



Part Five

Modern Transformations



Modern Postural Yoga

26A

Fakire und Fakirtum im Alten und Modernern Indien

Richard Schmidt
Germany, 1907
Book, 24.8 × 34.3 cm
General Collections, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, BL2015.F2 S3

26B

Yogasopana Purvacatushka

Narayana Ghamande
Tukarama Book Depot, Bombay, India, 1951
Book, 22 × 22 cm
National Library of Medicine, QT 255 G411y

26C

Surya Namaskars

Apa Pant
Orient Longmans, Bombay, India, 1970 (1929)
Book, 21 × 27.3 cm (open)
General Collections, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, RA 781.P28

26D

The Ten-Point Way to Health: Surya Namaskars

Balrasahib Pandit Pratinidhi, Rajah of Aundh
Edited by Louise Morgan
J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., London, 1938
Book, 18.3 × 12.6 × 1.8 cm
Collection of Kenneth and Joyce Robbins

26E

Massage and Exercises Combined

Albrecht Jensen
New York, United States, 1920
Book, 25 × 26 cm
General Collections, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, RM 721.J4

26F

The Yoga Body Illustrated

M. R. Jambunathan
Jambunathan Book Depot, Madras, India, 1941
Book, 19 × 19 cm
General Collections, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, RA781.7 J35

26G

Yoga Mimansa

Vol. 1, no. 3, October 1925
Shrimat Kuvalayananda, ed.
Kaivalyadhama Institute, Lonavla, India
Periodical (quarterly), 23.5 × 16.1 cm
National Library of Medicine, W1 Y0661

26H

Yoga Mimansa

Vol. 2, no. 4, July 1926
Shrimat Kuvalayananda, ed.
Kaivalyadhama Institute, Lonavla, India
Periodical (quarterly), 23.5 × 16.1 cm
National Library of Medicine, W1 Y0661

26I

T. Krishnamacharya Asanas

India, Mysore, 1938
Sponsored by Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodiyar
Digital copy of a lost black-and-white film, 57 min.
Courtesy of Dan McGuire

Visual genealogies of yoga are rarely seamless, revealing themselves most clearly at times of change, through “visual eruptions”¹ of earlier images into the present. Nowhere are these changes and eruptions more apparent than in the emergence of “modern postural yoga.”² The visual record suggests that what we take for granted today in modern yoga—the emphases on *asana* (posture), *vinyasa* (sequential movement), and even specific sequences (such as *surya namaskar* or sun salutation)—are neither millennia old nor rooted in ancient texts, but of relatively recent vintage. It also suggests that the rapid expansion of print technologies and the ready availability of photography and film in the first decades of the twentieth century not only made yoga accessible to mass audiences, they enabled the visualization of postures, sequences, and yogic bodies in specific ways that transformed practice.³

One of the earliest illustrated compilations of yoga *asanas* comes from an unlikely source: a 1907 history of fakirs in German by Richard Schmidt titled *Fakire und Fakirtum im Alten und Modernern India*. *Fakire und Fakirtum* was unusual because it included not only negative perceptions of yogis as “petty thieves and swindlers,” as was common in Western popular media and travelogues of the time, but also a reclamation of classical, text-based yoga.⁴ Its comprehensive account of hatha yoga included eighty-seven watercolors of *asanas* drawing on artistic styles of early nineteenth-century illustrated manuscripts, such as the *Jogapradipika* painted in the Kangra style or the Mysore Palace’s Tanjore-style *Sritattvanidhi*.⁵

Each *asana* in *Fakire und Fakirtum* is isolated and labeled, as shown in plates 2 and 3 (cat. 26a), in which two figures, clad in simple orange and white dhotis, perform *simhasana* (lion pose) and *padmasana* (lotus pose), identified in Devanagari script above each image. The watercolor medium and unpainted

