

ANNAPAKTA - One which can digest food

Ayurveda and Yoga as a way of life in modern times



DESCRIPTION

Documentary film project
by *Rajele Jain*
Lisboa 2020

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Our film “Annapakta” will present our **results of a long research**, an expedition to the people and places where Ayurveda and Yoga are preserved - unaffected by commercialization, superficiality, religious appropriation or lifestyle marketing.

Of course, there are already some films and anyway numerous YouTube videos on Ayurvedic therapies or Yoga practices. It is important to see with which background and intentions they are presented, because in most cases they are not scientifically discussed findings or reports of experiences lived through for years. In addition to the internationally successful yoga or ayurveda teachers, who distribute their lectures in video form, there are some biographical films about well-known historical figures from this subject area as well as documentaries that present Ayurveda or Yoga in a rather promotional form, which cannot satisfy the interest of a searching audience in particular.

In my experience, the **greatest challenge** for a film about a “classical” Indian theme lies here:

- If the filmmaker is of **non-Indian origin**, he/she must either already have acquired an enormous cultural and philosophical knowledge of India, not only in order not to misunderstand facts and situations, but also not to be blinded by the dazzling exoticism or the actually completely different experience - i.e. to glorify practices that would rather be critically examined or that might have lost their relevance over the millennia. Rarely, however, does a filmmaker have so much time to prepare a film, because actually several years of intensive study are required.

- Today’s **Indian documentary filmmakers**, at least in my experience, are not too interested in the “classical” topics, at least not at the moment, because they classify this work as conservative, if not reactionary. They are more interested in clearly emancipatory, obviously political, social or ecological topics.

I would like to derive **my own approach** and justification for our film project from what has been said:

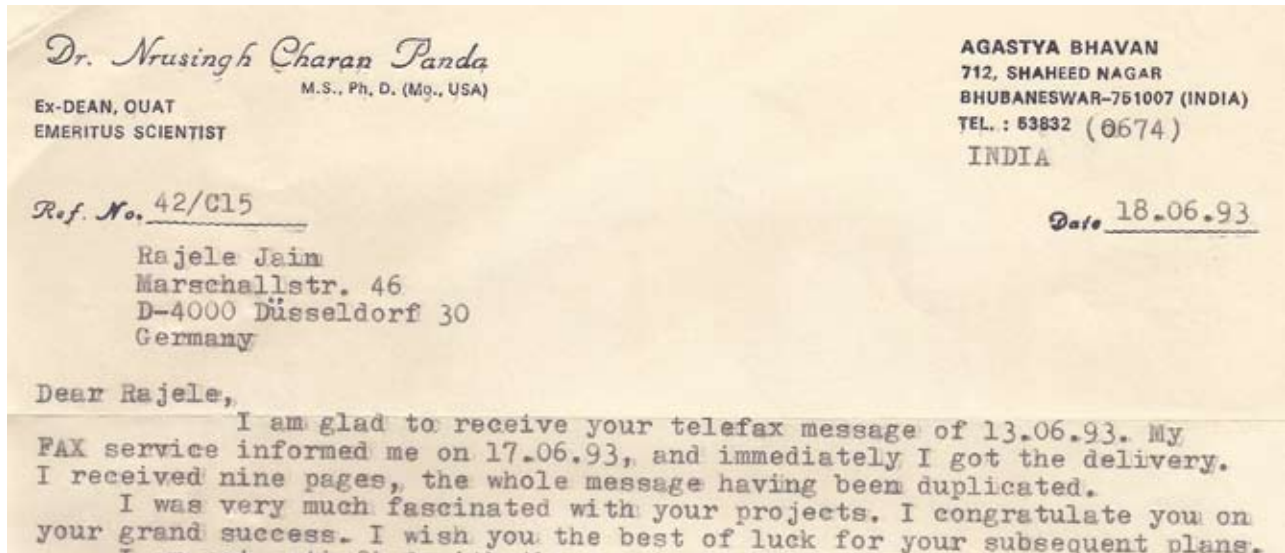
As the **daughter of an Indian father and a German mother**, raised in Germany and living in Portugal since 15 years, I have for decades located my artistic and scientific projects in the field of tension between India and the West, between natural sciences and humanities or art, and between nature and new technologies.

On this way I have become convinced that



“ALL WAYS - SARASWATI AND STRANGE ATTRACTORS” - a project between an Indian priest and Western scientists. Cologne 1993

there is a lot to rediscover, what I call “**New Light from India**”. This is also the title of a book by Gisela Bonn, who reported in the 1960s from India, the country “where one day perhaps the great conflict between East and West will be decided”. Because of my origins alone, I am of course concerned that this “conflict” is not a struggle for supremacy, but rather a respectful approach to and knowledge of the respective experiences and insights gained up to the present day.



SCIENTIST, POET, AUTHOR, PHILOSOPHER AND MUCH MORE,
Dr. Nrusingh Charan Panda, gave me his blessings many years ago...

Although the popularity of India since the 1960s has brought reports about yoga and later also Ayurveda to the West, today's offers from the fields of wellness or alternative medicine do not seem to take into account the seriousness and requirements (especially on the part of the student/customer) as described in the original theories and practices. This **softening possibly prevents** seriously interested people from becoming familiar with the possibilities for a self-determined, happy and healthy life, which could be found here as universal knowledge.

