

## Modern Yoga - A timeless ancient practice?

*"It is only against this broader backdrop of physical education in India that we can fully understand the historical location of Krishnamacharya's hatha yoga method."*

-- Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body*

**In this week's assignment** we will continue our exploration of the development of modern postural yoga as it asserts itself today as a widespread practice in America and around the globe. As we have seen, many of the more popular forms of postural yoga such as Iyengar, Ashtanga, Vinyasa, Anusara, etc., can be traced back to the seminal life and teachings of T. Krishnamacharya, whose story we saw in the documentary film *Yoga Unveiled*. This week we will look more closely at his *āsana* revival and the renaissance of haṭha yoga that took place at the Mysore Palace in the 1930s.

Religious scholar and haṭha yoga practitioner Mark Singleton has recently published a synthesis of research on what he calls "modern transnational yoga" in his book entitled *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice (Oxford, 2010)*. According to Singleton, the history of Krishnamacharya's modern *āsana* development was highly influenced by a mix of Indian and European physical culture, including gymnastics, wrestling and calisthenics (to name but a few). Some of Singleton's findings have aroused much controversy within contemporary yoga circles, as some practitioners feel it threatens the lineal antiquity and authenticity of modern postural and *haṭha yoga*. However, Singleton is not out to disprove the potency or transformative possibilities of modern *āsana*-based yoga practice. He's a practitioner himself! His goal, along with many others in the field, is to raise the bar of critical research and understanding of the yoga tradition, searching for the facts as they reveal themselves through a historical and contextual analysis.

*"This does not mean that the kind of posture-based yogas that predominate globally today are "mere gymnastics" nor that they are necessarily less "real" or "spiritual" than other forms of yoga... it does not follow from this that these practices, beliefs, and aspirations (whether conceived as yoga or not) are thereby lacking in seriousness, dignity, or spiritual profundity."*

### Required Assignments:

READ Chapter 9: *T. Krishnamacharya and the Mysore Āsana Revival*, from Mark Singleton's text *Yoga Body*.

PRACTICE: Over the break, take some time to look at popular media, books, or magazines on yoga. You could do a Google or YouTube search on 'Modern Yoga', or pick up a copy of the Yoga Journal. How is yoga portrayed and presented in the west? How is yoga defined? How does this relate to your own ideas and practice of yoga? Reflect in your journal on how this representation of yoga relates (or not) to the history and philosophy of yoga, as you know it from the class thus far. Be prepared to write about or discuss what you find in class.