TRANSLATING, PRACTICING AND COMMODIFYING YOGA IN THE U.S.

By

SHREENA Niketa Divyakant Gandhi

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2009
To My Dad and Mom
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I am thankful for all the teachers that I have had over the years. Each member of my dissertation committee has been instrumental in how I have come to think about history and religion. Dr. Jon Sensbach (through Rebecca) has helped me think about the characters that create the history; that they are not merely pawns but agents that are emblematic of their times and contexts, which helped me realize that the various yogi characters in my dissertation are not only products but also producers of history. Dr. Manuel Vasquez introduced me to Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the fallacy of a Cartesian outlook especially when examining a bodily practice. Far beyond yoga, Dr. Vasudha Narayanan opened my eyes to the richness and variety of my own history, heritage and faith; her words have brought meaning and hope in times of extreme light and darkness over these past six years. Dr. David Hackett has patiently and meticulously worked with me on a variety of subjects; because of his dedicated teaching I have been able to think through and about the commodity and fetish, its place in culture, capitalism and American religious history. Without the guidance and teaching of Dr. Narayanan and Dr. Hackett, I would not be the teacher or the person I am today, and for that I am immensely grateful.

Beyond my committee I have been lucky to have a group of teachers at the University of Florida, Harvard Divinity School and Swarthmore College that have all contributed to my overall development and in particular, to this dissertation. First, at UF, I must thank Annie Newman, who has kept me informed of procedures and deadlines; I am convinced that there is no one that knows the intricacies of the university better. Also at UF, three professors in particular, Dr. Anna Peterson, Dr. Gwynn Kessler and Dr. Richard Foltz all have impacted and influenced my thinking about the history of yoga
in the U.S. Dr. Peterson's scholarship is a testament to the importance of examining practice beyond the world of ritual and in the realm of politics (and economics). Dr. Kessler wisely introduced my peers and I to Elaine Scarry and the value of questioning how and why religions are classified. Finally, though I never had him as a professor, I did have the privilege of being Dr. Foltz's T.A., during which time he made me rethink the migration, movement and marketing of religions as a constant process through human history, and he made me seriously think about the notion of origins and syncretism. At HDS, I had the fortune of studying American religious history with Dr. Robert Orsi, Dr. David Hall and Dr. Lowell Livezey. Beyond the obvious lessons of lived religion, these three professors stressed the importance of anchoring all my work in primary sources, without which there is no narrative, analysis or theory. At Swarthmore, in the Religion department, was where my curiosity about and love for religious studies was cultivated; and for this I have to thank Dr. Steven Hopkins and Dr. Mark Wallace, whose encouragement, support and confidence in me gave me the courage to pursue further degrees. It was in Dr. Wallace's class, first semester of freshman year where I first read Martin Buber's *I Thou*, a book that I continually use to make sure that I attempt not to objectify the historical and contemporary agents in my narratives. My love for critical theory was also influenced by Dr. Braulio Munoz who not taught me about historical materialism and liberation theology, but also first made me read (using the techniques of hermeneutics) Walter Benjamin and Hans Georg Gadamer. Lastly, I would be remiss not to thank Dr. Doug Collar, my high school U.S. History teacher, who first made me realize that I did not have to become a scientist or doctor just because I was Indian.
These past two years of dissertation research and writing would not have been possible without Carol Anderson, who has been a wonderful mentor, colleague and friend. I am truly grateful that I have a chair who values my presence, genuinely considers my ideas, and helps me think through my ideas on religion and teaching. I am not sure what I did in a past life to land at a very good, small liberal arts college that is close to my family, but I am sure that I have Carol to thank for this blessing. Deb Pattison has also helped me transition from student to faculty, while also being a dear friend, a rock and a sounding board for all the dramas, academic and non-academic, in my life. And Liz Smith at the Kalamazoo College library has consistently helped me track down a variety of sources (obscure magazines, microfilms and publishers), and her help in these source-quests has been invaluable.

I have also been very lucky to be blessed with so many amazing friends who have all been critical in helping me through this process. In particular I want to thank and acknowledge Gayle Lasater, Hilit Surowitz, Kathleen Holscher and BoHee Yoon. Gayle has been at UF with me from day one, Hilit came a year later and completed the ‘Americas Girls Club,’ and in the process of classes and exams they have become two of my closest friends. Both Gayle and Hilit helped me get through my qualifying exams and have been critical conversation partners throughout all my years at UF, especially these past two years of research of writing. Kathleen has also been a valued conversation partner; fate placed Kathleen and I together as roommates our freshman year at Swarthmore and now we are both American religious historians - I consider myself to be extremely fortunate to have a colleague and friend who not only understands my field, but also who I was then and now. Finally, without the love and
encouragement and support of BoHee, I do not know who I would be today; so often, when one is an academic, it is hard to remember to live and develop outside the academy and BoHee has been that reminder. I know I am a better person because of her, and for personal reasons, I dedicate my third chapter to her.

Finally, I must thank the Patel side of my family, who are scattered all over the world, from New Zealand to the U.S. All of my aunts, uncles, cousins and my maternal grandmother, Bhanumati Patel keep me grounded and happy. My paternal grandfather, Bhogilal Gandhi, always encouraged my interest in religion, philosophy and meditative practices from a young age. I will always treasure my long walks, conversations and adventures in New York City with my Dadaji – it is during these times at a young age when I first became acquainted with Hindu and Buddhist philosophies. I miss him dearly, but as one light in my life was extinguished, another entered – my brother Alexander Gandhi, who has brought me infinite joy during these past four years; the very thought of him brings a smile to my face which cannot be underestimated in the process of taking exams and writing a dissertation. During these years I have also been lucky to receive the additional love, care and support of Maria Gandhi. None of this would be possible, however, without my parents, Divyakant Gandhi and Ragini Gandhi. I do not know that I will be able to adequately thank them in this lifetime for all the love, all the late nights, all the listening, all the times they have run to my side and all the sacrifices… Last but never least, I want to thank my constant, my best friend and my sister, Aneesha Gandhi, for always believing in me and being on my side.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................... 4

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................ 10

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................ 14

   Literature Review .................................................................................................... 21
   Method & Theory .................................................................................................... 30
   Chapter Outline ....................................................................................................... 36
      Introducing Yoga .............................................................................................. 36
      Popularizing Yoga ............................................................................................ 37
      Domesticating Yoga ......................................................................................... 39
      Communalizing Yoga ....................................................................................... 41
      Complicating Yoga ........................................................................................... 42

2 INTRODUCING YOGA ............................................................................................. 45

   What Is Yoga? Meaning and History in India .......................................................... 47
   Yoga and the Transcendentalists ........................................................................... 51
   Yoga and the Theosophists .................................................................................... 54
   World’s Parliament of Religions and the Triumph (?) of Swami Vivekananda ...... 59
   Women and Yoga = Mistrust and Scandal .............................................................. 68

3 POPULARIZING YOGA ............................................................................................ 76

   Pierre Bernard (Oom the Omnipotent) .................................................................... 77
   William Walker Atkinson (Yoga Ramacharaka) ...................................................... 81
   Theos Bernard ........................................................................................................ 86
   Paramahansa Yogananda ...................................................................................... 89
   Science and Yoga ................................................................................................... 94

4 DOMESTICATING YOGA ........................................................................................ 102

   Richard Hittleman ................................................................................................. 103
   Sri Tirumala Krishnamacharya: The Mysore School and its Ambassadors…… 106
      Indra Devi ........................................................................................................ 110
      B.K.S. Iyengar ................................................................................................ 113
      K. Pattabhi Jois .............................................................................................. 119
   Gurus of the Counterculture and Drug Detox ...................................................... 121
   Yoga for Health ..................................................................................................... 126

5 COMMUNALIZING YOGA ....................................................................................... 136
The Yoga Journal and the Creation of a Habitus .................................................. 137
Covers .................................................................................................................. 138
Articles .................................................................................................................. 142
Advertisements ................................................................................................. 147
The Yoga Habitus .............................................................................................. 150
Yoga and New Indo-American Community ...................................................... 155
Swami Ramdev ................................................................................................. 159
Yoga Reclaimed? ............................................................................................... 162

6 COMPLICATING YOGA ............................................................................................ 178
Current Variations of Practice and Products ...................................................... 179
Muslim, Jewish and Christian Yoga .................................................................... 186
Yoga in the Public Sphere ................................................................................... 194
Commodification and Yoga ............................................................................... 199

7 CONCLUSION ...................................................................................................... 207

APPENDIX ............................................................................................................. 226
LIST OF YOGIS THAT INFLUENCED PRACTICE IN THE U.S. ....................... 226
LIST OF REFERENCES .......................................................................................... 227
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .................................................................................... 240
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-1. Advertisement for Hittleman Yoga Class, from the <em>New York Times</em>, 2 Jan 1969 (picture taken by author).</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-2. Advertisement for Gimbel’s India Fortnight, from the <em>New York Times</em>, 17 May 1966 (picture taken by author).</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-3. Advertisement for Hittleman classes, from the <em>New York Times</em>, 21 February 1966 (picture taken by author).</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5-1. First Yoga Journal cover March/April 1975 (picture taken by author) ......................... 167
5-2. Yoga Journal cover May/June 1977 (picture taken by author). ................................. 167
5-3. Yoga Journal cover July/August 1977 (picture taken by author). .......................... 167
5-5. Yoga Journal cover February 1983 (picture taken by author). .............................. 168
5-6. Yoga Journal cover March/April 1985 (picture taken by author). .......................... 168
5-7. Yoga Journal cover July/August 1987 (picture taken by author). .......................... 169
5-10. Yoga Journal cover November/December 1998 (picture taken by author)............ 170
5-11. Yoga Journal cover March/April 1999 (picture taken by author). .......................... 170
5-12. Yoga Journal cover August 2005 (picture taken by author). ............................... 170
5-15. Advertisement for Birkenstock and Yoga Clothes, from Yoga Journal, July 1975, 25 (picture taken by author).............................................................................. 171
5-16. Advertisement for The Yoga Watch, from Yoga Journal, November/December 1976, 26 (picture taken by author).................................................................................. 172
5-17. Advertisement for Sexual Energy Seminars, from Yoga Journal, September/October 1979, 24 (picture taken by author)................................................................. 172
5-18. Advertisement page with 7 adverts, from Yoga Journal, May 1977, 72-73 (picture taken by author).............................................................................................. 172


5-23. Chopard *Om* necklaces advertisement from the *Yoga Journal*, December 2005, 5 (picture taken by author). .................................................................................. 174


5-26: Advertisement article for Ashtanga Yoga Mat, from Todd Jones, “The Illustrated Mat,” *Yoga Journal*, March/April 1999, 21 (picture taken by author). ........................................................................................................ 175


5-29. Hindu Calendar, from *India Abroad*, 5 October 1973 (picture taken by author). ........................................................................................................ 176

5-30. A variety of advertisements, from *India Abroad*, 14 March 1980 (picture taken by author). ........................................................................................................ 176

5-31. Travel advertisements to India, from *India Abroad*, 5 October 1973 (picture taken by author) ........................................................................................................ 177
This dissertation explores the history of yoga in the U.S. Starting with the Transcendentalists of the mid-nineteenth century the concept of yoga has captured the imagination and attention of some Americans. The importation of yoga from India to the U.S., however, was never a whole transplantation; rather it has always been and continues to be a translation. Throughout out this dissertation’s five main-body chapters (Introducing Yoga, Popularizing Yoga, Domesticating Yoga, Communalizing Yoga and Complicating Yoga), I trace this translation and map the effect that it has on the practice and commodification of yoga in the U.S.

