentic students only able to make the relation of guru and shishya. Otherwise you are teacher. Sashaya is female word, sashaye is male word (Arpit).

The literal meaning of a teacher is not someone who teaches. If you see the literal meaning of the word gu...ru. Guru means the one who removes ignorance. A guru does not need to teach anything. You already have some understanding about this is how life is. A guru will simply break that understanding of yours. A guru is not putting new knowledge in you. According to yoga... All the knowledge, the spiritual knowledge. It's present in you. When Buddha was sitting in yoga, there was no teacher sitting next to him and giving knowledge in his ear. All he did was sitting under a tree! He got connected to himself. He realized the soul. Similarly, a guru is not someone who is pouring in knowledge. A guru is someone who takes away all the false knowledge you have I have all this knowledge I am sharing with you from ancient lineage, from rishi to rishi from guru to guru (Shivam).

My Guru is not the like the teacher. He is poor hungry man by the Ganga. He asking me for food, he shared with me mantra about Shakti and Parvati. I meet him only one time. After that, the god come to me! My guru left after 10 minutes, after I never see him, and really, I never forget him (Pawmesh)

4.5 Business Aspects

This section present narratives reflecting upon the business aspects around the process of teaching authentic yoga combined with running an international commercialized yoga school. How do the respondents experience their wish to spread ancient knowledge, as defined by them, in a Rishikesh adapted to consumer culture? In their accounts on postural yoga, we saw that several of the respondents reflected on how the students come to their school with the aim to learn asanas and become yoga teachers, and they express their wish to teach what they perceive as authentic knowledge. Vishnu explained that he is experimenting with a synthesis of the modern and the

ancient knowledge to “make it more interesting” for the students. In the three first narratives in this section, we see how Sumit, Arpit, and Manesh expresses the need to adapt their teachings to meet the demand of the global market.

So, this is the thing; Authentic and not. You don't need lots of hip hop. Doing like gong, instruments etc. The traditional way is very simple. Do asanas, do pranayama, drink more water, clean your body. Like in ancient text, Patanjali, YS, they are very polite, very genuine, no nothing extra. They just say the simple process. This is the process. Now what people do? We mix lots of things, because if you are teaching kundalini, you have to do more show off. Then our students says: oh! Then you make business. So people just say kundalini is like this. This is the process of business (Arpit).

Arpit here argues that you don't need extravagant techniques or props to do yoga, but you need it to attract the customers. Again, we see how Arpit continuously confirms his story about how the asana practices are part of the authentic.

Modern society is a society of business. Classical yoga was not only the stretching. That is a modern concept, the American concept, European concept. Because they know that this is a very popular! It is huge difference between modern yoga and classical yoga! (Shivam)

Below, Sumit emphasizes that one must adapt to what the students ask for:

Authentic yoga means working on your mind. How many of the TTC want to meditate nicely and go deeper? Very less. How many yoga schools are there who just teach only meditation? Very less. So, the essence of authentic yoga is lost in practice, not in the school actually. School offering what people are searching actually. That is the thing. If I start teaching here total meditation, people will run away. But I think everyone cannot do the authentic yoga, according to me. They are not eligible for it as well. Because preparation is needed. You need healthy body, healthy mind, so if you've done preparation, then you find the path, but if only business is on your mind, then it is not good. You can say if you are doing authentically correct way, then powers, siddhi powers, come and will tell you: Yes, you are on correct path. And they really come! They will really tell you all these things. I have seen it (Sumit).

As he has done above, Sumit emphasizes on the intention on what one wants to learn and he notes that his school is offering what people are searching. Jain, who has done a study on a group called

Praksha dhyana, shares a similar example: To be compatible with the modern consumer context, they e.g. prescribe vegetarianism not for spiritual purification from karma, but because of the connection between the overconsumption of cholesterol-rich meat and heart disease (Jain 2015:110). Sumit also makes a reference to magical yogi powers, insinuating what he means by “the deeper level” that he referred to earlier. This also reflects his background narrative where he states that personally, he is “on a different journey, totally”. In the next narrative, Manesh explicitly connects business with modern yoga:

Modern yoga, they try to make everything business. Thousands of years! After practicing... No one in India thought to make yoga as a business! Until now! We have been teaching yoga freely in India, we have been teaching and practicing Ayurveda freely in India. In the village, if you go to ask some medicine, someone do, go to jungle, bring the leaf, bring the root and make the medicine for you... No charge! He will never charge even one Rupee because he knows if he will charge, his knowledge will not work. Now, Ayurveda is a very expensive part of the treatment. To learn yoga, you have to pay lots of money. When people come from the West here, to learn yoga; they don't come as students, they come as costumers. Even if many schools say they teach ancient and traditional way, they say it for the business, but they are polluted. Now, suppose what we are doing here? We can call ourselves a traditional yoga studio... There is no studio where they are traditional (Manesh).