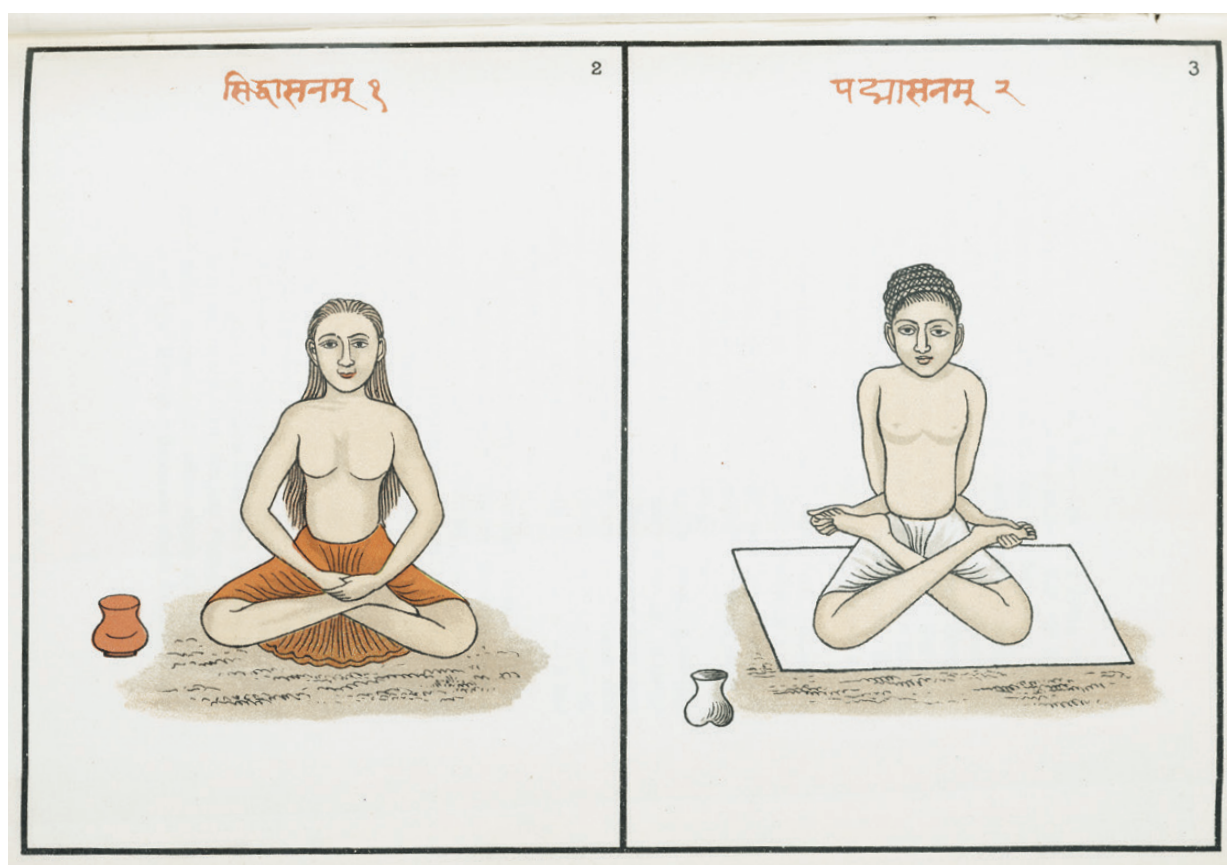
ground is typical of nineteenth-century Company School paintings, which native artists produced for foreign patrons (see cats. 20a–d). Seen individually, the paintings are unremarkable, executed in what Partha Mitter calls the “conceptual mode of art followed by Indian artists since antiquity”⁶: shallow, flat, two-dimensional outlines of figures that lack Western perspective. But, taken together, *Fakire und Fakirtum*’s watercolors offer an expanded visual archive of the classical *asanas* outlined in medieval hatha yoga texts, such as *Hathapradipika* and *Gheranda Samhita*. This archive was possibly the earliest inspiration for Indian yoga pioneers like Swami Kuvalayananda and T. Krishnamacharya, who developed what would become modern postural yoga practice.⁷

Schmidt’s *Fakire und Fakirtum* can be seen as a precursor of the instructional manuals of *asanas* published in the 1920s, when figurative, two-dimensional, conceptual models gave way to