Through this mapping, I find that yoga is not an uprooted entity, corrupted by the flows of modernity, rather that yoga is and has always been rhizomal, a practice that changes and bends to its context while remaining flexible to the contours of global and North American cultures. The rhizomal quality of yoga means that yoga can be accessed at many points by various actors and interests, which has resulting in a remarkable history and provides point of access to explore the relationship between religion, capitalism and our contemporary everyday lives.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

UNDER YOGA SPELL; Wife of a College President Leaves Home and Children. HER HUSBAND IS CRUSHED Offers to Resign, but IS Urged by Trustees to Serve

This is a headline from the Washington Post on May 3, 1908. Mrs. Victoria Stone, wife of Dr. Winthrop E. Stone, president of Purdue University, left her family to join a yoga cult in the South Sea Islands. It is a sensation story that made national headlines, and was reported on in the most sensational way. Three years prior, Dr. George Moulton taught a class on Yoga in Lafayette, which Mrs. Stone attended. Three years after the incident, when Dr. Stone was awarded a divorce, the Chicago Defender reports that Dr. Moulton

taught that one of the leading features of this doctrine was that of the ‘withdrawal’ or separation from kindred and friends... Books on the subject were put in the hands of Mrs. Stone and other members of the class, and their interest grew. Radical and revolutionary as were the books of the cult, Dr. Moulton seemed to go still beyond them, and evolve a Yoga philosophy of his own. But the members of the class were warned not to make public any of the private and secret instructions of how to send telepathic messages, how to hypnotize, how to use the key of Karma Yoga, and how to heal the sick.

While Dr. Stone attempted to resign his post as President of Purdue University, he and his sons were left devastated. The Washington Post reported that,

Dr. Stone revealed his sad story before the Presbyterian Church... ‘I am utterly crushed,’ he said. ‘I can scarcely bear up under it. I want your sympathy and your prayers. I love my wife; I would welcome her back. She is as dear to me as she ever was, but I am so sorry for her. I hope

\[1\] "JOINS YOGA COLONY: Educator’s Wife Goes to Follow Strange God. Purdue’s University Head Divorced After Philosophy Is Said to Have Taken Wife to South Sea Islands," The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition), 29 July 1911.

\[2\] "JOINS YOGA COLONY: Educator’s Wife Goes to Follow Strange God. Purdue’s University Head Divorced After Philosophy Is Said to Have Taken Wife to South Sea Islands."
that in a year or two she will come to her senses and return to me and my boys.\(^3\)

Unfortunately, Mrs. Stone never returned. Four years after her disappearance, Dr. Stone remarried, but it seems his life was always to be laced with tragedy: nine years later, he died in a rock climbing accident.\(^4\)

This story is fascinating for many reasons. Besides the obvious (high-society wife runs away from husband and kids), it is a part of the colorful history of yoga in the United States. It shows that the welcome mat for yoga was not always extended, and has had its ups and downs. While yoga is very popular among many segments of the American population today, it has not always been the case, and even today, it has its detractors and critics. Yoga has been both embraced and mistrusted since it’s introduction to the US, but it has still endured and grown in popularity. It was embraced and practiced even at a time when immigrants from India were not allowed, and through racist policies, citizenship was closed to them.\(^5\) At a time of heightened xenophobia, when yoga was so mistrusted, when ‘good wives’ were running away from their husbands because of it, why did it survive, even thrive and grow into the phenomenon it is today? Obviously there was something about it that appealed to Mrs. Stone, and the many (especially women) who practice yoga today.

This dissertation seeks to explain this appeal by specifically looking at the translation, practice and commodification of yoga in the United States. Walter Benjamin,  

\(^3\)\textit{UNDER YOGA SPELL; Wife of a College President Leaves Home and Children. HER HUSBAND IS CRUSHED Offers to Resign, but Is Urged by Trustees to Serve},\textit{ The Washington Post}, 3 May 1908.  
\(^4\)\textit{DR. STONE LOST LIFE AS WIFE LOOKED ON; Purdue University Head Fell Down Canadian Precipice When a Rock Gave Way. SHE TRIED TO REACH HIM But was Marooned on Ledge and Remained There Foodless Eight Days Until Rescued},\textit{ The New York Times}, 28 July 1921.  
in his seminal essay, “The Task of the Translator,” explains that, “while content and language form a certain unity in the original [piece of literature], like fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds.” The modernist and literary concerns may seem far off from the historical narrative of this dissertation, but Benjamin is fascinated with the messiness of translation and how translations ultimately affect and change language. I hope to look at the messiness of translating yoga into an American context and how this translation has, in its small way, changed the U.S. religious and cultural landscape. While Benjamin was specifically looking at literature and texts in his examination of translation, I insist, throughout this dissertation, that translation occurs also in lived, material and practiced cultures. In other words, yoga traveled across borders and was understood in different ways in different cultures, and that process of understanding was and is a cultural translation. Part of this translation involves texts that traveled from India, to England and then on to the U.S., and another part of this translation involves the use of Sanskrit in the practice of yoga, and the translation of those words to English. Text is a part of material culture, which is a part of lived culture, and thus translation touches upon all of these facets.

Homi Bhabha, a post-colonialist scholar, who also builds and departs from Benjamin’s notion of translation, writes, “I am less interested in the metonymic fragmentation of the ‘original.’ I am more engaged with the ‘foreign’ element that reveals the interstitial; insists in the textile superfluity of folds and wrinkles.” While it is important to understand the pre-U.S. history of yoga, I am not searching for any ‘original’ meaning of yoga (unlike Benjamin’s interest in original pieces of literature), but

---

7Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), 326.
rather this dissertation takes Bhabha’s interest in ‘fragmentation’ and focuses it on the
“folds and wrinkles” that have emerged as yoga, a foreign Indian import, has translated
into an American context.

Part of the process of yoga’s translation, is also a transnational project mired in the
mud of colonialism, economics and power; in other words, the reasons yoga came to
the U.S. and was sold to American consumers by a parade of Indian yogis is tied up
with the colonization of India, the need to raise money and opportunity to combat
cultural supremacy. While some of these yogis did travel to the U.K., where yoga is also
very popular, their relationship with Great Britain was complicated by the British
presence in India. Euro-Americans not only had money to spend, a First Amendment
that allowed them to experiment with religion, and an immense landscape for potential
growth, but also, the U.S. did not have an obvious colonial position or interest in India.
Indian yogis, who needed to raise money for their various causes in India, and who
wished to lift the status of India from under the oppressive and demeaning thumb of
colonialism, were eager to use these American resources of money, religious freedom
and room for growth; in other words the U.S. was fertile ground for the translation, idea
and practice of yoga.

The translation of yoga never just or even primarily involved ideas – the center of
this translation was always a practice, which in many ways, allowed for the success of
yoga in the U.S. This means looking at attempting to discern what people have done
and continue to do when they maintain they are practicing yoga. Examining the very
actions of practice and how they have changed over time and place is an excavation of
the complex translations of yoga. Pierre Bordieu reminds the examiner of everyday
practice that practice is always embedded in and informed by the market.⁸ Thus paying close attention to how yoga has been commodified, and how this commodification furthers the process of translation and the modes of practice is also essential.

The three main sets of questions emerge when primarily considering translation, practice and commodification of yoga in the U.S, and are as follows: How was yoga translated into the American context, and in what ways has it been domesticated and in what ways is it still considered foreign and exotic? What are the many means of practicing yoga that have been introduced and created in the U.S.? And what is the relationship between yoga and the American religious market, and how has that affected the practice and translation of yoga? Combined, these questions lead to some larger questions about religion, culture and capitalism and the very status of yoga at the intersections of these networks: Is yoga religion or is it just spiritual? To which culture does yoga “belong” – is it part of the ‘east ‘or the west’ and what is the significance of this division? Is it a hierophany or a fetish? And how does the relationship between yoga and capitalism affect the answers to these questions?

If one just takes a moment to observe the pervasiveness of yoga in American popular and religious culture, one quickly sees that yoga is everywhere – on television, in gyms and church basements, even at hospitals. It is clear that yoga has been ingrained into the American religious, economic and cultural landscape. There is something appealing about yoga, and over time, in the U.S. a space for yoga has emerged, and this space has been and is still being shaped by a multitude of American and Indian characters and factors.

---

This dissertation investigates the various American and Indian characters that helped create this distinct space for yoga in the United States, and looks at some of the colonial, economic, political, religious and societal factors also involved in the process of making yoga a part of the American cultural landscape. In order to properly do this, one must start from the time that word and the idea of “yoga” entered American philosophical and popular discourse. Starting with the American Transcendentalists the very concept of yoga captured the imagination of Americans, both as a concept and as a practice, and this fits into a larger history of American religion and spirituality. Yoga underwent a transformation, a translation – no system is static, and when religious practices migrate and cross boundaries into other cultures, there is bound to be some changes and part of these changes are due to the transnational exchanges that occurred between India and the United States starting at the end of the 19th century.

While studying the American histories of various yogis, I do not wish to ignore the global dimensions concerning the growth of yoga during the 20th century – the very premise of this exercise is that the U.S. is not and never has been in a religious or spiritual vacuum. The early exporters of yoga thought globally, and this is a trend that continues through today. However, for the sake of careful and tight scholarship, my focus will be on the manifestations of this global phenomenon in the geographic U.S., while still paying attention to yoga globally, and especially in India, when necessary.

After surveying some of the historical figures that have helped translate yoga into the American context, attention will also be paid to the print culture and the market that has also influenced the practice of yoga in the U.S. I will tackle the place of yoga in the American religious market today, and attempt to understand the forces that sustain the
practice of yoga and the creativity that drives the many yoga variations that have and continue to materialize. What is it about modern yoga that allows for this diversity and interpretation of a tradition, and what is it about the religious market today that allows for yoga to be a successful product? Further, is this innovation and creativity or is this contamination and heresy? Rather than come to a conclusion about this question, I am much more interested in how someone answers this question, because it could be illustrative of their orientation towards the many influences that form American culture today.