These last three lines addresses exactly the question that arose in my mind when I first became aware of the marketing trend in Rishikesh. As the statement appears in the middle of Manesh's story, I never did ask him to further elaborate on it, something which I, in the process of transcribing, identified to be missing in the interview. Manesh continues:

In our studio, there is no saloon, no academy! Every human being is a yoga school. You see, with business; I started teaching yoga, learn yoga from very big masters, and I lecture thousands of people in my life. And finally, I thought that yoga is the most powerful techniques, exercise, that it has the power to bring world peace. I was giving lectures to thousands, but still I had ego – That I am something bigger than others because I can teach. And that was to create the business out of yoga (Manesh).

We shall recall that Manesh was the one whose secretary declined my request for an interview, but that he later, upon seeing my topic of research, wanted to participate after all. “And I left this” Manesh says,

... when I saw my ego is more higher, my spirituality is down. People from all over the world is roaming around here and I try to share this knowledge with love. And that’s what make me a yogi. Yogi is yogi only if he is humble. Those students that have business mind, they cannot learn yoga, true yoga, practical yoga, classical yoga. My mission is to spread the ancient knowledge of yoga for the peace in the world. I want to bring world peace through you. That’s why I am here. That is why you read that in this school, you can come to learn the authentic knowledge of yoga. And in our school, we do so many humanitarian work. Because we are focused on world peace, so I tell my students, if you want to be a teacher of this school, you must serve the humanity, otherwise we do not consider you as yoga teacher. A yogi is he who has space for others in his heart (Manesh).

Manesh furthers yoga as a global ideology. In the narrative below, Vishnu again proposes the opposition between yoga before, and yoga now, suggesting that, in accordance with the theories of Jain, Singleton, De Michelis (et.al), when yoga became associated with physical fitness, it suited the growing consumer culture:

There are six major school in India. One path is yoga for liberation. Yoga is for the liberation. And then yoga become for the body, not for the mind, and it became much more popular and eligible for big business. The other five Rishis – the noble sages, the higher spirit, they give the yoga for liberation you can see in Hatha Pradikipa. Vashist taught yoga to lord Rama. For liberation, there was no stretching – very little. Like one example how they change the yoga only for business, I will tell you! Some masters say that if yoga with jumping and stretching can give the liberation, because that is what yoga is all about, so all the monkeys could be liberated because monkey they jump all day long and they stretch more. So, that’s the thing with business yoga now a days; that is what humans are doing (Vishnu).

In Pawnesh’s narrative about authenticity, we saw how he does not regard the modern yoga that he is teaching in his ashram as the real and ancient yoga, and that he, himself, does not even identify with the kind of yoga taught there. Here follows his narrative both about how the notion of yoga has changed in India as a nation, about how he experiences the business aspect of running a yoga school in Rishikesh, and how he sees the real intention of yoga getting lost in materialism.

Now, what is happening in our culture? All people supporting the ones who have the big ashram. They are getting big money support. But when you want to go to real meditation in India, right now, then nobody give anything support. Even they disturb you. I was eight months in the cave to do the meditation, but I cannot have permission for that, so they disturb me, the police and the forest people. [Shares a story about how the government require permit if one wants to stay in the Himalayas of the state, and how it is challenging to find anywhere in India to be alone due to this. Then follows a long and detailed story about wanderings in various areas in the Himalayas, and meetings with fake gurus]. So, that time when I had challenge to go to the cave, the army people and the police said I cannot go, they say no because I might die. But I need to go there. Then some baba and ashram people are jealous. The ones who are the big popular for meditation with good money support... Their popularity going down because that time they, these guru, were living highest up in the mountain, they is the biggest meditator in this area.⁸⁴ But since I been there, I have younger age and I think I am more courageous to do it. So, they have problem of jealousy, they also try to stop me, and they have the more power because the money... So, people also try to stop me from meditating there... Because if I survive then maybe I become more popular? They make big business out of the real yoga. But I think they should give me! Because I left my home, and if I don't have chance to do this, then how I can do meditation? These days you can see in India, in business of yoga, everywhere there is the fake guru. If you don't get chance, then how to become good guru? Nobody is born good. Everyone must practice to become good in future. After 30 or 60 years, they have the ability. [Another lengthy detailed narrative about permit, processes, failed attempts, disturbances, and support from the gods] So for some reason the police they cut my permission, the other guru they give some bucks to them to stop the permission. [...] (Pawnesht).

