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MIRCEA ELIADE

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# YOGA

Immortality and Freedom

*Translated from the French by*  
WILLARD R. TRASK

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*To the memory of*  
*my illustrious and venerable patron*

Maharaja Sir Manindra Chandra Nandi of Kasimbazar, K.C.I.E.

*my guru*

Professor Surendranath Dasgupta

PRINCIPAL, SANSKRIT COLLEGE, CALCUTTA

*and my teacher*

Nae Ionescu

UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST

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## FOREWORD

There is no more absorbing story than that of the discovery and interpretation of India by Western consciousness. I refer not only to its geographical, linguistic, and literary discovery, to expeditions and excavations—in short, to everything that constitutes the foundation for Western Indianism—but above all to the various cultural adventures inspired by the growing revelation of Indian languages, myths, and philosophies. Some of these cultural adventures have been described by Raymond Schwab in his fine book *La Renaissance orientale*. But the discovery of India is still in progress, and nothing entitles us to suppose that it is nearing its end. For the analysis of a foreign culture principally reveals what was sought in it or what the seeker was already prepared to discover. The discovery of India will not be accomplished until the day the creative forces of the West shall have run irremediably dry.

When spiritual values are in question, the contribution of philology, indispensable though it may be, does not exhaust the richness of the object. No doubt it would have been useless to attempt to understand Buddhism so long as the texts were not accurately edited, so long as the various Buddhistic philologies were not instituted. The fact remains that a comprehension of that vast and complex spiritual phenomenon was not infallibly guaranteed by the possession of such excellent tools as critical editions, polyglot dictionaries, historical monographs, and so on. When one approaches an exotic spirituality, one understands principally what one is predestined to understand by one's own vocation, by one's own cultural orientation and that of the historical moment to which one belongs. This truism is of general application. The image that our nineteenth century created of "inferior societies" was largely derived from the positivistic, antireligious, and ametaphysical attitude entertained by a number of worthy explorers and ethnol-

ogists who had approached the "savages" with the ideology of a contemporary of Comte, Darwin, or Spencer. Among the "primitives" they everywhere discovered "fetishism" and "religious infantilism"—simply because they could *see* nothing else. Only the resurgence of European metaphysical thought at the beginning of the present century, the religious renaissance, the many and various gains made by depth psychology, by poetry, by microphysics, have made it possible to understand the spiritual horizon of "primitives," the structure of their symbols, the function of their myths, the maturity of their mysticisms.

In the case of India the difficulties were even greater. On the one hand, the tools had to be forged, the philologies pursued, on the other, choice had to be made of the aspects of Indian spirituality that were most penetrable by the Western spirit. But, as was to be expected, what appeared to be most penetrable was precisely what answered to the most pressing needs of Western culture. It was chiefly interest in comparative Indo-Āryan philology that brought Sanskrit to the fore as a subject of study about the middle of the nineteenth century—just as, a generation or two earlier, minds had been stimulated to turn to India by idealistic philosophy or by the charm of the primordial images that German romanticism had just rediscovered. During the second half of the century, India was chiefly interpreted in terms of naturistic mythology and of the cultural fashion thereby launched in Europe and America. Finally, the resurgence of sociology and cultural anthropology in the first quarter of our own century inspired new perspectives.

All these experiments had their value, for they corresponded to problems natural to European culture. The various methods of approach practiced by Western scholars, though not always successful in revealing all the true values of Indian spirituality, were nevertheless of service. Little by little, India began to assert its presence in the consciousness of the West. For a considerable period, it is true, that presence was preponderantly manifested by comparative grammars. It was but rarely and timidly that India made its appearance in histories of philosophy—where, in accord-

ance with the fashion prevailing at the moment, its place alternated between German idealism and "prelogical mentality." When interest in sociology became general, there was a great deal of solemn criticism of the caste system. But all these attitudes find their explanation in the horizons of modern Western culture. When a culture bestowed high priority among its problems upon the explanation of a linguistic law or of a social structure, India suffered no diminution by being invoked to solve one or another etymology or to illustrate one or another stage of social evolution—indeed, this was rather a mark of respect and admiration. In any case, the modes of approach were not bad in themselves, they were merely too specialized, and their chances of revealing the various contents of a great and complex spirituality were proportionately limited. Fortunately, methods are subject to improvement, and the failures of the past were not wasted—successive generations soon learned not to repeat the errors of their predecessors. We need only measure the progress in the study of Indo-European mythology from the time of Max Muller, and we shall realize the advantage that a Georges Dumézil has been able to gain, not only from comparative philology, but also from sociology, the history of religions, and ethnology, in presenting an infinitely more precise and infinitely more fertile image of the great categories of Indo-European mythical thought.