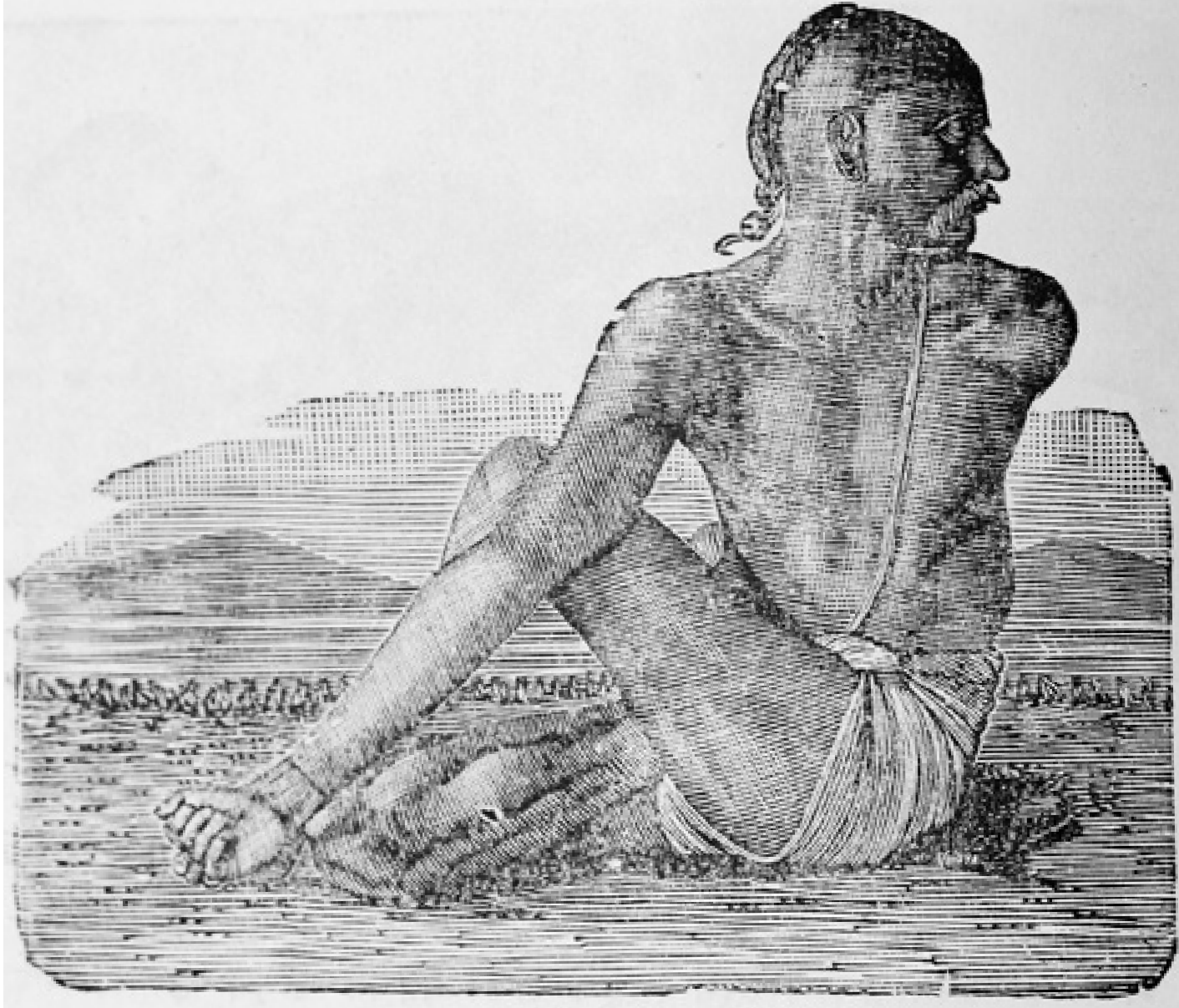
the naturalistic, objective representations of photographic realism as yoga was assimilated into the modern. A key transitional text in this visual history is *Yogasopana Purvacatushka*, compiled by Yogi Ghamande in 1905—described by Mark Singleton as “perhaps the first and only self-help yoga manual to use this (half-tone block print) reproduction technique.”⁸ *Yogasopana* (literally, “stairway to heaven”) includes thirty-seven detailed black-and-white line drawings of *asanas*, all modeled by Ghamande himself.⁹ Shown here (cat. 26b) is a detail of *matsyendrasana* (lord of the fish pose) with all the subtle gradations of light and shade needed to render a naturalistic body. *Yogasopana* broke new ground in depicting naturalistic, muscled, yogic bodies, prefiguring photographic *asana* manuals by two decades.¹⁰

Yogasopana is particularly important to a visual genealogy of yoga because it was conceived not just as a practical manual but as a work of art.¹¹ More than