Pawnesht here sheds light on a topic that I did not consider in the initiating phase of my fieldwork; focused on Ashtanga Vinyasa yoga schools with founders who speaks English, my area of research never touched upon the business aspects of yoga that are happening within the circles of Indian ascetics. Where courses and classes and brandings are not sold, but where the more adventurous seeking tourist ensure that the aspect of competition and reputation also reach the higher shrines. When walking in the higher regions of the state, in the mountain areas around Gangotri, I did encounter several Babas who had seasonal permits at shrines and temples in the area. After

⁸⁴ I learned that in the mountain dialects of the Himalayas as well as some Hindi dialects, one will address and speak of a guru in plural as a sign of respect. Therefore he might be referring to one guru or several.

crossing Gangotri glacier, arriving at Tapoban (about 4300 m.a.s), we met a Baba that went by the name “Silent Baba” as he never speaks. As staying in his temple was costly, he had also earned the name “Money Baba”. When we declined his offer as we carried tents, we were offered a meal set at a prize way above an average meal in Gangotri town a day’s march away. I interpret this business man, high up on the plateau below the majestic peaks of Uttarakhand, as what Pawnesh calls “fake guru”. Pawnesh continues:

Now, we need so many material things to survive. Even to meditate and do the real yoga. I was researching how I can do like the ancient master before, to fly in the air, go in the water. So, that’s why I do the modern yoga now. I can use modern yoga to get bucks so I can go for the ancient practice. Because in India, the people who have the money have the power. I need the bucks to bargain for written permission and a promise for no disturbance. I’m preparing to budget enough for the whole life. I want to become the yogi ancient way, and I don’t have so much time! Because when you get old, it’s very difficult to take challenge with yourself. When you’re young, you can face any challenge. So, that’s why I am teaching now, I have school, to teach. This is my business, this is not my yoga. Yoga is the spiritual inside, not here. When I have budget, I make my target, so I’m working here, but my aim only for that. To reach to higher authentic yoga. I want to make some difference. I don’t say that my business is yoga. I am doing it for the survive. So, you can say, I use the modern yoga, so later I can practice real yoga in cave. To have the bucks to give to police. Generally, I don’t follow the yoga in my school (Pawnesh).

“This is my business, not my yoga”. In Pawnesh’s case we might be safe to say that the rhetoric in his marketing campaign is, indeed, only that: rhetoric for marketing. Still, in the way Pawnesh defines his own understanding of authentic, ancient yoga, we must recognize a sense of legitimization in his claim, as he stated in the above section that when his students address him with enquiries of “spiritual things”, he does share his personal account on this with them. We met Pawnesh in chapter three when I described our interview unstructured interview at his usual spot by the Ganges. As he was the one to determine the course of conversation, there was no loophole to discuss his opinion about how he advertises for his school. Pawnesh’s narrative also sheds light on the controversy between tradition and modernization of yoga in India today, referred to in the introduction. Where India has seen reanimation of traditional forms of knowledge due to globalization and erosion of tradition, Pawnesh finds himself in a predicament, holding on to what he understands to be ancient and authentic, not wanting to give in to changes of the globalized

world, yet feeling forced to do so. Where the other respondents express necessity for adaptation, and emphasize that it is the intention behind the yoga practice that makes it authentic, Pawnesh seems to refuse that any other way of practice than a non-materialistic, meditative expression of yoga can be considered as authentic and ancient. In that sense, we might say that he agrees with the dominant academic discourse seeing premodern and modern yoga as different. What is also notable here, is that all the other participants exclusively refer to YS as the utmost authority on yoga. Pawnesh is not, as stated, guided by any Sanskrit texts in his practice and he also notes that he never had any teachers. He reports having watched movies and read stories about “high devotees to the gods”, and apart from that, we must assume that the knowledge he has, then is influenced by other yogis that he has identified with and whom he has trusted to pass down credible knowledge. To contextualize Pawnesh’s argument, Jacobsen explain that for ascetic movements developed on the basis of the Upanishads and on early traditions for asceticism and yoga, a conventional life is a hinder for the realization of salvation (moksha).

Yoga Alliance

A final aspect yet to present, is the participant’s narratives about YA. They are all founders of schools recognized by this organization who announces that they have over 76 000 registered yoga teachers, more than 5000 registered yoga schools, and more than 7000 Yoga Alliance education providers (Yoga Alliance 2017c).

