When Yoga Suits Her: Negotiating Women’s Positioning in the Yoga Tradition (The case study of Iyengar yoga)

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Today women are the majority of yoga practitioners, but it was not always the case. Until recently, yoga was practiced and taught by men and for men, creating a male-centered tradition. For this reason the Iyengar yoga tradition recognizes classical yoga practices as inadequate for women. Since 1935, B.K.S Iyengar (1918-2014), the founder of the tradition, developed specific yoga practices and re-interpreted key concepts, as an alternative for women. Later, Geeta Iyengar (1944-2018), his daughter and student, further conceptualized and established these practices.

Women-oriented Iyengar practices aim to address women’s needs, treating gynecological pathologies, adjusting ‘general’ practices, and recommending specific-postural-sequences for women-specific conditions, such as menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause. In addition, the Iyengar tradition provides women an imagined narrative and women-oriented interpretations of key concepts of classical yoga. This talk will explore the implications of women-oriented Iyengar yoga practice on both women’s’ positioning within the yoga tradition, and on the continuance of classical yoga tradition.

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