A recent market study by the Yoga Journal provided some basic statistics about the 15.8 million that practice and the 18.4 million that say they will practice yoga in the U.S. today. These facts are illuminating because, in some ways, they help focus what is important when examining yoga in the U.S. First, the importance of focusing on the market is justified. This study finds that “Americans spend $5.7 billion a year on yoga classes and products… an increase of 87 percent compared to the previous study in 2004–almost double of what was previously spent.” Second, of those that practice, “72.2 percent are women… 71.4 percent are college educated; 27 have postgraduate degrees… 44 percent of yogis have household income of $75,000 or more; 24 percent have more than $100,000.” These statistics show that it is imperative not only to look at how people practice, but also who practices and why. In other words, why is this practice so dominated by women, the educated and those that possess above average

---

9I should divulge that later in this dissertation I critique the Yoga Journal. Despite my criticisms, they do have the resources to perform such a study. Further it is in their interest to investigate the who and what of yoga in the U.S., for it will help them better market and produce their magazine.


salaries? Finally, this market study finds that yoga is starting to be used as a tool for medical therapy (not just for health benefits). They find that “14 million Americans, say that a doctor or therapist has recommended yoga to them.”\textsuperscript{12} Tracing how yoga has been translated from a religious practice, to a scientific process, to a fitness craze and now a prescription needs to be a key part of this narrative in order to have a better understanding of the history of yoga in the United States, such that we can understand how yoga came to be commodified and so popular among a particular demographic. Not only is it an important chapter in the history of Hindu traditions in the U.S., but it also provides insight into the relationship between religion and capitalism.

**Literature Review**

There are three fields of literature in which I ground this study in and from which I draw inspiration: 1 – the growing scholarship on Hinduism in the United States; 2 – the new studies on modern yoga in India and the ‘West’; and 3 – historical work on spirituality and the commodification of religion in the United States.

Due to the growing number of South-Asian immigrants and the increased visibility of their religions, the study of Hinduism, Jainism, Islam and Sikhism in the United States has also become more popular. Particularly, the fast pace of temple building has captured the attention of various scholars.

Vasudha Narayanan’s article, “Creating the South Indian ‘Hindu’ Experience in the United States” best illustrates the ways in which Indian Hindus transform the American religious landscape and their religion while at the same time attempting to retain and reinforce ties to Hinduism in India. Narayanan finds that the members of the Sri Vaisnava temple in Penn Hills, PA “seek to replicate the rituals and atmosphere of other

\textsuperscript{12}Yoga Journal, *Yoga in America’ Market Study Press Release.*
Sri Vaisnava temples [in India], but also they “adjust the sacred calendar to coincide more with long weekends in this country.” Also different in American Hindu temples is the presence of a community hall, where groups can hold classes for Indian music, language, dance, and yoga. Nonetheless, Narayanan points out that despite these adaptations, “the umbilical cord, the spiritual life line, tying the Hindus to the mother land is strengthened and reinforced with every temple built in this country.”

This notion of temple as a home for Hinduism in the United States is also reiterated in Joanne Punzo Waghorne’s article, “The Hindu Gods in a Split-Level World: The Sri Siva-Vishnu Temple in Suburban Washington DC,” where she stipulates that the American Hindu temple is not unlike a suburban home, for not only is home ownership the “ultimate marker of the American dream”, but also the home with its many “rooms, staircases, twists and turns” is able “to hold a very diverse family made up of gods and humans, men and women, parents and children, Indians and Americans, while giving them all space to grow.”

Corinne G. Dempsey, in her new book, The Goddess Lives in Upstate New York – Breaking Convention and Making Home at a North American Hindu Temple, also highlights the importance of temple life for Hindus in the United States, but adds an important detail to the conversation – the centrality of the guru in American Hindu traditions. Dempsey focuses her study on Aiya, a Sri Lankan Tamil non-Brahmin guru, who is able to provide a necessary link and facilitate the negotiation between temple

---


worship and progressive ideals, which allow devotees to perform their own rituals. Dempsey also highlights the creativity or ‘play’ of Hindu traditions in the U.S.: Aiya allows women and non-Indo Hindus to perform rituals, which is indicative of the flexibility of tradition.

The focus on gurus is also a theme in Vijay Prashad’s important book, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, though Prashad does not have the same positive view of gurus that Dempsey has. Prashad essentially argues that combination of American Orientalism and American selective immigration policies have created an Indo-American culture that is thought of/believed to be economically driven, spiritually superior, conservative, traditional and thus politically docile. In order to prove all of this Prashad looks at the ways in which Euro-Americans, like Emerson and Whitman, as well as Indian gurus, like Vivekananda and Deepak Chopra, have been orientalist in orientation and aided in the construction of the Indian “as intensely spiritual and apolitical, noble but silent, knowledgeable but no cosmopolitan…a passive character absorbed in the pursuit of pleasure and success without a developed social consciousness.”

Thus the South Asian American is perfect: “spiritual and cooperative but driven to succeed in commercial terms”.

Prashad is pointing to a trend that I would like to expand on by focusing on modern yoga in the United States – that is the construction of India and Indian as innately spiritual (a process and construction that both Euro-Americans and Indian-Americans participate in), and the commodity market that emerges due to this construction. I feel that that the two processes (the construction of spirituality and the

---

commodification of this spirituality) are linked together in the formation of modern yoga. There are several recent books that have already discussed the development of modern yoga, but none that have given careful attention to the historical narrative of yoga in the United States. These authors, Joseph S. Alter, Elizabeth de Michelis and Sarah Strauss, are important because they start the important task of how yoga went from an obscure Brahmanical and Tantric exclusive practice to a modern practice that has gained much popularity inside and outside of India.

In a richly imperative and careful study, Joseph S. Alter focuses his attention on the development of yoga in India during the 20th century. In his book, *Yoga in Modern India – The Body between Science and Philosophy*, Alter seeks to problematize the idea that yoga is an eternal and static tradition that has seamlessly descended from ancient times into our modern era. Tracing the effects of transnationalism and globalization due to colonialization, Alter finds that there was a move by various nationalists and yoga gurus to construct yoga as “transcendental science,” and thus yoga is not only the “subject of philosophical speculation,” but also “the object of mundane scientific research and investigation.”18 Alter is interested in figures that changed the meaning of yoga in India, and the influence of modern Western science in this change.

Another book that also tackles the subject of modern yoga is Elizabeth de Michelis’ *A History of Modern Yoga*. Published in the same year (2004) as Alter’s text, de Michelis’ book is less theoretical, but no less historically rich. Rather than making qualitative judgments on the state of yoga in modern times, de Michelis is more

---

interested in chronicling the history of yoga – how it developed in and outside India during colonial and post-colonial times. In particular, her focuses are the transnational intellectual connections between India and the United Kingdom that led to a four-fold typology of modern yoga in the ‘west.’ With Swami Vivekananda’s *Raja Yoga* as the base for modern yoga, de Michelis argues that four types of yoga emerged subsequently: Modern Psychosomatic Yoga (MPsY), Modern Denominational Yoga (MDY), Modern Postural Yoga (MPY) and Modern Meditational Yoga (MMY). De Michelis admits that this categorization is not exhaustive and that there are groups that overlap, but it is most helpful in tracing the various paths that yoga has taken outside of India. For De Michelis, it is Modern Postural Yoga (MPY) that has found a place in the secular West (United Kingdom, specifically); she finds that, “indeed, in colloquial English, ‘yoga’ has come to mean a session of MPY.”¹⁹ She argues that MPY yoga is able to adapt itself to a myriad of situations, across the boundaries of various religious traditions, thus, “even if practitioners’ commitments and beliefs are differently structured, it is likely that MPY will be able to offer some solace, physical, psychological or spiritual, in a world where solace and reassurance are sometimes elusive”.²⁰

Whereas De Michelis does a broad history of modern yoga with a minor focus on Iyengar yoga, Sarah Strauss, in her book, *Positioning Yoga – Balancing Acts Across Cultures*, focuses specifically on Swami Sivananda and the Divine Life Society. Strauss combines history and heavy ethnography to illustrate how the Divine Life Society emerges across cultures as a transnational movement. Strauss finds that yoga is a cultural product that is a result of the ‘pizza effect’, that is

---

Many objects, processes or ideas that are generally identified as the product of a particular people, culture, or place, such as pizza for Italy, were in fact developed or elaborated upon in a very different context of by very different people than those who supposedly originated the thing in question.21

Thus for her, it is imperative to follow the transnational trajectories of the Divine Life Society through careful ethnographic research. Through her research she finds three reasons why yoga has become so compelling and popular in India, Europe and the United States: first, the focus of yoga became freedom and health; second, yoga became an “indigenous strategy” to re-imagine and reassert the colonial body; and third yoga is a modern practice which was originally Indian, but now thoroughly global.22

What binds the three texts of Alter, de Michelis and Strauss together is their focus on the ability of those that sought to spread yoga to find the common denominator that allowed them to translate an ancient Indian/Hindu system into a different environment and modern context. These common denominators were making or reformulating yoga into a system of health, which was easily marketable with spiritual benefits. The marketing and quest for spirituality are also persistent themes in the religious history of the U.S., and have been best clarified by the scholarship of T. J. Jackson Lears, R. Laurence Moore, Leigh Eric Schmidt and Catherine Albanese.

In his landmark book, No Place of Grace – Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920, T.J. Jackson Lears argues that intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic were becoming increasingly dissatisfied and disillusioned with modernism and capitalism, which lead to the formation of an anti-modern culture. What signified this anti-modern culture was a search for meaning, or “’authentic’ alternatives

---

to the apparent unreality of modern existence.”23 This involved an increasing curiosity in medieval aesthetics, Catholic sacrament and “Oriental” spiritualities, and a search for a physical understanding of the body with a rise in craft and athletic hobbies. These new interests were not rooted in a need to escape from modern society, but rather to heal society and themselves. Unfortunately, Lears concludes that the “antimodern longings for authentic experience” and promotion of the “therapeutic world-view” served to aid the very thing that these anti-modernists wished to undermine - that is the emerging consumer culture and capitalism.24

Whereas Lears is weary and critical on effects of capitalism on American spirituality, R. Laurence Moore has a less severe reading of the market. Rather, in his book, Selling God - American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture, Moore sees the emergence of the American religious market as a space for invention and creativity on the part of religions. Starting his historical inquiry after the American Revolution and the increasing reach of the Tract society and print culture, Moore traces how religion fought to stay relevant in American culture using the forces of capitalism to aid their cause. Moore stylishly observes: “In American life, religion had to become a commodity, but that did not make it peanut butter.”25 Unlike Lears, Moore’s chooses not to focus on intellectuals, but on popular figures, who deserve more credit “as major architects of American experience,” and like politicians, made religion “lively and relevant to national life by reflecting popular taste.”26 Moore feels that the turn to the market by religious

---

actors should not be seen as selling out, but rather as a creative and innovation move that is intrinsically American.