First of all, if I would see from a traditional point of view, you cannot set criteria for yoga. Boundaries cannot be set for yoga. But YA have done a great work. YA has made yoga more popular. If YA system was not there, not so many students would come to Rishikesh to study yoga. So, they come here to get the certificate of yoga alliance. And that’s just the starting step, and YA has done a great work to motivate more and more people to become yoga teacher. Now it is not something very difficult. One month, or two months you give of your life, and you can be a yoga teacher. This is a great step by them. With this step, the journey of yoga can start (Shivam).

Rather than opposing YA, despite the fact that they do something Shivam regards as impossible, he regards the organization as a provider of an introduction to yoga.

Yoga Alliance based on USA. Now, Yoga Alliance Canada also. Actually this is useful for USA. The government give some facility to their students if they are registered with YA USA. Then they can take facility, and if the school is registered with YA, so easily student get loan from government, so that's why YA is useful for that. They are authentic in their area. But if you see in India, nobody asks about YA. What is YA. Because in India we did our course for minimum three months, six months, two years. And then after PhD in yoga. We spend lots of time to learn these things and students are coming for four weeks to ten weeks and they become... 200 hours, 500 hours you know? So, this is not the end. This is JUST the beginning. Just the beginning. They are not becoming yogi. 500 hours. They have to keep themselves study. You need to study yoga; the journey must continue. You become old and old, you experience more and more. Still you are learning. Uhm? It is not just read one or two books, asana, my body is flexible I am yogi. No! There is philosophy. You have to know more and more about this. So YA actually just create the beginning, not the real yogis (Arpit).

It is clear that Arpit has put a lot of thought into YA. As Shivam did, Arpit regards YS's courses as a good place to start, yet "just the beginning". Again we see that Arpit seems to use the word "authentic" synonymous with "real", as he did in his anecdote about Ayurveda and the medicine that is authentic if it works.

Well, I don't have any comment for YA. I don't have anything to say. This is a world organization, and we are under the world, and how the world is going... We supposed to go. So, I have nothing to say (Deepak).

I will let that statement speak for itself. We might perhaps think that it has some common undertones with Sumit's narrative below:

Yoga Alliance is actually a non-profit organization in USA. In point of USA, has given them affiliation. So, if you want to teach in USA, you have to be certified by any school which they recognize. That's it. So, that's the history of YA. It's not non-profit. It's just for marketing, and as an owner... I've seen them also... They don't care anything. They care only dollars... If inside thing I tell you, you will laugh! They don't even check certificate. I registered one person, who I know, at that time certificate was not ready. I taken some other certificate and put it, register, and it got registered! [baffled expression] They don't check who's certificate, how many hours, even for 200 hours, I've put 300 hours on certificate because that time I don't have a certificate that I upload there. And they take it. It is just a branding name. They adding lots of dollars for no reason.

Because they are not contributing with that amount they are earning, and they are not contributing anything! No contribution. At least they could contribute something! See on their site how many schools are there. Think thousands. And they pay 100 USD in the beginning, and then I think 50 USD ... And each student pays every year to be a member. More than thousands. Maybe ten thousand students paying. So, they are earning millions dollars in a year. That's that. And they are doing nothing (Sumit).

Sumit strongly contrasts the statements from Shivam and Arpit. Rather than “doing nothing”, Shivam recognize that they contribute by making the knowledge of yoga more accessible. Sumit's displeasure with YA arguably resembles a displeasure with the consumer system as a whole, as YA never lay any restrictions on Sumit's school, but that Sumit still must be a member if he wants the international audience so profitable for his own business. The size of YA and their effects on small private businesses around the world resembles countless other market capitalistic organizations so characteristic for the modern globalization. His statement about validity checks underlines the story about the guesthouse where I stayed who had a “fake YA certificate”.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

This thesis has questioned seven yoga school founders in Rishikesh about what yoga means to them. In their answers, they have shared narratives of how they have experienced yoga in a fusion of tradition and modernization. At first, I aimed to uncover how the founders' specialization in postural yoga would legitimize their claim of teaching traditional and authentic yoga. I referred to Lucia who suggested that the most successful gurus are those who incorporate modern liberal ideals of Western late capitalism, while maintaining “a core of traditionalism”, and I questioned if this was the picture the founders had of their schools. Further, I questioned whether advertising authenticity was more than just a marketing strategy, and if the juxtaposition between modern and ancient traditions would have legitimized reasoning in the cultural context of Rishikesh. Whether advertisements of authenticity is more than a marketing strategy, is no longer a question to be answered. Although it definitely was the case in the guesthouse where I stayed, general guesthouse managers were not subject for research. Through the respondents' narratives, yet another question arose; although everyone had a notion of the meaning of authentic yoga it seemed easier to describe authentic and original traditions in contrast to modern yoga. Would there be any interest in outlining what authentic yoga is if it didn't have a counterpart perceived as inauthentic? A dominant academic discourse suggests that modern postural yoga can be isolated and studied separate from premodern yoga systems. Could it be possible that the rhetoric involving words like ancient and authentic, in addition to being a good marketing strategy, was used because of this discourse rather than despite of it?

