

# Dr James Mallinson

James Mallinson's interest in yoga grew out of a fascination for India and Indian asceticism – he spent several years living with Indian ascetics and yogis, in particular Rāmānandī Tyāgīs. His MA thesis, part of a major in ethnography, was on Indian asceticism. He became frustrated, however, with (to quote Sheldon Pollock) the “hypertrophy of method” that afflicts much of the humanities, and anthropology in particular, so sought to ground his future research in philology. The one aspect of ascetic practice that is well represented in Sanskrit texts is yoga, so for his doctoral thesis he chose to edit an early text on haṭhayoga, the *Khecarīvidyā*, which teaches in detail *khecarīmudrā*, one of traditional haṭhayoga's most important practices, and he used fieldwork among traditional yogis in India to shed light on the text's teachings.



As he worked on his thesis he became more and more unsure that the received wisdom on the origins of haṭhayoga (whose practices form the basis of much of modern yoga) was correct, in particular its blanket attribution to the Nāth sect, based as that wisdom was on a very small selection of the available texts and modern oral history (which is rarely a reliable source in India). But it was clear that to put his work in the broader context was going to be impossible while working on his thesis. When he was revising it for publication a few years after completing it, he was asked to contribute to a volume on the Nāths and their literature. He agreed and decided to concentrate on the corpus of texts of haṭhayoga. It soon became apparent that this was going to be too big a task for a single chapter of a book and he apologised to the

volume's editor but continued with his research. Four years on he has identified a corpus of eight works that teach early haṭhayoga and about a dozen more that contribute to its classical formulation in the *Haṭhapradīpikā*. With this philological basis established it has been possible at last to put all of haṭhayoga's aspects into context, which is what he is doing in the monograph on which he is currently working, *Yoga and Yogis: The Texts, Techniques and Practitioners of Early Haṭhayoga*. Many of the conclusions that can be drawn from the corpus and the other sources he uses (from Mughal miniatures to his fieldwork amongst traditional yogis) overturn what was previously thought about yoga's formative period. Although he has decided to present the bulk of the findings in a single monograph (because its parts are all so interdependent), in the course of working on it he has written various spin-off articles and reviews on specific aspects of haṭhayoga.

In September 2015, Mallinson became the Principle Investigator of The Haṭha Yoga Project (HYP), a five-year research project funded by the European Research Council and based at SOAS, University of London which aims to chart the history of physical yoga practice by means of philology, i.e. the study of texts on yoga, and ethnography, i.e. fieldwork among practitioners of yoga. The project team consists of four researchers based at SOAS, one at the École française d'Extrême Orient, Pondicherry and one at the Maharaja Man Singh Pustak Prakash, Jodhpur. More information can be found on the project's [website](#).

He has been interviewed on yoga for BBC Radio on [Beyond Belief](#) and for the [Secret History of Yoga](#).

More information about Dr Mallinson's work, his CV and publications, many of them downloadable, can be found [here](#), and on his website: [www.khecari.com](http://www.khecari.com)

# Education

1988-1991 BA Sanskrit (Oxford).

1992-1993 MA Area Studies (South Asia) SOAS

1995-2002 DPhil (Oxford), supervised by Professor Alexis Sanderson, *The Khecarīvidyā of Ādinātha: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation*.

2002-2008 Principal translator for the Clay Sanskrit Library

2009-2010 Temporary position as Lecturer in Sanskrit at SOAS

2010- Fellow of the Lavasa Institute of Classical Studies

2013- Lecturer in Sanskrit and Classical Indian Studies at SOAS

# Publications

## Books

Forthcoming (2017; with Mark Singleton). *Roots of Yoga*. Penguin Classics. (A commented collection of translations of yoga practice texts from the Sanskrit traditions).

2009. *The Ocean of the Rivers of Story by Somadeva*. Vol.~2. New York University Press.

2007. *The Ocean of the Rivers of Story by Somadeva*. Vol.~1. New York University Press.

2007. *The Shiva Samhita*. New York: YogaVidya.com.

2007. *The Khecarīvidyā of Ādinātha. A critical edition and annotated translation of an early text of haṭhayoga*. London: Routledge. (In 2010 the book was reprinted in paperback by Routledge and an Indian hardback edition was published by Indica Books.)

2006. *Messenger Poems by Kalidasa*, Dhoyi & Rupa Gosvamin. New York University Press.

2005. *The Emperor of the Sorcerers by Budhasvamin*. Vol.~2. New York University Press.

2005. *The Emperor of the Sorcerers by Budhasvamin*. Vol.~1. New York University Press.

2004. *The Gheranda Samhita*. New York: YogaVidya.com.

## Articles and book sections

Forthcoming (2017). "Yoga and Sex: What is the Purpose of *Vajroli-mudra*?" in *Yoga in Transformation*, a volume of revised papers from the conference of the same name held at the University of Vienna in September 2013, to be published by V&R unipress in the series "Wiener Forum für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft".

2016. "Śāktism and Haṭhayoga," in *Goddess Traditions in Tantric Hinduism, History, Practice and Doctrine*, Edited by Bjarne Wernicke Olesen, 109-140. Oxford: Routledge.

2014. "Haṭhayoga's Philosophy: A Fortuitous Union of Non-Dualities", pp. 225-247 in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* volume 42, issue 1.

2014. "The Yogīś' Latest Trick," pp. 165-180 in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* volume 24, issue 1.

2014. Entry on "The Kumbh Mela" in *Keywords in Modern Indian Studies* to be published by Oxford University Press (Delhi) in the series "SOAS Studies on South Asia".

2013. "Yogic Identities: Tradition and Transformation". Smithsonian Institute Research Online. This is an online-only publication and can be found [here](#).

2013. "Yogis in Mughal India", pp. 35-46 in *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, ed. Debra Diamond. Washington DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (Smithsonian Institution).

2013. "Aṣana" (with Debra Diamond), pp.150-159 in *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, ed. Debra Diamond. Washington DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (Smithsonian Institution).

2011. "The Yogīs' Latest Trick". Review article in *Tantric Studies* (University of Hamburg).

2011. 5,000-word Entry on "Haṭha Yoga" in the *Brill Encyclopedia of Hinduism* Vol. 3 (pp. 770-781). Leiden: Brill.

2011. 10,000-word Entry on "The Nāth Saṃpradaḃa" in the *Brill Encyclopedia of Hinduism* Vol. 3 (pp. 407-428). Leiden: Brill.

2011. "Siddhi and Maha-siddhi in Early Haṭhayoga", pp. 327-344 in *Yoga Powers*, ed. Knut Jacobsen. Leiden: Brill.

2011. "The Original Gorakṣas'ataka," pp. 257-272 in *Yoga in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

2005. "Rāmānandī Tyāgīs and Haṭhayoga," pp. 107-121 in the *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* Vol.~14, No.~1/Fall 2005. Reprinted in *Namarupa* magazine (2006). [Reproduced](#) with permission of the Journal of Vaishnava Studies

## Other

2014. *Mystical Journey: Kumbh Mela*, a set of 3 videos on the 2013 Kumbh Mela and related topics for the Smithsonian Institute, visible [here](#).

2007. Channel 4 documentary, *The Beginner's Guide to Yoga*, which was also broadcast on the Discovery Channel. I devised the programme, co-presented it and was associate producer.