In his book, *Restless Souls – The Making of American Spirituality*, Leigh Eric Schmidt also argues for the creativity and innovation of religious and spiritual actors. Further he feels that the search for “spirituality” is not a sociological inquiry, but rather a historical one. He finds that there is a long history in the United States of ‘seekers’ who drew from a large array of sources to understand their place in the world. Schmidt ties together thinkers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, W.E.B. DuBois, Vivekananda, Annie Besant, William James and Barack Obama to show that central to the history of spirituality in the United States is creativity and resourcefulness. What all these thinkers have in common is that they draw on a vast array of diverse traditions to construct their philosophies and approaches to life. Schmidt traces the ability of these thinkers to follow this path to the “rise and flourishing in the nineteenth century of religious liberalism,” saying that the seeking of spirituality is “an artifact of religious liberalism.”27  Thinkers that believed in this religious liberalism held the World’s Parliament of Religions in 1893 which paved the way for Vivekananda to affect the religious landscape of the United States, and bring yoga to a new level of popularity. This modern yoga that Vivekananda introduced to the United States laid the base for later gurus and practices to really take hold.

Recently, Catherine Albanese has published a book that also addresses the creativity of American spirituality. In her 2006 book, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit – A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion*, Albanese veers away from the term

spirituality towards the term metaphysical, which she defines as a religious orientation that focuses on the mind, connections to the past, energy of and between individuals and lastly the goal of healing through therapeutic means. For Albanese, the act of “recovering the narrative of American metaphysical religions sets the stage for a new reversionary account of all of American religious history that privileges the study of contact and combinations… a way to chronicle a profusely rich and hybrid series of contacts among religious peoples, ideas and practices.”28 Albanese effectively moves the discussion away from religious boundaries to religious appropriation and creativity. Her chapter, “Metaphysical Asia” is most useful, for it not only gives a great overview narrative of the different yogis that translated yoga into an American metaphysical practice, but it also exposes the various contacts and combinations that are an integral part of the this narrative.

What these books all have in common is that they provide us with broad histories that are essential monographs that allow for me to focus on a specific tradition in a particular context and time period. Lears, Moore, Schmidt and Albanese show that spirituality (or metaphysics), and the process of drawing from a diverse array of traditions to construct that spirituality is not a modern phenomenon, rather it and its place in an American religious market has a long history. Alter, De Michelis and Strauss give us a good overview of how modern yoga came to be, and gives a means of categorizing modern yoga today. Narayanan, Waghorne, and Dempsey present us with essential scholarship on the history and development of Hinduism in the United States after 1965, with their focus on temple and devotional culture. Prashad presents the pre-

---

1965 history, which helps us understand why Hinduism has become part of the American religious market today, and further, he warns us that we must be skeptical and question why Hindu traditions, such as yoga, have been given a favorable reception in the U.S.

I believe my research draws much inspiration and is heavily indebted to this scholarship, and I want my dissertation to force the intersection of these three fields. This needs to be done in order to properly understand yoga in the U.S. Not only is yoga part of the larger history of Hindu traditions in the U.S., but also due to the processes of global capitalism and colonialism, it has become modern and a global phenomenon, and also an integral part of the larger history of spirituality and the religious market in the U.S.

Method & Theory

This is a dissertation that will be historical with special attention to how this history has affected the practice of yoga today; thus I have used a wide variety of primary sources to tell this story. This covers a large array of materials. The writings many of the major yoga figures have been preserved. Throughout the first three chapters I lean heavily on the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, William Quan Judge, Swami Vivekananda, William Atkinson, Theos Bernard, Swami Yogananda, Richard Hittleman, Indra Devi, B.K.S. Iyengar and Prattabhi Jois. I also felt it was important to investigate the reception of the ideas and practices of yoga as they were introduced to Americans via Indian and American yoga teachers. Using the databases at the University of Florida, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College and Michigan State University, I searched the Atlanta Constitution, Chicago Tribune, Christian Science Monitor, Los Angeles Times, New York Times, San Francisco
Chronicle, Wall Street Journal, and Washington Post as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, and was able to find many articles that helped piece my narrative together.

Primary sources extend beyond the writings of and about yoga and yoga teachers. In 1975 the Yoga Journal was started, and after its success, more magazines followed suite in the 1980s and 1990s. Unfortunately, the Library of Congress only had Yoga Journal issues 62-78 and 80 through present (from May 1985 with a few missing from 1988). While I searched various library databases from New York to San Francisco, it was the library at Michigan State University that had the most extensive collection of the Yoga Journal, but they did not have the years from 1975-1983. I considered these years to be the most important, because I felt they would show the evolution of the Yoga Journal from a newsletter to a glossy magazine. I was also very interested to see what topics were covered, and what products were advertised in comparison to the topics and adverts of the mid-80s, the 90s and the early 2000s. While the Yoga Journal was unwilling to let me see their archives, I was able to find one of the early founders of the Yoga Journal, Judith Lasater, who was willing to let me look at her early Yoga Journals. Though I only had 2 hours to look through about 10 years worth of magazines, she did let me take pictures and these early issues have been most illuminating. This print culture provides a key insight into how yoga started to seep into mainstream culture.

Another tremendous resource for me has been India Abroad, a weekly newspaper circular that has been a serving the Indian community in North America since 1970. I was fortunate enough to be granted access to see copies of India Abroad from 1972-present at the library of Michigan State University, but unfortunately I have not been able to find hard copies of the first two years of India Abroad anywhere.
My reasons for pursuing this approach to this topic are connected to the way in which yoga has stretched from an Indian philosophical system into a global practice. This dissertation is both an intellectual history and the history of a cultural phenomenon and lived practice – I think that the combination of philosophical writings, newspaper articles and full magazines dedicated to the practice of yoga encapsulate the intellectual and cultural history of yoga in the US.

A quick survey of the various yoga magazines today show that yoga is far more than an ancient Indian philosophy or physical and mental practice – it is also a way to live one’s life. These magazines sell a “yoga lifestyle” and advertisers and companies have invented a large array of products to supplement and enhance this particular lifestyle. Robert A. Orsi, writes, “the emphasis in the study of lived religion is on embodied practice and imagination, as men, women, and children exist in and move through their built and found environments.” Lived religion points to the ways in which the body interacts with its social and material location. In his book, Phenomenology of Perception, Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that the body anchors one in the world and “is the pivot of the world: I know that objects have several facets because I could make a tour of inspection of them, and in that sense I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body.” Merleau-Ponty is interested in the place of the body in the world, and the dialectic between the body and natural and cultural world – it is at this intersection that we are able to observe and understand how religion is lived, practiced and embodied.

---

Though there has a slight shift from intellectual and textual history in the past few years, I do not wish to downplay the importance of printed material and the robust intellectual debates surrounding the introduction of a Hindu philosophy and practice to the United States. In his recent book, *Theology in America*, E. Brooks Holifield writes, “Combining religious fervor with egalitarian social protest, they [American populists] often broke away from established denominations and created alternative institutions… insisting that the ‘right of private judgment’ made everyone a theologian.” Holifield is arguing that intellectual discourse is not limited to the realm of academia – people outside this profession have opinions that are informed, changed and challenged by what is occurring in the intellectual sphere of society. In turn, those that are in business of theology or philosophy are informed, changed and challenged by what is occurring in the streets, farms and neighborhoods. In other words there is a healthy dialectic that creates the intellectual discourse, and it is through this intellectual discourse that yoga is first introduced to the United States, and thus cannot be ignored.

Following Orsi, that “that study of lived religion is not about practice rather than ideas, but ideas, gestures, imaginings, all as media of engagement with the world,” I hope to decipher the ways in which intellectual debate and lived practice intersect in the history of yoga in the United States. Involved in this investigation is employing archival methods which has helped in understanding both the intellectual and lived history of yoga in the United States.

While spending time looking through stacks of newspaper articles, various autobiographical writings and advertisements, I realized that studying this history might

---

31 E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America – Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 18.
have implications beyond historiography; that I was struggling with the questions regarding the cultural and religious “status” of yoga. This research has forced me to look how religion and culture moves, and ask to whom does a particular religion or culture belong.

For theoretical guidance on these questions, I turned to Jean Baudrillard and started to think of yoga a type of post-modern simulacrum that continues to replicate without any reference to “any reality.”33 Yet, a simulacrum involves a process, one that starts with a “reflection of a profound reality.”34 While yoga today obviously has many forms and means many different things to different people, casting yoga as a simulacrum might assume a single origin or reality. Whereas yoga might not have had as many manifestations in ancient India as it does today, I am not convinced that yoga ever had a single origin. Given that yoga has migrated quite well over time and boundaries, and given that yoga seems to have sprouted up from multiple and perhaps unknowable sources in ancient India, it seems that perhaps it might be better to see yoga as rhizomatic, rather than as a simulacra. In their book, *a thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari write,

> The rhizome is reducible neither or the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes two or even directly three, four, five, etc. It is not a multiple derived from the One, or to which One is added \((n + 1)\)... It has neither beginning not end, but always a middle \((milieu)\) from which it grows and which it overspills... It is a short-term memory or antimemory. The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots... a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight”.35

---


What Deleuze and Guattari are concerned with is the nature of culture, and they are giving an answer to question of cultural origins – essentially they are arguing that origins are impossible to trace for culture rhizomatic. While they are not arguing against the project of history, they do call into question the uses of historical inquiry.

Further, imagining yoga as a rhizome, rather than a simulacrum, helps in better understanding why it has translated so well across cultural contexts. The goal is to delve into the ‘folds and wrinkles’ that emerge during the processes of translation. The trope of the rhizome enables an understanding of why this process is messy and complex; it is because the rhizome itself is messy and complex and this is because culture is not neat and easy. Once we divorce ourselves from the idea and comfort of origins, and embrace the uneasiness of rhizomes, the easier it becomes to understand that cultures and practice constantly translate to create even more ‘folds and wrinkles’ for rhizomes to navigate into, out of and over in different times and places. The concept of the rhizome also helps explain why yoga has been so easily commodified; capitalism serves to deterritorialize everything it comes into contact with, and thus helps a rhizome (practice of yoga) translate into different contexts.36

The problem with this theoretical outlook is that it could be seen as justifying cultural appropriation, an issue that concerns some postcolonial citizens and scholarship. Yet as I put together the pieces of my research, it seemed that this theoretical framework best fit my narrative, and even came to explain why cultural (and religious) appropriation is such a slippery subject, and one that is so difficult to adjudicate. As I navigate through the history of yoga in United States, I hope to show

36Deleuze and Guattari, a thousand plateaus, 454-455.
that one of the reasons that yoga is so translatable, so practicable and so commodifiable in the context of the United States is because of its rhizomatic qualities. That is, yoga is impossible to trace to one point (n is unknowable), that it is easily malleable and changed, and thus can be accessed by various actors in a myriad of ways for a myriad of reasons and possibilities.

Chapter Outline

I have chosen to break this dissertation into seven chapters. Besides an introduction and conclusion, there are five middle chapters, each of which loosely focus on a time period and what makes that time in the history of yoga interesting. These sections are briefly summarized below.