Legitimizing Claims for Authenticity

Jain argues that it is mainly Hindu scholarly “antipostural yoga movements” and thinkers that have reacted negative to the profitable yoga market by attempting to exercise power over defining what counts as true, authentic yoga and what amounts to mere commodification or corruption (2015:xvii). Though some of the respondents to this project have higher education within Hindu scholarship, none of them are part of “antipostural yoga movements”. I have shown, however, that all participants have clear opinions on how they define authentic yoga. Besides Pawnesh who opposes modern traditions of yoga, all respondents promote and teach postural yoga. Important values with which the respondents legitimized their claim for authenticity manifested themselves

already in the respondents' background narratives: cultural heritage, family values, guidance by a guru, geographical belonging, spirituality in the land and the Ganges, and the oldest Sanskrit text; the Rigveda. The interrelation between religion, life style, culture, and yoga, is a characteristic with all the respondents, and although they emphasize the non-religious nature of yoga (and that it suits all religions), there was also a tendency to perceive yoga as a way of uniting with God. Further; how would the respondents mediate the relationship between their contemporary postural teachings and the ancient traditions of which they claim to be heir? What is interesting to note, is that the respondents' most prominent reported authority on ancient yoga traditions was the YS of Patanjali. Shivam argued that it cannot be denied that all yoga traditions derive from the YS, and Arpit even claimed that 84 000 asanas derive from the YS. Although this text, as we have seen, only regained popularity in the 19th century, it has ancient mythological origins, hence the mythology is also used to legitimize the claim for authenticity. In addition, we have seen references to postural yoga gurus from the 20th century referred to ancient and authentic. Recalling the 5000 year old *Yoga Kurunta*, the text from which Krishnamacharya supposedly retrieved his teachings, we again see the authority given by mythology.

The respondents also tended to use metaphors to highlight their points about authenticity or the importance of mindful yoga; Manesh explain that yoga unites the powers of the mind like magnifying glass unites the sunrays to burn paper. To explain the difference between authentic and inauthentic, Vishnu shared a metaphor about milk from one's own cow, and milk from the market, claiming the latter not to be real milk. Pawnesh explained how we must go a long way before we can reach spirituality, like all the rivers travel far before they reach the Ganges and become spiritual. Perhaps the most vivid metaphor was Vishnu's way to explain why yoga is more than asana: he referred to "masters" who say that "if yoga with jumping and stretching can give the liberation, because that is what yoga is all about, so all the monkeys could be liberated because monkey they jump all day long and they stretch more." Finally Vishnu also explained that "like how the baby grow from the navel" all the knowledge in the world comes out of the Rigveda.

In the account for the thematic analysis, I presented mantras and sound as themes for coding. I have repeatedly accounted for how we recite mantras in class, and both Sumit and Manesh emphasized the importance of mantras in their background narratives. Jacobsen asserts that one of the most characteristic features of Hinduism is the importance of words composed by sacred sound,

and that to some Hindus, only listening to Sanskrit may be a divine experience (Jacobsen 2010:51). The respondents shared narratives about mantras and sound, but as I aimed for an interview to last no more than two hours, we never had enough time for the participants to elaborate on the mantras, although they had a lot to say. Shivam explains:

All yoga practices work on chitta, mantra is a very beautiful technique to work on mind. Man means the mind. Tra means freedom. The moment you start reciting mantra, your mind becomes free from the past, from the future. Especially mantra being in Sanskrit. First of all you have to become, really, in the very moment, to listen, to see what the person is saying, and to repeat. Sanskrit language is a very scientific language. Every sound that is present in Sanskrit language has a certain effect on our body. And not just any language, any sound. There are many kinds of sound which affect different parts of the body. Similarly, the different kinds of mantra that we do for a yoga class, these are the mantras, the first effect is: they bring you to the present moment, second, they create a receptive aura to learn (Shivam).