Everything leads to the belief that, at the present moment, a more accurate knowledge of Indian thought has become possible. India has entered the course of history, and, rightly or wrongly, Western consciousness tends to take a more serious view of the philosophies of peoples who hold a place in history. On the other hand, especially since the last generation of philosophers, Western consciousness is more and more inclined to define itself with reference to the problems of time and history. For over a century, the greater part of the scientific and philosophical effort of the West has been devoted to the factors that "condition" the human being. It has been shown how and to what degree man is conditioned by his physiology, his heredity, his social milieu, the cultural ideology

in which he shares, his unconscious—and above all by history, by his historical moment and his own personal history. This last discovery of Western thought—that man is essentially a temporal and historical being, that he is, and can only be, what history has made him—still dominates Western philosophy. Certain philosophical trends even conclude from it that the only worthy and valid task proposed to man is to assume this temporality and this historicity frankly and fully, for any other choice would be equivalent to an escape into the abstract and nonauthentic and would be at the price of the sterility and death that inexorably punish any betrayal of history.

It does not fall to us to discuss these theses. We may, however, remark that the problems that today absorb the Western mind also prepare it for a better understanding of Indian spirituality, indeed, they incite it to employ, for its own philosophical effort, the millennial experience of India. Let us explain. It is the *human condition*, and above all the temporality of the human being, that constitutes the object of the most recent Western philosophy. It is this temporality that makes all the other “conditionings” possible and that, in the last analysis, makes man a “conditioned being,” an indefinite and evanescent series of “conditions.” Now, this problem of the “conditioning” of man (and its corollary, rather neglected in the West: his “deconditioning”) constitutes the central problem of Indian thought. From the Upanisads onward, India has been seriously preoccupied with but one great problem—the structure of the human condition. (Hence it has been said, and not without reason, that all Indian philosophy has been, and still is, “existentialist.”) The West, therefore, might well learn (1) what India thinks of the multiple “conditionings” of the human being, (2) how it has approached the problem of the temporality and historicity of man, (3) what solution it has found for the anxiety and despair that inevitably follow upon consciousness of temporality, the matrix of all “conditionings.”

With a rigor unknown elsewhere, India has applied itself to analyzing the various conditionings of the human being. We hasten

to add that it has done so not in order to arrive at a precise and coherent explanation of man (as, for example, did nineteenth-century Europe when it believed that it explained man by his hereditary or social conditioning), but in order to learn how far the conditioned zones of the human being extend and *to see if anything else exists beyond these conditionings*. Hence it is that, long before depth psychology, the sages and ascetics of India were led to explore the obscure zones of the unconscious. They had found that man's physiological, social, cultural, and religious conditionings were comparatively easy to delimit and hence to master, the great obstacles to the ascetic and contemplative life arose from the activity of the unconscious, from the *samskāras* and the *vāsanās*—"im-pregnations," "residues," "latencies"—that constitute what depth psychology calls the contents and structures of the unconscious. It is not, however, this pragmatic anticipation of certain modern psychological techniques that is valuable, it is its employment for the "deconditioning" of man. Because, for India, knowledge of the systems of "conditioning" could not be an end in itself, it was not knowing them that mattered, but mastering them, if the contents of the unconscious were worked upon, it was in order to "burn" them. We shall see by what methods Yoga conceives that it arrives at these surprising results. And it is primarily these results which are of interest to Western psychologists and philosophers.

Let us not be misunderstood. We have no intention of inviting Western scholars to practice Yoga (which, by the way, is not so easy as some amateurs are wont to suggest) or of proposing that the various Western disciplines practice yogic methods or adopt the yogic ideology. Another point of view seems to us far more fertile—to study, as attentively as possible, the results obtained by such methods of exploring the psyche. A whole immemorial experience of human behavior in general here offers itself to Western investigators. It would be at least unwise in them not to take advantage of it.