Introducing Yoga

While taking seriously the idea that yoga is a rhizome, this first chapter starts out by briefly looking into the histories of yoga in India. In some way this might explain why yoga so captured the imagination of Henry David Thoreau, a Transcendentalist thinker, wrote, “rude and careless as I am, I would fain practice the yoga faithfully.” While the Transcendentalists and Theosophists were enthralled with Indian texts and ideas, there is no evidence that they knew how to practice. The first to bring the practice of yoga to the United States was Swami Vivekananda who came to participate in the World’s Parliament of Religions in 1893. He was among the more popular delegates at the meeting, and was able to stay longer for the purpose of raising money for his Ramakrishna Mission and Math in India, as well as plant the seeds for establishing Vedanta Centers in the United States. Though he gained many followers he also

created a lot of controversy. Within a decade of publishing *Raja Yoga*, one of the foundational texts for modern yoga, there appeared both supporters and detractors of Vivekananda.

This first chapter is an attempt to lay out this early history and tease out the inherent tensions that existed - the confusion between accepting the exotic and spiritual and rejecting the menacing and forbidden other. While yoga might be the anti-modern answer to the dilemma of modernism posited by Lears, it still is scary, for it is the modern forces of capitalism and globalization that expose Americans to yoga. In particular, yoga is distrusted because it attracted so many white women, which caused some scandal and hysteria in the papers.

**Popularizing Yoga**

This next chapter focuses on four figures: Pierre and Theos Bernard, William Atkinson and Yogananda. The Progressive Era, the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression and World War II was interesting in the history of yoga for it is in this time period that yoga becomes more of a global phenomenon, and marks a time when yoga started to become less foreign and more indigenized to the context of the United States. In other words, some Americans started to make yoga their own. Pierre Bernard, who was dogged by scandal at first, started his own yoga school and retreat. Inspired by his uncle, Theos Bernard went to South Asia in 1936 traveling all over from Tibet to Sri Lanka. When he returned from India, he wrote his dissertation, *Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience*, which was published and was, for many years, a popular source book on the practice of yoga, on both sides of the Atlantic.

At the same time Vedanta Centers were being set up in the US, a Euro-American by the name of William Atkinson started publishing best-selling books under the
pseudonym Yogi Ramacharaka. These books were on yoga, and while there is no evidence that he never went to India or had any contact with any yoga instruction, they were nonetheless taken as authentic and read by many even today! Understanding the phenomenon and success of William Atkinson is perhaps a key to understanding why yoga had staying power in the United States.

Despite the emergence of American yoga teachers, Indian gurus still garnered much popularity in the United States. In particular, the figure and philosophies of Paramahansa Yogananda best embodies the guru of the 1920s, 30s, 40s & 50s. Born in the same year that Vivekananda came to the United States, Yogananda espoused the practice of Kriya Yoga (a meditative practice which stresses the connection between the mind and breath), and spent his early life teaching throughout India. In 1920 he was invited by the Unitarians to speak at a Boston conference on the Science of Religion, which fit Yogananda’s philosophy for he drew from contemporary ideas in science to explain that Kriya Yoga was a technique to recharge the body with spiritual energy. Yogananda is best known for his 1946 book, *Autobiography of a Yogi*. This book braids the adventures of Yogananda’s extraordinary life with a spiritual journey, thus it became very popular, not only in the U.S., but the world over (it has been translated into 18 languages). This book also appealed to a broad audience because Yogananda drew from a broad range of spiritual traditions, including Christianity, in order to spread his message, thus aptly fitting into the history of spiritual borrowing in the U.S. as told by Schmidt.

What is interesting about this period is that we see how yoga is starting to become more of a global movement and how the global is manifested in the U.S. (one could say
to create a glocal movement). It is at this point that yoga starts to transform from a primarily meditative practice to a physical practice with bodily benefits, and yoga is starting to take its place in the American market. In India and the U.S. the connection between yoga and science is explored; all four of the historical figures in this chapter use and emphasize this connection to make yoga more appealing to a certain part of the American population.

**Domesticating Yoga**

Theos Bernard is not the only American to go to India, only to return and become a major conduit of information. Richard Hittleman, whose books are still vastly popular today, came back to the United States from India in 1950, and by 1961 he was teaching yoga on television sets. Combined with his very popular book, *The Twenty-Eight Day Yoga Plan*, Hittleman reached millions of Americans.

An important guru in India, Tirumalai Krishnamacharya also influenced the practice of yoga in the U.S. through three of his students: Indra Devi, Bellur Krishnamachar Sundararaja (B. K. S) Iyengar and Pattabhi Jois. Russian by birth, American during life and Argentine at death, Indra Devi went to India and studied with Sri Krishnamacharya and published three books on yoga, which reached a wide audience of women all over the U.S. Iyengar stressed the physicality of Krishnamacharya’s yoga practice, and introduced the importance of bodily alignment and the use of props to aid in that alignment. With the help of American violinist Yehudi Menuhin, Iyengar came to the United States in 1956, but reached immense popularity after the publication of this book *Light on Yoga - The Bible of Modern Yoga* in 1966. What is significant about this book is that it focuses on the *asanas* of that made Iyengar yoga so popular, but also introduces the American public to a technical Hindu vocabulary. Iyengar and Menuhin
traveled all over Europe and the United States together, making this form of yoga one of the most popular of the time and even today. Another of Krishnamacharya’s students, Pattabhi Jois, focused on the flow between asanas and the centrality of the Surya Namaskara in practice. This type of yoga was more aerobic in nature and attracted a following of practitioners that wanted more exercise.

In the cultural turmoil/upheaval/revolution of the 1960s, and particularly in the U.S. with the popularity of the counter-culture, the fight for civil rights and the disillusionment of the Vietnam War, yoga became very attractive, especially to the ‘hippies.’ This population also had a drug problem and two yoga gurus of this era, Yogi Bhajan and Swami Satchidananda, used yoga to combat this problem. Along with importing their version of yoga, they also created drug rehabilitation programs, which aided in their popularity. Yogi Bhajan introduced Kundalini Yoga to the United States, and in 1969 established the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO) in New Mexico. Swami Satchidananda, a student of Swami Sivananda who opened the Woodstock festival in 1969, founded the Integral Yoga Institute and the ashram, Yogaville. Both these organizations are thriving today and provide refuge for those seeking an alternative to mainstream life.

Simultaneously yoga really started to be seen as a means for better physical health, not just spiritual health, and all the major figures of this chapter capitalized on this trend. The pragmatic benefits of yoga made it appealing to those outside of the counter-culture, and the importance of health was a growing concern in the U.S. This chapter will not only try to make sense of all the different yogas that were introduced to the U.S., but also to understand their particular philosophy, their presence in the
religious market, and to explore how they all appealed to Americans (particularly women) via the conduit of health.

Communalizing Yoga

This chapter examines the battle over yoga and community by turning attention to the history of the Yoga Journal and the relationship between the Hindu Indo-Americans and yoga.

To serve the growing interest in yoga, in 1975 the California Yoga Teachers Association started the Yoga Journal. Their first issue was distributed to 300 people, however, they claim that today each of their issues reaches about one million people, and have increased their output to eight issues a year. This magazine sells yoga as part of a particular lifestyle, and helps to popularize the practice of modern yoga. Looking, in particular, at the Yoga Journal there is much evidence to show the process of how yoga became a lifestyle, and how yoga became “divorced” or separated from religion. Combined, the covers, articles and advertisements, cast yoga a spiritual practice, one that is separate from Hinduism (but not from India) and thus practiced by anyone. The Yoga Journal helped create a habitus around yoga, and made it common property for all to participate.

With the presence of the Yoga Journal and so many schools of yoga practice in the United States, one might imagine that the new Indian immigrant population might immediately embrace the practice of yoga. The majority of these immigrants were urban, educated and middle-class, thus many of them had already been exposed to modern yoga - when they came to the United States, the presence of yoga was not entirely unfamiliar and strange. Yet, taking a closer look at these immigrants’ early devotional practices and the stories about religion covered by India Abroad, it does not
seem that yoga was first practice embraced by this new community. They brought with them their more material and “ethnic” practices – rituals, fasts, dances, and it was not too long after their arrival that Hindu temples started to dot the American landscape and sacralize the states as sacred Hindu ground. This type of Hinduism, with its elaborate rituals, material embodiments of divinity and sectarian divisions stood in stark contrast to the austere, simple and ecumenical Hinduism that the early Indian yoga gurus introduced to the US. It was not until the 1990s that new Hindu immigrants started to fully embrace the practice of yoga, and part of this involved embracing a yoga guru of their own, Swami Ramdev. Ramdev caters primarily to Indians in India and around the globe and is one guru that is not ‘afraid’ of the Hindu label, thus encouraging those that wish to claim to yoga as essentially Hindu.

It is this dynamic between Euro-American yoga practitioners and Hindu immigrants that shows part of the rhizomatic nature of yoga; that it can accessed by different groups in different ways and for different purposes. The question that must be answered, is why ownership or communalizing of yoga important?

Complicating Yoga

This chapter continues to explore the emergence of yoga as a force in the religious market in the United States, and the ways in which it is mixing into the market, other religions and civic spaces.

Yoga classes are becoming more varied and expensive, more products (mats, props, yoga pants) are needed to practice yoga, and there seems to be a yoga product for every facet of a ‘yogis’ life. This immense proliferation is somewhat due to the participation of yoga in the American capitalist market – how does this change the practice of yoga? Whereas Moore would point to the creativity that is involved in this
process, Lears and other Marxists would stress the alienation that this causes. It seems that both hold true when examining this merging. Further, non-Hindu religious groups as means for prayer now utilize yoga; despite protest from some, the merging of yoga with Abrahamic faiths is becoming increasingly popular. This variation on the practice of yoga, begs the question: is yoga essentially Hindu? If not, can it be used to practice other religions? If yoga is not Hindu (and thus not part of a religion), can it be taught in public schools and can the state regulate yoga studios? Given the existence of the First Amendment, the place of yoga in public schools and the attempt to regulate yoga studios and teacher training programs has garnered some controversy. If yoga is not religious or part of any one tradition, what is the harm in teaching it to children at school? And if it is a merely secular pursuit, then should the state not regulate it as they regulate businesses and vocational schools?

These three controversies over the mixing of yoga with the market, with other religions and with public spaces about the religious identity of yoga show how the place of yoga in the U.S. has become increasingly complicated since its arrival in the mid-19th century. Part of the reason for this complication is that yoga has become a commodity, and when a rhizome becomes a commodity, it refracts in as many directions as the market can sustain.