26a *Fakire und Fakirtum*
in *Alten und Modernern*
Indien



११ अथ मत्स्येन्द्रासनविधिः ।



26b Yogasopana
Purvacatushka

other illustrated yoga texts, it embodies the aesthetic intersection of modern hatha yoga representation and modern Indian art. The drawings mark a clear departure from the conceptual, subtle body of earlier artistic renderings toward the Western, “perceptual” model popularized by Raja Ravi Varma.¹² Given Varma’s pioneering use of chromolithographic techniques to make available cheap naturalistic reproductions of his mythological art, it is not surprising to learn that *Yogasopana*’s half-tone blocks were in fact crafted by his clerk, Purushottam Sadasiv Joshi. A clear institutional intersection between modern art and modern yoga is visible here: Jaganmohan Palace, home to the first gallery of modern art in India, the Mysore *chitrasala* (picture hall), also housed the most influential studio of modern postural yoga in the twentieth century, namely T. Krishnamacharya’s famous *yogasala* (yoga hall).¹³

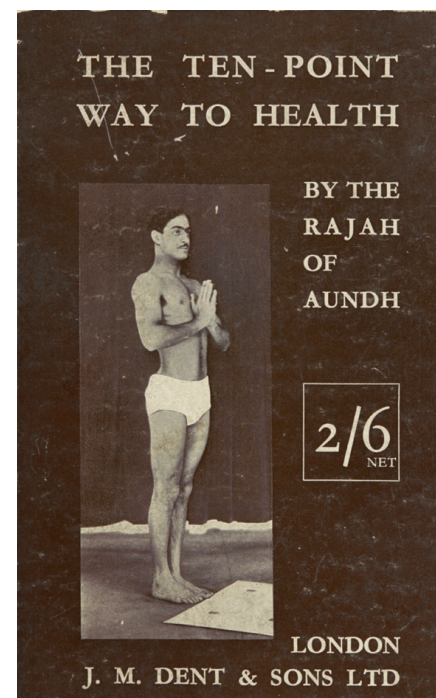
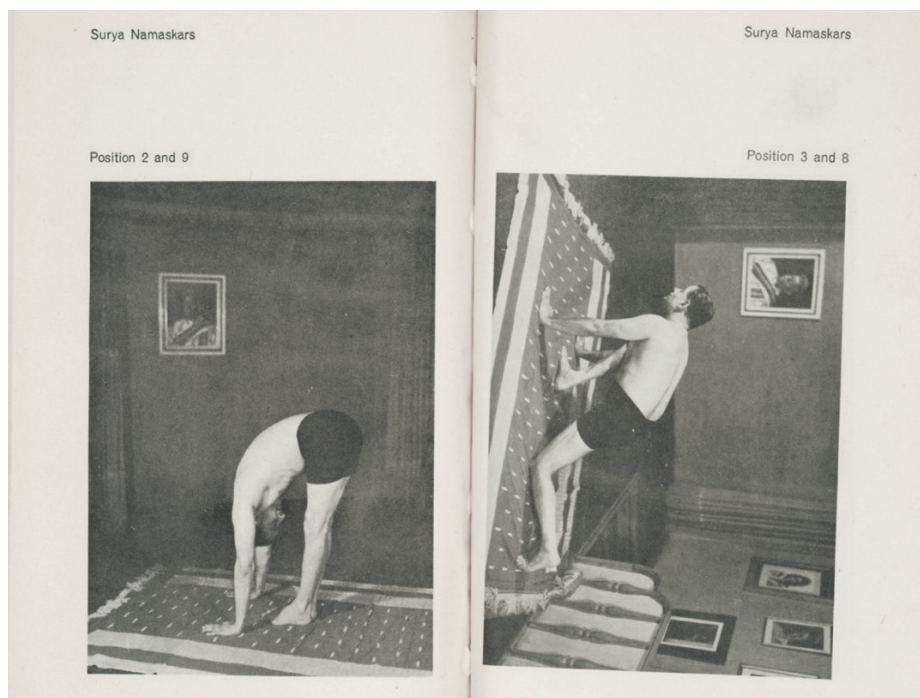
As with art, so with reinventions of *asana*. If there is a single text (and eponymous *asana* series) in the early twentieth century that embodies the

intersection of yoga, bodybuilding, and physical culture through an *asana* sequence, it is Pratinidhi Pant’s *Surya Namaskars*, first published in 1929 and revised and republished five times before 1940.¹⁴ The book’s title refers to the sun salutation exercise that may well be the single best-recognized *asana* sequence or yoga meme in postural yoga today. It is routinely invoked by contemporary practitioners as an ancient feature of Indian civilization, although it is thoroughly modern.

