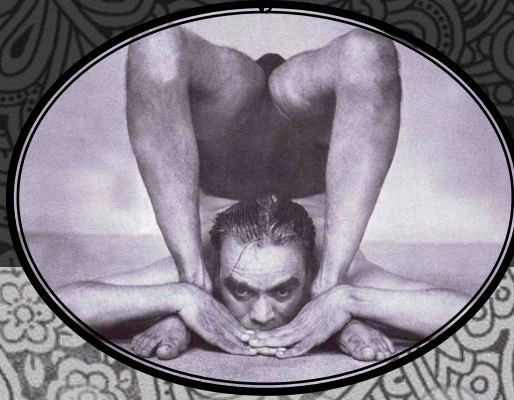


SEMINAR ON YOGA: HISTORY AND POLITICS

CHID 498F | JSIS 485 | AUTUMN 2014 | T 11:30-2:20 | LOCATION TBA

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Yoga's long history in India reveals that this practice of imposing discipline on the body and mind was far more than a set of physical or meditative practices, but a means to reformulate the social and cosmic world as well. Practiced by Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists, yoga transcends any given religion, yet links many religions. Yoga also exists independently of any religion at all, as simply a set of stretches and breathing techniques. Over the two or more millennia that yoga has been practiced in myriad forms, it has reshaped the cultures where it has travelled from India to East and Southeast Asia, Europe, and America. And as it has travelled, yoga has often become a subject for political debate: about what constitutes religion, about its purported foreignness outside of India, how it should be used, and its relationship to capital accumulation in all places and times. Yoga is therefore a practice that must be understood in a fundamentally social, historical, and political way.

In this seminar, we will study yoga from its first textual representations to its current status in the modern world. Along the way, we'll discuss the social, religious, historical, and political issues raised around the practice of yoga, even while we further hone the very definition of this word and practice in different contexts over centuries. Our goal in this course is to holistically understand the world-wide and transhistorical phenomenon of yoga. You will read classic texts such as Patanjali's Yoga Sutra and the Bhagavad Gita, as well as texts on Tantra, and studies of contemporary yoga practice, its reinvention in the modern West, and its role in reshaping how we view "religion" in the 21st Century. Prerequisites: It is preferable that students will have taken at least one course on Indian religion, history, culture, or politics, or a course on non-Western religions and cultures that included a study of India.