I mention this to emphasize that although the present analysis has painted a picture of how the respondents legitimize their claim for authenticity; it is my interpretation that much is yet left unexplored. In that regard it would be interesting to see a similar study conducted among founders of schools and ashrams in Rishikesh who do not speak English. Like my respondents, they live in a town characterized by globalization, yet their attitudes have been less impacted by global discourse. It could also be interesting to see how perspectives would differ in other places in India, or even abroad. For instance, in Goa, South West in India, we can also find a large density of yoga schools in some areas, yet the mythological significance of Hinduism is less prominent.

Intention, Adaptation, and Conservation

I have noted that apart from a seemingly sacred ritual performed by the teacher, the structural basis for a yoga class in Rishikesh does not differ much from the yoga classes that I was used to around Europe or the US. Still tourists who come to Rishikesh, as noted by Norman and by me, deem the experience there more meaningful than at home. Why is that so? They want to discover the roots of yoga, and many in Rishikesh claim that they can give them just that – teachings from the ancient roots of yoga. The respondents to this project have stated with frequency, that authentic yoga is

about the intention: Almost anything can be yoga as long as the intention is right. They refer to a holistic system, and assert that yoga is incomplete without meditation and pranayama. Pawnesh, Deepak, and the school where I did my TTC, also emphasized kriyas. There was a general agreement between the respondents that when only asana, physical fitness, or business is on your mind, there is no yoga. Shivam emphasized that one can be a good asana teacher and yet not be a yoga teacher at all. And Pawnesh, at the most rigid end of the scale of my respondents, claim that modern asana yoga is only “for the bucks” so that he can have the chance to practice the real yoga. Shivam stated that “Along with what the students want, we also give what authentic yoga is”. And similarly, Vishnu emphasizes a synthesis of ancient and modern yoga. Some of the respondents discussed modern new innovative yoga traditions such as yoga in the hammock and dogo, and emphasized that it can all be yoga, as long as the intention is correct. – A correctness that they have learned from various education institutions, gurus in caves, family members, texts, and others.

In the start phase of the fieldwork, I found, as stated, the claims for authentic teachings somewhat contradictive, and even perhaps shallow in the light of the dominant academic discourse separating premodern yoga and modern postural yoga. My initial experience with yoga did not resemble traditions of the past, but rather the traits of improving physical health. Yet, on the other hand, I came to learn that lifestyle, religion and yoga are all intertwined in Rishikesh, calling for an emic account for yoga as a body of religious practice. Initially, I questioned the juxtaposition of modern yoga systems, as well as the claims for authenticity. Since the first established ashram, Kailash Ashram, in Rishikesh opened in 1880, and the Sivananda Ashram and the DLS were established in 1936, Rishikesh has grown with the modernization of yoga. Today, Rishikesh resembles a city where strong family ties and religious beliefs are held high, while the capitalistic and consumer culture is taking root. Viewing postural yoga as a separate tradition is therefore more challenging in the cultural context of Rishikesh. This is also because, to some extent, the ancient religious philosophy is closely tied to everyday life. For instance, the city is vegetarian and alcohol is prohibited. These are not rules experienced as restrictions, but rather traditions resembling yogic philosophy. It is for example a common saying that it is good for your health to get up at sunrise, preferably after having finished sequences of pranayama's. The yogic lifestyle includes renouncing materialistic belongings, restraining from temptations, avoiding indulgences,

practicing solemn silence, eating non-spicy food, and performing a complex systems of kriyas among many others. This lifestyle is encouraged in moderated versions to all “Westerners” residing at the various ashrams.

Essentially, Rishikesh is in a place, as Strauss pointed out, “replete with spiritual wealth”, and although construction work, expansions of big ashrams, and crowded shopping streets characterizes Rishikesh today, the sense of solemn religiosity also characterizes the teachings and lifestyles of many schools and ashrams. In places packed with “westerner women and men”, where yoga mats were almost touching, and where I had thought that words like authentic, ancient, and traditional possibly were implied mostly for marketing purposes, there was still a solemn atmosphere in the room. The teachers often had what I interpreted as a sincere, heartfelt desire to share ancient philosophy, and a desire for us to further understand the wisdom shared to him by lords and Rishis. When visiting classes around town, we often stayed for an hour or more, listening to an unexpected speech by the teachers. This underlines the emphasis given by many of the respondents in the interviews; they offer postural yoga “to make it more interesting” or to attract the tourists, and then try to create an arena where they want to learn more.

Actually, my personal view is: you have to begin from where people are, and you have to take them to where they should be. So begin from there, their means, because then they will be interested in your program. And then in that program, you should be clever enough, be that master who will take them and touch them. And that’s what we’re doing here actually. We are doing here multi style and all these things, showing them the good picture, but when they come inside, they have the real picture. So, this is my personal thing. What I believe (Sumit).