While it is often difficult to trace the exact genealogy of specific sequences, historians agree that the creation of the modern *surya namaskar* system can be attributed to Pratinidhi Pant, who was the raja of Aundh.¹⁵ Pant chose to illustrate the first edition of *Surya Namaskars* with monochromatic prints of schematic, two-dimensional figures performing ten *asanas* in the original series. Later editions include photographs of all ten *asanas*, evidence of the new photographic realism that was changing perceptions of yogic bodies in the early twentieth century. Seen here are the

26c *Surya Namaskars*

26d *The Ten-Point Way to Health: Surya Namaskars*





THE AUTHOR

MASSAGE & EXERCISES COMBINED

A PERMANENT PHYSICAL
CULTURE COURSE FOR MEN
WOMEN AND CHILDREN

HEALTH-GIVING, VITALIZING
PROPHYLATIC, BEAUTIFYING

A NEW SYSTEM OF THE CHARACTERISTIC
ESSENTIALS OF GYMNASTIC AND INDIAN
YOGIS CONCENTRATION EXERCISES COMBINED
WITH SCIENTIFIC MASSAGE MOVEMENTS

WITH 86 ILLUSTRATIONS
AND
DEEP BREATHING EXERCISES

BY
ALBRECHT JENSEN
FORMERLY IN CHARGE OF MEDICAL MASSAGE CLINICS AT
POLYCLINIC HOSPITAL AND OTHER HOSPITALS, NEW YORK

1920
NEW YORK, N. Y.

ALBRECHT JENSEN,
220 WEST 42ND STREET
NEW YORK

THE YOGA-BODY

1. TREE.



Stand erect like a tree in a garden. Join the two palms of your hand together. Look straight. Keep your mind clear from all worries.

This position is to be immediately followed by the accompanying six important poses, all of which are to be done at a stretch.

2. BOW.

Bend down your body. Let your two palms rest on the ground, placing your face on the knee, taking care that no part of your limbs below the navel is given any movement. Draw your stomach in by your in-breath.

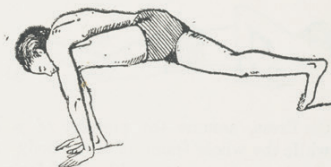
It may not be possible for you in the early stages to place the palms and fingers fully on the ground. Do what you can now and try to achieve it slowly by constant practice.



PRESS

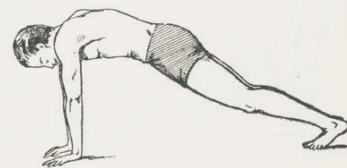
43

3. STRETCH.



This pose is little more difficult to perform. Planting the two palms firmly as previously suggested in the second pose, stretch one of your legs back and let it stand on its toes leaving the other leg to stand parallel with the vertical arms as shown in the illustration.

4. PRESS.



Let the other leg also go back and stand on their toes. Throw all your weight on your forearms pressing the palms firmly on the ground.

In assuming the pose as illustrated, do not give any movement to your head and see that your hands stand straight.

cover photograph from a 1938 edition by Pant, titled *The Ten-Point Way to Health* (cat. 26d), and photographic sequence of *asana* positions 2 and 3 from a later, instructional edition of *Surya Namaskars* (cat. 26c).