Everyone knows the **common prejudices**: Yoga practice is like acrobatics (at least if you look at the advertising photos for yoga classes), an Ayurvedic treatment means lying passively on a bench and getting oil dripped on your forehead (“this is only done for mentally ill people”, my Ayurveda specialist protested), meditators only perceive themselves, retreats or Ayurvedic medicines have to be paid dearly and so on. All this is to be countered by direct questioning of the most experienced and honest practitioners and teachers, but even more importantly: what can we all, in the West but also in India itself, actually gain by it as contemporary people?

I myself received one year of yoga instruction in Chennai, then Madras, in South India in 1985, and have never stopped doing my exercises every day since then. So for more than 30 years. At that time the institute of **Krishnamacharya** was still relatively young, **Sri Desikachar** taught there, and also one of his disciples, **R. Sriram**. Sriram, for example, will be one of the important reference personalities in our film.

The idea for this film, which by the way is part 2 of my planned trilogy on the “New Light from India”, also led me to first inform myself about Ayurveda through the common books, which became international partly bestsellers. While reading I was unfortunately often annoyed - either the concepts seemed too simplified to me, probably in order not to unsettle the western readers, or everything was presented as so “holy” that a normal person could hardly find access to the ideas anyway, except by unconditional faith in what was written there. So I set off again to India to see for myself how the ayurvedic practice was going. I attended conferences and talked to doctors and theorists, I visited friends in Ayurveda clinics and witnessed my partner undergoing a cure in an Ayurveda private clinic in Kerala. And I found an Ayurveda specialist who also knows both sides of the coin: an Indian biologist, **Dr. Vinod Verma**, who had a doctorate in Paris, who after years of experience in a pharmaceutical company, asked for alternatives to this chemical approach to illness and recalled old sources of her home culture. Her studies resulted in more than 20 books, in which Ayurvedic knowledge and methods are conveyed in a clear and undogmatic way. My studies with her have of course had a practical impact on my life, so that I am now in a position to ask quite “normal” questions to this expert and other Ayurveda specialists, like a representative for you, the future viewers of the film. *Dr. Vinod Verma will also participate as a scientific advisor to the film.*



Dr. VINOD VERMA giving a lecture in the Festival “NOVA LUZ DA ÍNDIA”, a festival that I curated in Lisbon, 2017

Other interview partners will be an Indian researcher and **activist for the protection of ayurvedic medicinal plants, herbalists and growers from Portugal and Germany**, a **Sanskrit scholar** who interprets the Vedic texts, an **artist, choreographer and activist who opposes the commercialization of this ancient knowledge**, and some more. These people, even if some of them are quite well known, were **not chosen for their degree of fame**, but they all stand out for their tireless, consistent, truthful work, which has never fallen victim to commercial thinking. They are **true masters of their kind**, not afraid to face the most critical questions - for they have asked them themselves long before I did.



Dr. VINOD VERMA with herbalist Kerstin Boettcher
studying herbs and plants from Alentejo/Portugal 2017

The first film of my planned trilogy was about classical Indian dance, especially the South Indian Bharatanatyam. There, too, I investigated the extent to which the extensive traditional knowledge that dancers have to acquire can be relevant to the present day. I was very happy to see for myself at a screening in India that even the dancers present were interested in the film and began to discuss its contents.



Still image from my film "THE NINE MOVEMENTS OF THE EYELID" (2008),
with the legendary choreographer CHANDRALEKHA and well-known film critic SUNIL KOTHARI

Films by foreigners on such topics are usually only smiled at or not accepted at all in the country itself, whereas films by Indians themselves sometimes lack the necessary distance to not present "self-evident" things as such or, depending on their disposition, to want to treat the content critically and as undogmatically as possible. With this film I had to decide beforehand whether I wanted to make it for a Western or Indian audience, because the subject is very specific. Although the decision was made for a western audience, I still seem to have succeeded in stimulating enough

critical, interesting thoughts that also seem worth mentioning in India.



Award ceremony 2013, where I received the "Gisela-Bonn-Award" from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, ICCR, for the "promotion of German-Indian friendship" !

The effort **to find this ridge and to walk it is my main concern** and I will do my best to make it work again for the now planned film.

My projects need a **long time of preparation**, this has perhaps become clear from my telling. As a documentary filmmaker, **my own experience with the subject is important** to me. My belonging to **two very different cultures** constantly urges me to "reconcile" both by using the tools of my Western science, critical philosophy and media design to encounter the physical experience and practicing life of Indian teaching and learning.

Credits (to be completed)

Original idea and storyboard: Rajele Jain

Director of Photography: G.R. Peun

Music: n.a.

Editing: Rajele Jain

Animation/Special Effects: Vipulamati Studios Lisbon

Production: G. R. Peun | Hanuman Farm Productions



Rajele Jain

Lives and works in Lisbon/Portugal since 2006. Studied Philosophy and Biology at Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf (1984), post-graduated in Media Art and Design from Academy of Media Art, Cologne/Germany (1993), doctorate in Cultural and Art Studies at Bergische Wilhelms-Universität Wuppertal with Prof. Bazon Brock (2017).

For her long documentary “The Nine Movements of the Eyelid”, she received the “Gisela-Bonn-Award” from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, ICCR, in 2013.

Since 1993, she works independently as film maker, author, artist, researcher and curator in interdisciplinary and transcultural projects.