

**Statement prepared by the supervisor of LUBOMÍR ONDRAČKA relating to their studies  
and dissertation entitled “*Charakter nesmrtnosti v jógových textech*”  
[“The Character of Immortality in Yoga Texts”]  
submitted in 2021 at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies**

**I. Overall evaluation of PhD studies**

Lubomír Ondračka is an exceptional student who is outside all standard categories. For years, he has been one of the best Czech Indologists, who has remarkably broad knowledge of both Indian philosophy and religion. Lubomír received his M.A. in Bengali Studies in 1996 at Charles University. He started to study a Ph.D. programme in Bengali Studies, focusing on Bengali tantrism (with Dušan Zbavitel as his supervisor), but in 2002 he quit for personal reasons. By this time he was a full-time lecturer in Religious studies at our Institute, the Head of the Religious studies section, teaching various courses on Indian religion and philosophy. Sadly, in 2005 he decided to quit his lecturer position, and continued to work in the academic world solely in various administrative positions. Nevertheless, he still retained his passion for Indology as a private hobby. He closely collaborated with his former supervisor Dušan Zbavitel, whose translations of classic Sanskrit works (such as the Upanishads or the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra) he was helping to edit, and as an independent scholar he continued in his studies of Indian traditions, and was in touch with various international Indologists.

Such was his passion for Indology that in 2009 he decided to give the official academic world a second chance, enrolling in a Ph.D. programme once again, this time in Religious Studies, and again with Dušan Zbavitel as his supervisor. After Zbavitel’s death in 2012, I took over Lubomír’s supervision, though my role was mainly technical and administrative, as I am not an Indologist myself. In 2012 Lubomír once again became a lecturer in Religious Studies. At the same time, he intensified his international academic contacts. He was in close touch with a number of top international Indologists, regularly meeting with them at various conferences. In 2014–2015 he was Visiting Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies for a year. Regrettably, the range of his academic activities was so broad that it distracted him from working on his Ph.D. thesis (which, frankly, he tended to see rather as a formality, since in many regards he already acted as an accomplished scholar respected by the international community). Thus it happened that his maximum period of study expired in 2016 when about 90 % of his thesis was finished. As a result of this, he lost his lecturer job at our Institute, though he continued to be employed as a research fellow till 2020.

In 2017 Lubomír enrolled in the Religious Studies programme again with the aim of just quickly finishing his thesis. Since this study was seen as a continuation of his previous unfinished study, as the Head of the programme I once again took on the technical task of formally supervising him. Most of his study requirements were recognized from his previous study, and he only had to repeat the final state exam and to submit the thesis. He was admitted on condition that he would submit the thesis in the second year of his study at the latest. By that time, though, he was so busy travelling to conferences and pursuing several other research projects (such as writing the history of Hinduism in Bengal for Oxford University Press) that he did not make it, and was thus expelled from studies in 2019. Yet, while expelling him, the board of the Religious Studies programme decided to give him a final chance and to accept him as a Ph.D. student for the fourth time, on condition that he would submit his finished thesis already at the entrance examination. This he did, enrolling again in 2020, and submitting the thesis in 2021.

During the four years of his renewed Ph.D. study he was very prolific as a scholar, speaking at four international conferences, giving two international invited lectures, teaching a number of courses at Charles University, University of Pardubice, and the Czech Yoga Academy, and publishing or having in print five articles in international journals and collective monographs, as well as six entries in the *Hinduism and Tribal Religions* encyclopaedia.

## **II. Overall evaluation of the dissertation**

Though the thesis has been submitted in the Religious Studies Programme, it is really purely indological. It asks how we are to understand the effort of the yogis to achieve immortality. Through a careful analysis of yogic texts Lubomír reaches the conclusion that the yogis attempt to attain the immortality of their biophysical bodies, and the thesis discusses various techniques used to achieve this aim. As far as I can judge, Lubomír displays extensive knowledge of not just the yogic tradition but of Indian religious thought in general, as well as of modern scholarly discussions. The thesis is highly readable, and to follow the argument was very easy even for me as a non-Indologist.

## **III. Any questions for the defence**

If the immortality the yogis sought to achieve was really that of their existing material body, what are we to make of this as Western scholars? Are we to suppose that our standard Western scientific conception of reality is limited, and that there may exist paranormal phenomena it is in principle incapable of accounting for (such as achieving physical immortality)? Are we perhaps to subscribe to what is nowadays sometimes called the “ontological turn”, i.e. are we to assume that different world views are not simply different representations of the same world, but amount to differences in worlds as such? In other words, are we to believe that in the yogic cultural milieu physical immortality was actually possible, while not being possible in ours?

## **IV. Conclusion**

I believe Lubomír has demonstrated that he has very good knowledge of Indian religious thought, and that he is a competent Indologist. Therefore I provisionally classify the submitted dissertation as *passed*.

[4 March 2022]

doc. Radek Chlup, Ph.D.