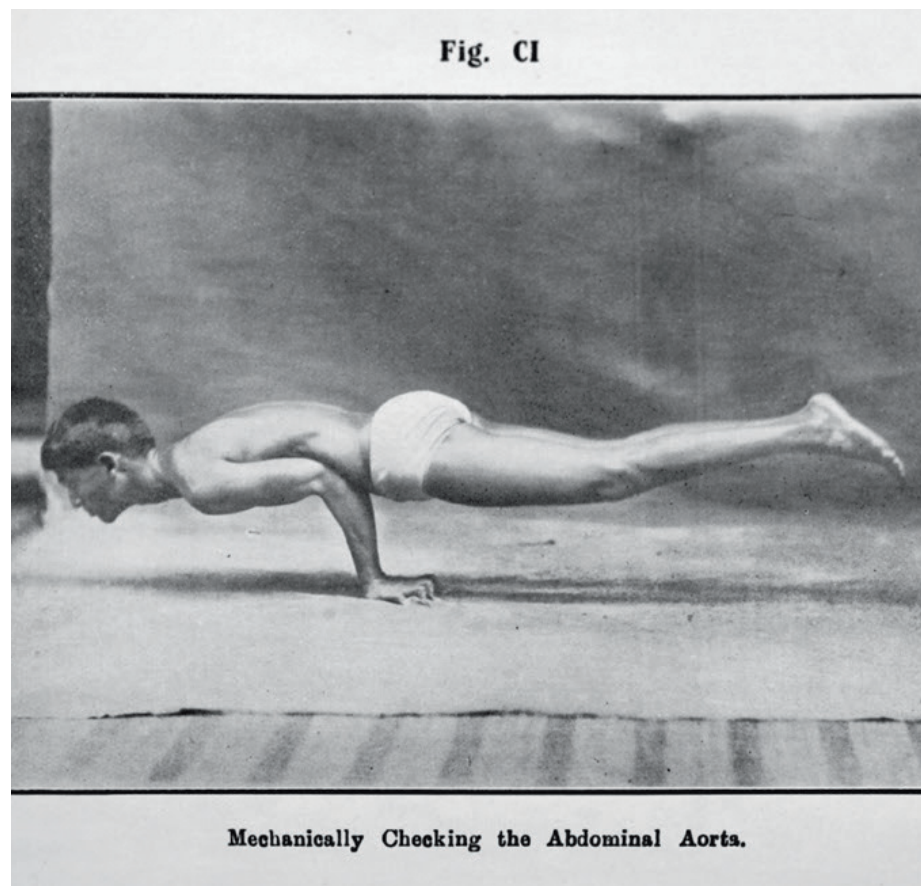
Surya Namaskars sits at an important historical nexus of yoga, bodybuilding, and physical education in India during the early twentieth century. Pant's project of health reform clearly fit with ongoing political, medical, and cultural trends, but was also unique in its emphasis on the relationship between body discipline and nationalism in modern India. He was a devoted bodybuilder and practitioner of the Eugene Sandow method who popularized the *surya namaskar asana* sequence as an indigenous bodybuilding technique.¹⁶ In gymnasia, this sequence became a practical expression of the unique blend of yoga–physical fitness through an internal regimen of body conditioning on the one

hand and indigenous bodybuilding on the other. It was only later, in the 1930s, that it was absorbed into yoga routines, in some part due to the popularity of Pant's book.

Other illustrated yoga manuals made similar connections with Western models of physical culture, such as the Scandinavian Ling exercise system.¹⁷ A classic case in point is M. R. Jambunathan's 1941 *The Yoga Body Illustrated* (cat. 26f), which promised the reader "a strong and beautiful body" through the practice of yoga. One of the best-known among early printed *asana* manuals, this publication presented yoga *asanas* as body-conditioning techniques that could lead to bodily perfection and, therefore, happiness. Jambunathan's book exemplifies the absorption of postural yoga by physical culturalists in the early twentieth century, the promotion of hatha yoga exercise as part of a larger, highly aestheticized physical culture

26g (left) *Yoga Mimansa*

26h (right) *Yoga Mimansa*





26i Scenes from *T. Krishnamacharya Asanas* in which the father of modern yoga demonstrates a series of yogic exercises

regime based on Western models. During this period, books like *The Yoga Body Illustrated* reflected an identifiable shift in yogic body practice—from hatha yoga’s perfection of the body (the conquest over the “material”) to modern fitness models based on Western ideals of physique and strength. Swami Kuvalayananda’s *Yoga Mimansa*, which first made the link between yoga, health, and science in the 1920s, was a classic case in point, as seen in two images shown here: the *chaturdandasana* (plank pose) and a standing figure flexing his biceps (cats. 26h, 26g). As such, these manuals anticipated by several decades all the other photographic manuals of *asanas* that followed: Theos Bernard’s *Hatha Yoga* in 1941 and, later in the 1960s, works by Indra Devi, B. K. S. Iyengar, and Vishnudevananda.¹⁸

Similar attempts to link hatha yoga with physical culture and muscle control occurred in the transnational context. During the first decades of the twentieth century, early proponents of yoga in the United States included Yogendra, Ramacharaka, Yogi Gherwal, and Yogi Wassan, but they also extended to alternative healthcare practitioners who drew on New Thought philosophies. An early example of this therapeutic synthesis is Albrecht Jensen’s 1920 *Massage and Exercise Combined* (cat. 26e). The

book, endorsed by American alternative health luminary W. A. Kellogg, identified psychophysiological methods of muscle control as Indian yoga techniques. It thus recast yoga as a muscle-based physical culture for a new generation of American alternative health enthusiasts, who would not have easily encountered hatha yoga through other routes.