* * * * *

With a focus on translation, practice and commodification, I hope to tell a story that adds to a larger narrative of North American religious history. While the narrative itself is most interesting, and even at times, amusing, the topic of yoga allows access to some of the larger foundational questions in religious studies today: What is religion? How does
religion and culture move or migrate, and how does this movement change religion and culture? What is the relationship between religion and capitalism? The study of yoga touches on all these questions. There is much debate over whether yoga is a religion or a secular practice. Further, yoga is a practice that has come from India, and tracing this movement and the accompanying changes allows us to better understand the consequences of global flows. Finally yoga has a presence in the market today, and examining that presence may help in better understanding the relationship between religion and capitalism. This dissertation is a history of yoga in the United States. It follows the idea and practice of yoga from the time of the Transcendentalists to its presence in the American religious market today. The history of yoga in the United States fits into larger narrative of U.S. religious history, and illuminates the process of how a foreign religion becomes American. I also hope to answer some questions and perhaps shed some understanding on the puzzle that is religion, culture and capitalism. I want to try to comprehend why humans categorize the way they do and what these categories say about perception of religion, place, meaning and history (with particular attention to yoga). Perhaps looking specifically at the case study of yoga, we can better understand how culture commodifies, embodies, moves, translates and still remains ever flexible to its changing contexts.

Using the themes of translation, practice and commodification, I hope to bring an analysis of the history of yoga that brings further understanding and nuance to these larger issues in religious studies.
Like the headline from the introduction, this headline also appeared in 1908, but on August 15 and in the *New York Times*. This review, written by Joseph Hornor Coates is largely celebratory of the translation and exhibits a genuine enthusiasm for Hindu philosophy. While Coates describes the reviewed translation by Charles Johnston as “the best English version,” he also thinks it important to be familiar with the *Bhagavad Gita* because it contains proof that “human beings were thrashing out problems very like those which are confronting us to-day, and sometimes along lines of though quite similar to those the twentieth century is pursuing.”

The *Bhagavad Gita* is one Hindu text that is a huge part of the history of yoga in India and in the United States. While it is in no way a point of origin, rather point of entrance into this narrative and further understanding, the *Bhagavad Gita* weaves in and out of this history, especially in the early years of encounter between the U.S. and yoga. This chapter will chronicle these early years, from the time of the Transcendentalists of New England through the middle of the American Progressive Era: a period in American history when some (liberal) Protestants started to question the inerrancy of the *Bible* and read the *Bible* as a historical document. This interpretive

---

position helped make these American Protestants more open to ideas and practices from other religions, and from the beginning of this ‘openness’ yoga captured American imaginations.

It is tempting to ask why and how did yoga start, and to these questions there seems to be no satisfying answer; nonetheless, the first section of this chapter will briefly outline the history of yoga in India, which will assist in providing a better understanding of yoga in the United States. The next section of this chapter will be on the Transcendentalist movement, and in particular will focus on Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. The Transcendentalists were introduced to translated religious texts from India, and found in them a philosophy to help them cope with and fight the disillusionments of their day, and the practice of yoga was part of that philosophy. While Transcendentalism was an American movement influenced by global forces, the Theosophical Society was a transnational movement largely based on ideas from Indian texts that found a home in the United States. The next section explores the history of Theosophy, and pays particular attention to its history in the United States and the way they thought about yoga. The Transcendentalist movement and the Theosophical Society helped introduce yoga to the United States, but this early introduction was mainly confined to New England and New York City. The World’s Parliament of Religions in 1893, the focus of this chapter’s fourth section, is the event that provided a national stage for yoga. It was covered in all types of newspapers (with the help of the Associated Press, small town and big city), and introduced interested Americans to Swami Vivekananda, the first yoga missionary from India. In turn, Vivekananda introduced Americans to a systemized means of practicing yoga, primarily
through pranayama. While Vivekananda was quite popular, the attention he and yoga in general, garnered from white women became troubling to some, and was hence scandalously scrutinized in the national press. This early controversy surrounding yoga shows that the translation of yoga into an American practice was not completely seamless and the American public never immediately or wholly embraced yoga; this uneasiness and mistrust manifested itself via concern for white women’s bodies. Once yoga started to gain popularity, a cloud of suspicion arose over it, and this part of U.S. yoga history is important to unearth, because suspicion and fear of foreignness threads through this history to today.

Taken together, the five sections of this chapter (on the history of yoga in India, the Transcendentalists, the Theosophical Society, The World’s Parliament of Religions and Vivekananda, and finally on yoga, scandal and women) will show how the practice of yoga started to translate into an American context. This translation was not always neat, was not always accepted, and certainly made headlines, but is nonetheless important to better understand why yoga became so popular in later decades.

**What Is Yoga? Meaning and History in India**

Technically, translated from Sanskrit, yoga means to yoke together or union, but it can also mean discipline or technique. It is more than a word, and thus difficult to translate and it shows up in various texts and at various times and in various forms – from the beginning yoga exhibited rhizomatic qualities. While this dissertation is geographically confined to the United States, it is still important to understand yoga, its various meanings and its long history. While the origin of yoga maybe in India, even there it is impossible to trace yoga to one point; just as in the US, in ancient India yoga never had one purpose or even one meaning.
The *Bhagavad Gita*, which is dated between the 2nd century B.C.E. and the 2nd century C.E., is but a section of a much larger epic, the *Mahabharata*, which poses more questions than gives answers on the nature of life and purpose through the narrative of two warring factions of the same family. At one point during the great battle, one of the “good” brothers, Arjuna, struggles with the task of having to members of his family on the battlefield. His charioteer, Krishna, consuls Arjuna on what he should do and why; it is these verses that make up the *Bhagavad Gita*. Krishna tells Arjuna that he should follow the path laid out for him, and that inaction is not an option. Through yoga (discipline) one is able to act with detachment, which leads to liberation. There are three yoga options which may lead to liberation, that Krishna lays out in the *Bhagavad Gita*: *karma yoga* (action), *jnana yoga* (knowledge), and *bhakti yoga* (devotion). It is clearly laid out in the *Gita* that in order to gain liberation through yoga one must practice by living an ethical life, making ethical decisions and following one’s path. Yoga in the *Gita* does not involve postures, but rather is a code for how one should strive to live.

Yoga not only shows up in the *Bhagavad Gita*, but is also the name of one of the six classical Indian schools of philosophy. The text that is most identified today with the Yoga school of philosophy is the *Yoga Sutras* attributed to Patanjali, which is “earliest known systematic statement of the philosophical insights and practical psychology that define yoga.” Written around the third century C.E., and heavily influenced by the

---

4These six schools are: Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa and Vedanta. In ancient times the Yoga school was most associated with the dualism or Sankhya; today the practice of yoga is often identified with Vedanta, the school of philosophy that is most popular today.
Bhagavad Gita, as well as Buddhism and Jainism, the Yoga Sutras is a guide to liberation composed of eight limbs or practices: “moral principles (yama), observances (niyama), posture (asana), breath control (pranayama), withdrawal of senses (pratyahara), concentration (dharana), meditation (dhyana), and pure contemplation (samadhi).” Understanding that the yoga presented by Patanjali had eight components is important for understanding how yoga has changed, for yoga practiced today mostly involves asanas and some pranayama. Perhaps pranayama and asana were latched onto by modern yoga “exporters” for they were easiest to translate into a modern ethos - one that focused on health and physical wellbeing.

Another important, but much younger, text that bears importance on the history of yoga in the U.S. is the Hatha Yoga Pradipika by Swami Swatmarama. This text was most likely compiled by the sage in the 15th century, and while not much is known about Swatmarama, his text is in many ways the source for many of the popular yoga asanas today. Swatmarama divides his treatise on Hatha Yoga into four parts: Asanas, Pranayama, Mudras and Samadhi. Swatmarama explains that Hatha Yoga is a “stairway to the heights of Raja Yoga”, which is a retronym in reference to the yoga of Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras. Throughout the four sections of his text, Swatmarama describes exactly what one must do in order to master Hatha Yoga. In detail, Swatmarama explains how to perform various asanas, what food to eat (and not to eat), how to practice pranayama, which mudras to do in order to combat sickness and old age, and finally how to attain samadhi (union with Atman). Unlike Patanjali, Swatmarama was extremely specific about what a yogi had to do in order to become a

---

master of yoga. It is because of this specificity that it is an extremely important text for it showed many of the modern yogis (in India and the U.S.) exactly how to practice yoga, and many of the asanas in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika became the basis for the modern yoga postures taught today.

While the Bhagavad Gita, Yoga Sutra and the Hatha Yoga Pradipika are all Brahmin Hindu texts, yoga in ancient and medieval India was a practice that seemed to transcend the religious boundaries between Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, and it also was common to Tantra. Based on his research of yoga in ancient India, noted historian Thomas Berry argues that yoga is a “spirituality rather than a religion” and that it “has become intimately associated with both Hinduism and Buddhism.” The categorical separation between religion and spirituality can be problematic, especially when applying these Protestant categories to the South Asian context. Categories, like yoga, have histories, and when these categories rise out of a European and American and Protestant context, they do not always fit when translated back to other contexts. Further, it is not all together decided that such a split between religion and spirituality exists, even in Euro-American Protestant circles. Despite this categorical slipup, Berry is pointing to the innate rhizomatic quality of yoga. It is apparent that yoga never really fit neatly anywhere, and at anytime. This malleability and boundary crossing is still the case today, and has been the case from the time yoga entered into the American religious landscape.


Yoga and the Transcendentalists

In 1785, Sir Charles Wilkins, an employee of the East India Company, translated the *Bhagavad Gita* into English. This first translation, *Bhagvat-geeta, or Dialogues of Krëeshna and Arjoon*, made its way to the United States and into the hands of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). These two men were part of a larger early nineteenth century, New England-based movement called Transcendentalism, which sought to question religion, technology and government.

In many ways Emerson was the leader of this movement. Starting in 1836, he set up a weekly meeting for Transcendentalist meetings, and this club later started publishing a journal, *The Dial*, with their thoughts and causes. Overall, Transcendentalists focused on the potential of the individual within and even without society. In many ways their outlook was most utopian, and interested in self-liberation and transcendence outside the traditional bounds of New England Protestantism. Thus, when texts from India started to flow into the print culture of New England, the Transcendentalists were an eager audience. Though Emerson did not read Wilkins’ translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* until 1845, while a student at Harvard and after, he was made aware of Hindu philosophies via a myriad of secondary sources.\(^\text{10}\) Along with the *Gita*, Emerson latched onto the H.H. Wilson 1840 translation of the *Vishnu Purana*, and through study of these texts he found that “in all nations there are minds which incline to dwell in the conception of the fundamental Unity. The raptures of prayer and the ecstasy of devotion lose all being in one Being.”\(^\text{11}\) From this, it is apparent that


Emerson was taken by the idea of union or yoga, but what is not apparent is if he imagined yoga beyond an Asian or Hindu philosophy. Further, Emerson was fixated on the idea of “Asia as an almost absolute, transhistorical and transcontextual category,” and for Emerson this Asia was feminine and spiritual, while the ‘west’ was masculine and material. This construction of the east versus the west is one to be aware of, for it is replicated by later missionaries of yoga and in many ways, still persists today. For Emerson, what he read in the Gita and Vishnu Purana was what he imagined India to be like, which is akin to an Indian in the nineteenth century and basing her impressions of the U.S. on the Bible or Book of Mormon. It is not quite clear if Emerson ever moved beyond imagining yoga as more than a type of philosophy, one that nicely fit into the ethos of the Transcendentalist movement.