Lucia argues that the reason why gurus (defined by her as teachers of Hindu tradition and yoga) must become innovative, is due to the aggressive marketing and high competition in modern times (Lucia 2014: 224). In the words of Lucia: “Global gurus who emerge from Indic Hindu traditions are highly adaptive religious leaders who tailor their messages to particular times, circumstances, and populations”. She further suggests that contemporary global gurus are some of the most vibrant innovators in the field of Hindu religiosity (Lucia 2014: 221).

What was meant with “let’s try to keep yoga as authentic as possible?” One interpretation is that when the yoga teacher told us to do so, he implied that it should include keeping the right intention. Besides from Sumit and Pawnesh, none of the respondents mentioned the siddhi powers that are

believed to be possible to attain through yoga and extreme concentration; but Arpit emphasized Kundalini energy forces, and Vishnu concluded that all knowledge comes from a divine text accepted as revealed. Manesh and Shivam reports to have been chosen by yoga.

Concluding Remarks

The founders of the yoga schools see themselves as performers of traditional teachings with additional modern innovations. What still remains, is to give an account for the discussion of perspective. Initially, I referred to De Micheli's definition of modern yoga as the "graft of a Western branch onto the Indian tree of yoga", and she further argued that "most of the yoga currently practiced and taught in the West, as well as some contemporary Indian yoga, fit into this category" (De Michelis 2005:2). She further suggests that this is applicable only for *some* contemporary Indian yoga, and not to all. Yoga in Rishikesh is hard to identify a tradition set apart from religious values; despite globalization and the large number of international short-term residents. Singleton highlights a crucial point: "modern transnational yoga was and is a predominantly Anglophone phenomenon", and therefore the majority of his sources are in English (2010:9). All sources I have referred to on the topic of modern postural yoga, except from the respondents, are either European, American or Australian – highlighting Singleton's point, as well as relating to my reflection in chapter three: To me, being a typical picture of a postural yoga practitioner, it was easy to isolate yoga as a postural fitness tradition, as I had no connotations to yoga, and the many implications of the term before the 19th century resembles nothing from my own background and traditions. This also makes it easy to see how scholars also can look at this phenomena as something new and traceable, we can identify it as new because we can see it as something that was never there before; like when yoga is presented in the cultural context of a fitness center in NYC, or in a large open venue in Chile. Rishikesh is where it all melts together; you find the playful acroyoga practitioners at the white beaches along the Ganges, and you see the bars and fences surrounding ashrams where only Brhamin men are allowed entry. The respondents did not seem to identify with statements suggesting that modern yoga systems bear little resemblance to the yoga systems that preceded them- besides Pawnsesh and possibly a large group of others that share his beliefs and values. Postural yoga sure means a commercial commodity in some aspects, but in other aspects it must equally be regarded as part of part of a body of religious practice.

Ethnography is very useful for understanding the mechanics and practical details of Hatha Yoga techniques but less so for understanding their history or that of the principles underlying them, because practitioners' reports of both may be skewed by sectarian interpretations and other vicissitudes (Mallinson 2011:771). What this ethnographical research has done, however, is to present *how* reports about authentic yoga might be skewed right in the watershed between the most modern popularized forms of transnational postural yoga, and the most sacred and mythological yoga places in the world. Many scholars, including Carrette and King as demonstrated above, and Olav Hammer argues that yoga has become reduced (Hammer 2001:160) Yet one must admit that through its so called reduction, or the adaptation, it has also been conserved and promoted. Some argue that YA makes unjust requirements about yoga, capitalizing on religious values, while others, including both Shivam and Arpit, recognize that they are promoting yoga and making it more accessible to a global audience. Either way, yoga depends on the context in which it is used, and to the respondents the definition of yoga is deeply rooted in traditional values and beliefs.

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Appendix A

A random selection of schools from popular booking pages found on google, italicized sections, my emphasis.

Rishikesh School of Yoga:

At Rishikesh School of Yoga, we offer 200 & 300 Hour Yoga Teacher Trainings registered with Yoga alliance USA. We also offer daily drop-in classes, Yoga Retreats & Yoga Workshops. Our teachers come from all over the world and each one offers a priceless contribution to the world of Yoga. *We dedicate ourselves to teaching and promoting yoga in its most authentic and holistic form while remaining relevant to the modern needs.* Available from: <<https://www.indianyogaassociation.com/>> [Accessed May 23rd 2017].

