



that evening, I reflected on my discovery. What did it mean that many of the poses I was teaching were identical to those developed by a Scandinavian gymnastics teacher less than a century ago? This gymnast had not been to India and had never received any teaching in asana. And yet his system, with its five-count format, its abdominal "locks," and its dynamic jumps in and out of those oh-so-familiar postures, looked uncannily like the vinyasa yoga system I knew so well.

Time passed, and my curiosity nagged at me, leading me to do further research. I learned that the Danish system was an offshoot of a 19th-century Scandinavian gymnastics tradition that had revolutionized the way Europeans exercised. Systems based on the Scandinavian model sprang up throughout Europe and became the basis for physical training in armies, navies, and many schools. These systems also found their way to India. In the 1920s, according to a survey taken by the Indian

YMCA, Primitive Gymnastics was one of the most popular forms of exercise in the whole subcontinent, second only to the original Swedish gymnastics developed by P.H. Ling. That's when I became seriously confused.

ANCIENT OR MODERN?

This was not what my yoga teachers had taught me. On the contrary, yoga asana is commonly presented as a practice handed down for thousands of years, originating from the Vedas, the oldest religious texts of the Hindus, and not as some hybrid of Indian tradition and European gymnastics. Clearly there was more to the story than I had been told. My foundation was shaken, to say the least. If I was not participating in an ancient, venerable tradition, what exactly was I doing? Was I heir to an authentic yoga practice, or the unwitting perpetrator of a global fraud?

I spent the next four years researching feverishly in libraries in England, the United States, and India, searching for clues about how the yoga we practice today came into being. I looked through hundreds of manuals of modern