The understanding of yoga as a practice becomes more apparent with Thoreau. Though in many ways Emerson and Thoreau were contemporaries and comrades in the cause of Transcendentalism and though it was Emerson that fully introduced Thoreau to the new world of Asian sacred texts, it could be argued that Thoreau took his appreciation of Hinduism to another level, for he used these texts for more than just a tool in the process of reforming or forming a philosophy. For Thoreau, these texts were a manual for practices, which would lead to a better life. He wrote, “rude and careless as I am, I would fain practice the yoga faithfully.” The question is, when Thoreau writes of practicing yoga, what exactly was he doing? Was he meditating along the “banks” of the Walden, imagining he was a yogi on the banks of the Ganges? Was he striking various asana poses?

---

12 Malini Johar Schueller, US Orientalisms: Race, Nation and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890 (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press), 165.
Looking closer at Wilkins’ translation of the Gita might help a bit in reconstructing Thoreau’s actions. In part six of the Gita, which Wilson translates as “Lecture VI: Of The Exercise of the Soul”, Krishna (or Kreeshna) explains how one becomes a yogi (or Yogee):

He plants his seat firmly on a spot that is undefiled, neither too high nor too low, and sits upon the sacred grass, called Koos, covered with a skin and a cloth. There be, whose business is the restraining of passions, should sit with his mind fixed on one object alone in the exercise of devotion for the purification of soul, keeping his head, neck and body steady without motion; his eyes fixed on the point of nose, looking at no other place around… This divine discipline, Arjoon, cannot be attained by him, who eats more than enough, or less than that; neither by him who is in the habit of sleeping much, nor by him who sleeps not at all. This discipline, which assuages the pains, is susceptible to him, who is moderate in eating, recreation, action and sleep.14

Did Thoreau sit on the banks of Walden Pond covered only by “skin and cloth” concentrating on purifying his soul? Was there anything else that he did?

We may not be able to fully extrapolate what he meant by practicing “the yoga,” but what is interesting, is that he imagined yoga to be a practice – something that is not necessarily to be simply be thought about, but something to be done. In his 1964 article, “Walden and Yoga,” Frank Macshane argues that Thoreau thought yoga to be method of liberation, and that “Yoga alone offered the possibility of overcoming that feeling of quiet desperation and futility suffered by men divided between the here and how and the ultimate… the dualism of modern life.”15 Thoreau was thoroughly disenchanted with the changing economic and social landscape of the United States, and “recognized that the trials of industrialism produced both material and spiritual hardships for working

---

14 The Bhagvat-Geeta or Dialogues of Kreeshna and Arjoon In Eighteen Lectures, trans. Charles Wilkins (Calcutta, India: Bengal Superior Press, 1845), 23.
people. His solution was to retreat into nature and attempt to live life according to the texts with which he had become so enchanted. Like Emerson, Thoreau fell into the trap of imagining India (and by extension, yoga) as fixed and pure, which just fueled his disillusionment of his location as capricious and corrupt. Thoreau’s exoticism aside, that he was able to use the Bhagavad Gita and the practice of yoga to deal with the alienation of modernism (and capitalism) is demonstrative of yoga’s translatability across regional, temporal, social and economic boundaries. Thoreau’s glorification and “use” of yoga was just the beginning; many would follow in their attempts to liberate themselves via the practice of a form of yoga.

Yoga and the Theosophists

Elena Petrovna Gan (better known as Helena Blavatsky) Henry Steel Olcott, and William Quan Judge founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. The focus of the Theosophical Society, like the Transcendentalists, was not yoga; nonetheless they incorporated yoga into their spiritualist philosophy and introduced Pantanjali’s Yoga Sutra to U.S.

The Theosophical Society had three main goals:

To form the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, colour, or creed...To promote the study of Aryan and other Scriptures, of the World's religion and sciences, and to vindicate the importance of old Asiatic literature, namely, of the Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Zoroastrian philosophies... To investigate the hidden mysteries of Nature under every aspect possible, and the psychic and spiritual powers latent in man especially.17

From these three main goals it is obvious that the Theosophists relied heavily on the newly translated scriptures from the British colonies of South Asia, and they also had a

---

16Prashad, The Karma of Brown Folk, 17.
desire to create a world built upon equality. This was essential to the Theosophists for they also felt that all the major world religions lead to one destination, and it was their goal to ascertain how and to excavate the esoteric history of the major world religions. It is safe to say that the Theosophists had a certain type of wonder and reverence for the religions of India, and were very much dedicated to discovery of their many secrets.

Blavatsky and Olcott eventually traveled to India and set up headquarters in Bangalore, while Judge stayed and headed the Theosophical Society in the U.S. After Blavatsky’s death in 1891, Olcott and Judge split over a forgery tiff. Olcott and his successor, Annie Besant, stayed in South Asia, while Judge and his successor, Katherine Tingley, continued to head the Theosophical Society in the U.S. To this day, the Theosophical University Press, which is the publishing arm of the Theosophical Society in the U.S., does not even acknowledge the writings of Olcott or Besant (who is perhaps Theosophy’s most prolific figure).18

Schisms and disagreements are bound to arise within new religious movements. While the Transcendentalists were a group that shared a common philosophy, the Theosophical Society’s aim was broader and loftier, which probably led to conflict, especially after their main leader, Blavatsky died. Both arms of the Theosophical Society, in the U.S. and in India, continued after Blavatsky’s death and both kept focus on excavating the mysteries of the past encapsulated in various texts from South Asia.

---

Given this focus, it is not surprising that the Theosophical Society stumbled across the practice and philosophy of yoga.

In 1889, Judge published an interpretation of Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*; this text was basically a translation of the *Yoga Sutras* by Indian Theosophist Tookeram Tatya, sprinkled with Judge’s comments. For example, Judge relates Patanjali’s ideas on release from the cycle of rebirth to the theosophical idea of *mahatmas*. For the Theosophists, *mahatmas* were great souls and teachers, and “from them we have derived all the Theosophical truths… They are men of great learning… They are not ascetics in the ordinary sense, though they certainly remain apart from the turmoil and strife of your western world.”¹⁹ Judge used the theosophical idea of *mahatmas* to explain Patanjali’s notion that practice of yoga leads to the soul’s perfection and thus liberation from *karma*. Quite simply, Judge was attempting to link the ideas of the Theosophical Society to the ancient wisdom of Patanjali. He was also attempting to see how the ideas of Patanjali could be used for the benefit of his contemporaries. In particular, it seems that Judge was quite drawn to the idea of reincarnation and feels that this is a better way of thinking of about the soul than the notion expounded “under the frightful dogmas of Christian priestcraft” that a soul “will enjoy heaven or be damned eternally.”²⁰

The best means, for Judge, of releasing the soul from the cycle of reincarnation is *Raja Yoga*, not *Hatha Yoga*. Judge draws a distinction between the two arguing that even though “results in the way of psychic development are not so immediately seen as in the case of the successful practitioner of *Hatha Yoga*,” *Raja Yoga* “is infinitely safer

---

¹⁹Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy*, 186.
and is certainly spiritual, which *Hatha Yoga* is not."\(^{21}\) In an 1891 article, “Why Yoga Practice is Dangerous,” Judge warns Theosophists that *Hatha Yoga* slows down the pulse of the heart, thus one who practices needs “a guide who is fully acquainted with the subject… and that every one of these practices requires an antidote for its effects.”\(^{22}\) The problem with this article is that Judge does not give much more information beyond that yoga practice slows down the heart; there are no specifics given about what exactly this practice entails.

Obviously, Judge did not feel that *Hatha Yoga* is a step towards mastering *Raja Yoga* the way Swatmarama did, but the question is, what did Judge mean by practice of *Raja Yoga*? This is harder to ascertain. Judge’s successor, Tingley, did start a Raja Yoga school that was involved in some kidnapping allegations, but there is no evidence describing what type of yoga was practiced. Similar to suppositions about the Transcendentalists, one is left to piece together what yoga practice by the Theosophists may have looked like. From Judge’s warnings about *Hatha Yoga* and hailing of Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*, he likely felt that one needed to follow the eight practices that lead to liberation as described by Patanjali, but Judge had amendments to Patanjali that would better suit the Western student. Looking back at Judge’s ‘interpretation’ of the *Yoga Sutras*, it is clear that Judge places little value on the posture limb of the *Yoga Sutras*. He writes,

> For the clearing up of the mind of the student it is to be observed that the ‘postures’ laid down in various systems of ‘Yoga’ are not absolutely essential to the successful pursuit of the practice of concentration and attainment of its ultimate fruits. All such ‘postures,’ as prescribed by Hindu writers, are based upon an accurate knowledge of the physiological

\(^{21}\) *The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*, vii.

\(^{22}\) William Quan Judge, “Why Yoga Practice is Dangerous,” *Path* Volume V (March 1891): 368.
effects produced by them, but at the present day they are only possible for Hindus, who from their earliest years are accustomed to assuming them.  

From this interpretation, it seems clear that Judge and his fellow Theosophists imagined yoga as more of a meditative practice that aided in concentration of the mind rather than a physical practice that aided in the health of the body. Like the Transcendentalists, he also drew a distinction between people in the west and the east, specifically, Hindus. It seems he imagined Hindus doing yoga postures from the time they were young, and thus older Westerners could not assume such positions, because their bodies were not disciplined in a similar manner. Yet, the mind could be disciplined and trained via yoga at a later age. This Cartesian outlook is consistent with the Theosophical Society’s third goal of excavating the latent psychic (not physical) powers within humans, nonetheless it is curious that Judge seemed to think the mind could be retrained, but that the body could not be.

It is important to remember, however, that the Theosophical Society (and the Transcendentalists) did not place yoga at the center of their spiritual system. Rather, they used (bent) yoga to fit their ultimate agenda, and the parts that did not fit (postures) were discarded. The Theosophical Society was also most creative in their outlook: they were synthesizing a mountain of new religious and textual information that was circulating in the new colonial world. The Theosophists were attempting to decipher truth in a world that had more than one religious text; trying to do yoga was part of this decryption. While they may not have been terribly successful at the yoga part, they did succeed in introducing the concept of yoga to part of the U.S., and perhaps most importantly introduced a foundational yogic text to a non-academic population. Their

---

23 *The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali*, 23.
willingness to see and accept truth beyond Christianity and the Bible helped create a pathway for yoga (and other Asian religions) in U.S.