As we said earlier, the problem of the human condition—that is, the temporality and historicity of the human being—is at the very



center of Western thought, and the same problem has preoccupied Indian philosophy from its beginnings. It is true that we do not there find the terms "history" and "historicity" in the senses that they bear in the West today, and that we very seldom find the term "temporality." In fact, it was impossible that these concepts should be found under the particular designations of "history" and "historicity." But what matters is not identity in philosophical terminology, it is enough if the problems are homologizable. Now, it has long been known that Indian thought accords considerable importance to the concept of *māyā*, which has been translated—and with good reason—as "illusion," "cosmic illusion," "mirage," "magic," "becoming," "irreality," and the like. But, looking more closely, we see that *māyā* is illusion because it does not participate in Being, because it is "becoming," "temporality"—cosmic becoming, to be sure, but also historical becoming. It is possible, then, that India has been not unaware of the relation between illusion, temporality, and human suffering. Although its sages have generally explained human suffering in cosmic terms, we realize, if we read them with the attention they deserve, that they were thinking particularly of human suffering as a "becoming" conditioned by the structures of temporality. We have touched upon this problem elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> and we shall have occasion to return to it. What modern Western philosophy terms "being situated," "being constituted by temporality and historicity," has its counterpart, in Indian philosophy, in "existence in *māyā*." If we can homologize the two philosophical horizons—Indian and Western—everything that India has thought on the subject of *māyā* has a certain timeliness for us today. This becomes apparent if, for example, we read the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Its analysis of human existence is conducted in a language that is familiar to us, *māyā* is not only cosmic illusion but also, and above all, historicity, not only existence in the eternal cosmic becoming but above all existence in time and history. For

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "Symbolisme religieux et angoisse" in the collective volume *L'Angoisse du temps présent et les devoirs de l'esprit* [For full references, see the List of Works Cited.]

the *Bhagavad Gītā*, as in some measure for Christianity, the problem presented itself in these terms how shall we resolve the paradoxical situation created by the twofold fact that man, on the one hand, finds himself *in* time, given over to history, and that, on the other hand, he knows that he will be “damned” if he allows himself to be exhausted by temporality and historicity, that, consequently, he must at all costs find *in this world* a road that issues upon a transhistorical and atemporal plane? The solutions proposed by the *Bhagavad Gītā* will be discussed later. What we wish to emphasize now is that all these solutions represent various applications of Yoga.

Here again, then, we encounter Yoga. For the fact is that, to the third question that is of concern to Western philosophy (the question, that is, what solution India proposes for the anxiety produced by our discovery of our temporality and historicity, the means by which one can remain in the world without letting oneself be exhausted by time and history), the answers offered by Indian thought all more or less directly imply some knowledge of Yoga. Hence it is apparent what familiarity with this problem can mean to Western investigators and philosophers. To repeat it is not a matter of purely and simply accepting one of the solutions proposed by India. A spiritual value is not acquired after the fashion of a new make of automobile. Above all, it is not a matter of philosophical syncretism, or of “Indianization,” still less of the detestable “spiritual” hybridism inaugurated by the Theosophical Society and continued, in aggravated forms, by the countless pseudomorphs of our time. The problem is more serious: it is essential that we know and understand a thought that has held a place of the first importance in the history of universal spirituality. And it is essential that we know it *now*. For, on the one hand, it is from *now* on that, any cultural provincialism having been outstripped by the very course of history, we are forced—Westerners and non-Westerners alike—to think in terms of universal history and to forge universal spiritual values. And, on the other hand, it is *now* that the problem of man’s situation in the world dominates the philosophical conscious-

ness of Europe—and, to repeat, this problem is at the very center of Indian thought

Perhaps this philosophical dialogue will not be carried on, especially at first, without some disappointments. A number of Western investigators and philosophers may find the Indian analyses rather oversimplified and the proposed solutions ineffectual. Any technical language that is dependent upon a certain spiritual tradition always remains a jargon. Western philosophers may perhaps find the jargon of Indian philosophy outmoded, lacking in precision, un-serviceable. But all these risks to which the dialogue is subject are of minor importance. The great discoveries of Indian thought will in the end be recognized, under and despite the philosophic jargon. It is impossible, for example, to disregard one of India's greatest discoveries—that of consciousness as witness, of consciousness freed from its psychophysiological structures and their temporal conditioning, the consciousness of the "liberated" man, of him, that is, who has succeeded in emancipating himself from temporality and thereafter knows the true, inexpressible freedom. The conquest of this absolute freedom, of perfect spontaneity, is the goal of all Indian philosophies and mystical techniques, but it is above all through Yoga, through one of the many forms of Yoga, that India has held that it can be assured. This is the chief reason we have thought it useful to write a comparatively full exposition of the theory and practices of Yoga, to recount the history of its forms, and to define its place in Indian spirituality as a whole.