Bindhusar School of Yoga:

Bindusar yoga method is a fusion of ancient authentic wisdom (Yoga, Vedanta and Tantra) and modern revelation in form of human anatomy and physiology & psychology. It is suited for people looking either health oriented goals or deeper meaning of their existence. Available from: <<http://www.bindusaryoga.com/about> - downloaded 04.11.16> [Accessed May 23rd 2017].

Rishikesh Yogpeeth:

Yoga school Rishikesh Yogpeeth came into the existence in the year 2005 and since then it's *involved in spreading the ancient wisdom of Yogic Art and Science and its related disciplines and practices.* Rishikesh Yogpeeth is registered under Society act of India since 2005 and got registered with Yoga Alliance, USA in the Year 2009. Available from: <<https://www.rishikeshyogpeeth.com/>> [Accessed May 23rd 2017].

Shitva Tattva Yoga:

Shiva Tattva Yoga is *dedicated to spread the ancient knowledge of Yoga, Meditation and Ayurveda in its traditional form.* As a charitable yoga organization, we are registered under the Indian Trusts Registration Act. Shiva Tattva Yoga Foundation (STYF) works to help

poor children in India and organizes yoga workshops, yoga teacher training courses and yoga retreats in India and internationally. *We teach the right techniques and hidden meaning of different styles of yoga like Hatha, Vinyasa, Ashtanga, Shivananda and Kundalini Yoga in a most authentic way.* Available from: <http://www.shivatattvayoga.com/about-shiva-tattva-yoga/> [Accessed May 23rd 2017].

Association Yoga and Meditation:

Welcome to AYM School, the oldest, most authentic Yoga Teacher Training School/Ashram in Rishikesh. We are a truly dedicated school which provides our students with the most original, humbling experience in India, offering traditional and ancient yoga in Rishikesh. We have some of the most knowledgeable yoga masters in India, teaching students of all levels, at a high standard. Our courses include Philosophy, Asana Alignment, Pranayama, Meditation, Human Anatomy Physiology and teaching practicum. Available from: <https://www.indianyogaassociation.com/> [Accessed May 23rd 2017].

Yoga Vinnie:

Our studio boasts of spirituality located on the banks of the mother Ganga.” Deep Knowledge of Yoga. On our Yoga Teachers Training Course, you will get to *experience a true insight of traditional yoga and its culture. Alongside the learning of the Philosophy of Yoga, you will be guided with ease, through the experience of a true Yogic lifestyle for the entire month.* A complete unique concept of Yoga is provided to our disciples where you will be made to feel, by taking your senses to a condition of awareness, you are immersing yourself completely into the art of Yoga. <https://yogavinirishikesh.com/drop-in-yoga-class/> [Accessed May 23rd 2017].

Appendix B

Lists of online advertisements for yoga schools where schedules, number of students, and marketing rhetoric can be found.

- Aboutindia.com:
<http://goindia.about.com/od/spiritualplaces/tp/Top-10-Rishikesh-Ashrams.htm>
- Bookyogaretreats.com:
<https://www.bookyogaretreats.com/all/d/asia-and-oceania/india/rishikesh> (187)
- Mytourindia:
<https://www.tourmyindia.com/blog/top-ten-yoga-training-centers-rishikesh/>
- Tripadvisor:
<https://www.tripadvisor.com/Travel-g580106-c202160/Rishikesh:India:Yoga.Teacher.Training.html>
- Yoga Directory
<http://www.yoga-centers-directory.net/india/rishikesh.htm>

Appendix C

Project Discription

Yoga has a long history and a wide complexity. From being a spiritual concept in the East, it has spread to gain footing internationally and many people interpret yoga in different ways.

Many scholars (Mark Singleton, Andrea Jain, De Michelies, David G. White and more) suggest studied the concept of yoga and they make a distinction between what is modern yoga and what is traditional/classical/authentic yoga.

Many ashrams in Rishikesh offer the teachings of ancient yoga. I am in Rishikesh to understand more about the meaning of this. What is ancient/authentic yoga according to the Indian Yoga teachers in Rishikesh? I have heard what scholars are saying, now I want to hear the voices of yoga teachers in the capital of yoga. Share their voice with the readers of my thesis.

I will conduct 8 – 10 interviews, using audio- recorder and in the finished publication, the participants will remain 100 % anonymous (unless there is a desire to be named). No personally identifiable information will be given and all interview material will only be listened to by the interviewer and will be deleted when the thesis finish in May 2017. Participants may listen to their own recordings, and participants may also get the chance to read the transcribed interviews, both within three weeks after the interview. If desirable, the study will be available to respondents when it is finished.

Diploma for Completed 200 hours TTC