For all their transformative potential in producing new forms of *asana*, static print and photographic technologies of visual reproduction were thoroughly eclipsed by the extraordinary reach of moving images and film in the early twentieth century, especially when these new media were used by a legendary practitioner to disseminate yoga’s dynamic potential as sequential movement. Such was the case in 1938 when the Mysore maharaja, Krishnaraja Wodiyar, sponsored an early film of T. Krishnamacharya—the father of modern yoga—demonstrating a series of flowing *asana* sequences. For the first time in history, these sequences could be showcased around the country to non-students: “imagined communities” in pre-independence India, united through shared pasts and invented futures (cat. 26i).¹⁹

Partly filmed in black-and-white and partly in color, this archival fifty-seven-minute silent film is a composite of rare footage showing a fifty-year-



old Krishnamacharya demonstrating advanced postures in linked sequences that are both hypnotic and inspiring. He is accompanied by several other practitioners, young and old, male and female, including his then-student B. K. S. Iyengar. In the grainy, eight-minute opening sequence, the camera focuses on a young Iyengar, who performs a series of difficult seated *asana* positions, what seems to be a modified version of Ashtanga Advanced A Series, in an unidentified outdoor location (see page 99). The next segment (ten minutes long) features close-ups of Krishnamacharya doing a series of seated *navli* and *pranayama* exercises, the grace and elegance of the linking *vinyasas* matched only by the control required to sustain each position. In the short sections that follow, the camera moves indoors to feature two women and two children (performing *asanas* synchronously), ending in a sequence where Krishnamacharya demonstrates a set of balancing exercises with the children, more reminiscent of an acrobatic circus act. The film ends with a black-and-white sequence outdoors, against a backdrop of unidentified mountains, in which Krishnamacharya dazzles the viewer with a tightly choreographed series of difficult inversions and headstands.

At the time the film was made, Krishnamacharya was the resident teacher in the Mysore Palace, where he created his own yoga synthesis, combining hatha yoga practice, British and Swedish calisthenics, and the gymnastic and wrestling traditions of Karnataka. Moving images or silent film offered the perfect dynamic and public medium through which these *vinyasas* could be presented for the first time in pre-independence India. This impulse to spread the gospel of new yoga through regular demonstrations was both democratizing—it introduced yoga to unprecedented new audiences—and competitive, attracting students who might otherwise have gone the way of Western gymnastics.²⁰ The maharaja sent Krishnamacharya all over South India on this “propaganda work,”²¹ and the teacher’s debut on celluloid was conceived as part performance piece, part spectacular enticement to introduce yoga to mass audiences.

Throughout the film, the slow, almost languorous, aesthetic of unfolding *asanas* complements the camera’s rigorous focus on the practitioner; the dynamic linking *vinyasas* provide both sequential narrative and connective tissue for the story of modern postural yoga in India. The film achieves many things at once: it is cultural archive as

well as museum artifact; live theater as well as historical documentation of a tradition in the making. In the late 1930s, it was a cinematic innovation in visualizing modern yogic practice, but also part of a larger project of public dissemination that relied heavily on a nationalist physical culture.²²

Located somewhere between documentary and ethnography, the film’s narrative-free sequences of *asanas* encode their own hidden visual histories, much like a palimpsest. It can be seen as a performative spectacle that recalls earlier performances of fakirs and yogis but was reinvented for nationalist audiences eager to see yoga as indigenous exercise. If this film footage suggests one thing, it is that new ways of representing *asana* led directly to new ways of perceiving yoga, and therefore, of practicing *asanas*, performing yogic identities, and inhabiting yogic bodies. In a world marked by increasing media cacophony and image saturation, we are reminded that visual technologies can change practice, media sometimes do create the message, and yogic lives can, and often do, imitate yogic art. SR