It was after three years of study at the University of Calcutta (1928–31) under the direction of Professor Surendranath Dasgupta, and a residence of six months (1931) in the *āśram* of Rishikesh, Himālaya, that we entered upon the composition of this book. A first version, written in English, translated into Romanian by the author, and retranslated into French by some friends, was published in 1936, under the title *Yoga. Essai sur les origines de la mystique indienne*. Together with faults due to youth and inexperience, this version suffered from unfortunate misunderstandings

resulting from the double translation, in addition, the text was disfigured by a large number of linguistic and typographical errors. Despite these serious imperfections, the work was well received by Indianists, the reviews by Louis de la Vallée Poussin, Jean Przyluski, Heinrich Zimmer, V. Papesso, to cite only those who have since died, long ago encouraged us to prepare a new edition. The corrections and the added material have resulted in a text that differs considerably from that of the 1936 publication. Except for a few paragraphs, the book has been entirely rewritten in order to adapt it as much as possible to our present views. (A portion of this new version was used in a little book published in 1948 *Techniques du Yoga*.) The bibliographies and the summaries of the present position of research in regard to the various questions, the details demanded by certain more special aspects of the problem, and, in general, all the technical discussions have been brought together at the end of the book in the form of short appendixes. We have sought to present a book that should be accessible to nonspecialists, without, however, departing from strict scientific practice, in the documentation collected at the end of the volume, Indianists will find supplementary material and bibliographical items. Need we add that none of the bibliographies is exhaustive?

We have used existing translations of Sanskrit and Pāli texts whenever good ones were available. If in translating the *Yoga-sūtras* and their commentaries we sometimes deviate from current interpretations, we do so in view of the oral teaching of our Hindu masters, especially of the resident Surendranath Dasgupta, with whom we translated and discussed all the important texts of the *yoga-darśana*.

In its present form, this book is addressed especially to historians of religions, psychologists, and philosophers. The greater part of it is devoted to an exposition of the various forms of yogic technique and of their history. Excellent books are available on the system of Patañjali—notably those by Dasgupta, hence we have not considered it necessary to discuss this subject at length. The same is true of the techniques of Buddhist meditation, for which

an abundant critical literature already exists. Instead, we have emphasized less known or inadequately studied aspects—the ideas, the symbolism, and the methods of Yoga, as they are expressed in tantrism, in alchemy, in folklore, in the aboriginal devotion of India.

We have dedicated this work to the memory of our protector, the Maharajah Sir Manindra Chandra Nandi of Kasimbazar, who made our residence in India possible by awarding us a scholarship, and to the memory of our most cherished masters—Nae Ionescu and Surendranath Dasgupta. To the teaching of the first we owe our philosophical initiation and orientation. As to Surendranath Dasgupta, not only did he lead us into the very center of Indian thought, but for three years he was our professor of Sanskrit, our master, and our *guru*. May all three rest in the peace of their faith!

We began the preparation of this present edition long ago, but we should not have been able to finish it except for a happy combination of circumstances. By according us a research grant, the Bollingen Foundation, of New York, allowed us to devote several years to the present work, may the Trustees of the Foundation accept our most sincere acknowledgments here. It is thanks to our dear friends Dr. René Laforgue and Délia Laforgue, who so tactfully put their house at our disposal, that, since 1951, we have been able to work in un hoped-for conditions, may they rest assured of our most sincere gratitude.

MIRCEA ELIADE

*Paris, September 15, 1954*

POSTSCRIPT

For the present edition, all quotations from the *Yoga-sūtras* and the commentaries on them and all texts of which reliable English translations do not exist have been translated directly from Sanskrit into English. We have also added a number of recent bibliographical references.

M E

*Saint-Cloud, August, 1957*

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# YOGA

*Immortality and Freedom*



# The Doctrines of Yoga

## *Point of Departure*

FOUR basic and interdependent concepts, four “kinetic ideas,” bring us directly to the core of Indian spirituality. They are *karma*, *māyā*, *nirvāna*, and *yoga*. A coherent history of Indian thought could be written starting from any one of these basic concepts, the other three would inevitably have to be discussed. In terms of Western philosophy, we can say that, from the post-Vedic period on, India has above all sought to understand

✓(1) The law of universal causality, which connects man with the cosmos and condemns him to transmigrate indefinitely. This is the law of karma

✓(2) The mysterious process that engenders and maintains the cosmos and, in so doing, makes possible the “eternal return” of existences. This is *māyā*, cosmic illusion, endured (even worse—accorded validity) by man as long as he is blinded by ignorance (*avidyā*)

✓(3) Absolute reality, “situated” somewhere beyond the cosmic illusion woven by *māyā* and beyond human experience as conditioned by *karma*, pure Being, the Absolute, by whatever name it may be called—the Self (*ātman*), *brahman*, the unconditioned, the transcendent, the immortal, the indestructible, *nirvāna*, etc

✓(4) The means of attaining to Being, the effectual techniques for gaining liberation. This corpus of means constitutes Yoga properly speaking



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