**World’s Parliament of Religions and the Triumph (?) of Swami Vivekananda**

While the Transcendentalists and the Theosophical Society helped introduce yoga and other Asian religions to the U.S., it was the World Parliament of Religions in 1893 that gave them a national stage. Neither Emerson nor Thoreau lived long enough to participate in the World’s Parliament of Religions in 1893, but the American Theosophical Society sent a delegation there. Though Olcott did not attend, he did help sponsor one of the Buddhist attendees, Anagarika Dharmapala, a Sinhalese monk. ‘Actual’ practitioners and leaders of the religions that the Transcendentalists and Theosophists read about and introduced to the U.S., met in Chicago for about two weeks in September of 1893. Organized by John Henry Barrows, a Presbyterian minister in Chicago, the World’s Parliament of Religions was part of a larger event: the World’s Columbian Exposition, which was to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’ discovery of the New World.24 The goal of the Parliament was to allow “Able ministers and laymen of all creeds” to “set forth the reasons for the faith that is in them... and in almost every instance, the address relating to these religion will be given by persons from far-off lands in which they hold sway over the consciences of men.”25 In many ways it was more an event to show case American and Christian (Liberal Protestant) exceptionalism, and the Parliament of Religions was meant to fit into this construction. As the event was being planned, one of the organizers, “Rev. J.

---


R. Morrison said: ‘I do not believe there is any other community in the world able to carry out a program like ours and make it a success. We feel as though it were a new era dawning, and that possible this great gathering of the nations here in Chicago is to make a turning point in the evangelization of the world.”26 Thus, while it was to be a forum for all religions, evangelization (conversion to Christianity) was not off the table for all participants, thus mutual respect was not the underlying goal. Further, not all American Christians were thrilled with idea of hosting non-Christians in their country. Rev. Frederick Campbell, another Presbyterian minister, argued that

Heathen life is in heathen creeds... while we force a cessation of polygamy in Utah we are providing the spectacle of a public religious recognition of the heads of heathen harems, whom we ask to ‘sit with us in frank and friendly conference over the great things of our common spiritual and moral life.’ The parliament of religions will be in depreciation of Christianity. What the world needs is not more theism, but the recognition of God in the Christ. Christianity contains something vitally distinctive.27

Campbell’s protests point to the growing schisms between liberal and conservative Protestantism that gripped congregations all over the country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which had an effect on people’s willingness to be open to the truths of other people. The liberal Protestant faction in this country, in many ways, owes much to the openness of the Transcendentalists who sought truth outside the Bible, but this religious outlook, combined with biblical interpretation, embracing of science and social justice just agitated the growing conservative Protestant movement, which preferred edicts of Biblical literalism, creationism, pre-millennialism and a singular Christian truth.

While the World’s Parliament of Religions may have been a step back for Campbell and his followers it was a triumph for the other side: “that those we have been accustomed to call heathens are not so much heathens as we imagined. Under some of the religions lies the clear idea of divinity. Under all lies the clear idea of morality.”28 In many ways, this conference was a small step in the direction of plurality and acceptance; at the same time it was a huge moment for yoga and America’s first missionary, Swami Vivekananda, who emerged from the Parliament a media star whose message became most appealing. While Christian evangelism might not have been taken off the table at this meeting, there was also room for the reverse mission (a technique picked up by Hindu reformers in India from Christian missionaries), and Vivekananda was keen to take advantage of the American platform.

Vivekananda was well received at the Parliament, partly because of his message and partly because of his delivery style and presence. Born in 1863 in Bengal as Narendranath Datta, Vivekananda became a follower of the mystic, Ramakrishna; and after Ramakrishna’s death in 1886, Vivekananda had the daunting task of holding together the disciples of Ramakrishna while also finding his own path of liberation. It is at this time that he learned yoga from Pavhari Baba, and started plotting his visit to the United States to attend the World Parliament of Religions.29

While there were many interesting figures at the Parliament, Vivekananda was particularly appealing to the liberal Protestant crowd and media. His desire was first to debunk what he perceived as misconceptions about Hinduism. In his speech at the

---

Parliament, he said, “At the very outset, I may tell you that there is no polytheism in India.”\textsuperscript{30} That he even felt the necessity to denounce polytheism shows that his categories of religion (good and bad) were informed by Protestant categorization; this influence is further demonstrated by paying closer attention to how he frames certain Hindu philosophical concepts. In the very same speech in which he denounces polytheism, Vivekananda explains Hindu perfection: “the whole object of their system is by constant struggle to become perfect… perfect even as the Father in Heaven is perfect.”\textsuperscript{31} Using this language might have been his way of appeasing his audience and translating Hinduism into understandable terms, but it also served to make Hinduism fit Protestant categories, thus make it less threatening and easier to sell via the enterprise of mission.

After the Parliament, Vivekananda traveled all over the US and Great Britain on a lecture and teaching tour for three years. He gained a decent following and was well received. He continued to use language that made sense to the people he was talking to, and focus on issues that they could relate too. His travels and talks garnered local and national media attention.\textsuperscript{32} Vivekananda co-opted the colonial idea of ‘east’/’west’ difference, and thus fell into the same trap of constructing the ‘east’ as wholly and innately different from the ‘west.’ He commented: “When the Oriental wants to learn about machine making, he should sit at the feet of the Occidental and learn from him. When the Occident wants to learn about the spirit, about God, about the soul, about the


\textsuperscript{31}Vivekananda, “Why We Disagree,” 13.

\textsuperscript{32}Vivekananda’s followers compiled his writings and lectures in 9 volumes. In many of these volumes, in the last sections, are newspaper clippings from all over the country, from the \textit{New York Times} to the \textit{Iowa State Register}. All these articles are all positive reviews of Vivekananda, but they do show the extent of his traveling and are testament to the interest he garnered.
meaning and the mystery of the universe, he must sit at the feet of the Orient to learn.” In many ways he took his own advice in setting up religious communities in India and the US.

Vivekanananda made enough connections across the United States to start forming networks, such that during his second trip to the States in 1899 (after forming the Ramakrishna Mission and Math in India), he started Vedanta Societies in New York City and San Francisco. While the Ramakrishna Mission and Math in India was dedicated to reform Hinduism and social work (something he picked up from missions in India and exposure to the Benevolent Empire in the US, as well as the budding Social Gospel Movement), the Vedanta society in the US was primarily dedicated to the teachings of Hindu philosophies and the practice of yoga. While Vivekananda and later Swamis placed Ramakrishna at the center of both these movements, gone were the practices (pujas for Kali and trance/possession) for which Ramakrishna was known, especially in regard to the Vedanta Society. Rather, Vivekananda’s movements, while pan-Hindu in outlook, had a multi-religious platform, and the focus of practice was not ritual devotion but yoga, which helped make yoga a practice that could be embraced by people of many faiths and a practice that did not have to have an explicit reference to any one divine figure.

The Vedanta Society constructed itself as open to all religions for obvious reasons. They were trying to attract converts and felt the best way was to offer a path which did not involve total rejection of their former religious life. They were so intentional about this that when Swami Trigunatita, one of Vivekananda’s successors, set out to build the

first Hindu temple in San Francisco, it was done using symbols from other faiths. There were four towers built on top of the temple, and the symbols in the four towers of the temple make explicit reference to Christianity, Islam, Roman Mythology and various sects of Hinduism. "This temple," the pamphlet began, "may be considered as a combination of a Hindu temple, a Christian church, a Mohammedan mosque, a Hindu math or monastery, and an American residence."34 The Vedanta society was attempting to materially represent their philosophy of inclusion and tolerance, which they saw as key to gaining acceptance and converts in their new land.35 This multi-religious/inter-faith ethos still exists today. A few years ago, when the Vedanta Society of Northern California had a celebration for Sri Sarada Devi’s 150th birthday, the invited guest speakers from the Vedanta Society, Islam, Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism.36

The other means by which the Vedanta Society carved a niche for itself in the American religious landscape is by teaching the practice of yoga in an easy to follow manner. According to Nicolo Ruberto, a one-time follower of Vivekananda, one practiced yoga by sitting up straight and engaging in a series of breathing exercises. He explains this involves, “closing the right nostril and inhaling through the left.”37 This process starts the kundalini, which, according to this article, is “a residual energy”, which “in normal persons… lies dormant in a triangular aperture, giving rise to hallucinations, visions, dream, and other things. In order to be a god – to rise above the

36Sri Sarada Devi was the wife and religious counterpart to Sri Ramakrishna.
things of earth – you have to move the kundalini upward until it touches the brain.”38

Practicing breathing exercises is the way to awaken this dormant energy and thus become a god.

Like Swatmarama and Judge, Vivekananda retroactively applied the term *Raja Yoga* to apply to Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*, and referred to his method of yoga as *Raja*. In his booklet, *Raja Yoga*, Vivekananda wrote, “Practice is absolutely necessary. You may sit down and listen to me by the hour every day, but if you do not practise, you will not get one step further… We never understand these things until we experience them. We will have to see and feel them for ourselves.”39 It is obvious that importance of the Vedanta Society is not placed on the philosophy of yoga, but on the practice and the doing of yoga. To best achieve this Vivekananda suggests having a separate practice room at home, one that was only to be used for daily practice, and this daily practice should occur in the morning and in the evening. He does realize, however, that not everyone may have this luxury, so he suggests, “Those who cannot afford to have a room set apart can practise anywhere they like.”40

While yoga practice today often equals some *pranayama* exercises followed by *asanas*, the early practice and knowledge of yoga in the United States really only involved the practice of *pranayama*, which many thought encompassed all the eight limbs of yoga as outlined by Patanjali. In a 1905 *Chicago Daily Tribune* article, an (unknown) author writes about the two types of yoga best elucidated by Vivekananda.41

38How To Be God As Taught By Swami.”
41Incidentally, on this same page, the headlining article is “Blondes Highest Type of Human Race,” which presents an interesting visual for the reader: on the one had she gets to learn about yoga, a system
For the author, Hatha Yoga is the process by which a yogi is able to completely control the physical body, and the benefits of this are that “the Hatha Yogi lives long; he is quite young and fresh when 100, without one hair turning gray. But that is all.”42 The author goes on to tout Raja Yoga, which he understands to include all eight limbs of yoga as described by Patanjali (via Vivekananda), as the system of yoga, which will lead to freeing the soul.

Wendell Thomas provides a great participant-observation section of Vivekananda’s Raja Yoga in his 1930 book, Hinduism Invades America. Thomas reports that the group practice (which involved about 15 participants) at the Vedanta Center in New York City first involves relaxing the body and emptying the mind.43 After this, the group followed six meditation steps:

1. Guru-pranama, or Salutation to the Masters. Here one may invoke the blessing of his special savior, or all the saviors at once. The swami chants a Sanskrit mantra, or holy affirmation, and then tells us to imagine we are charging the machinery of the body with electricity. We may think of this electricity as a spiritual energy emanating from the divine masters.
2. Asana-suddhi, or Purification of Posture. Here we are told to sit at ease, but quite erect, with the spine, neck and heat in one straight line. We breathe deeply with a slow and measured rhythm. The swami chants again, and then tells us to imagine a holy circle, a protecting wall of divine elements surrounding us and keeping us from all harm.
3. Bhuta-suddhi, or Purification of the Subtle Body Elements. This is accomplished by meditation on the astral progress of the Kundalini, or serpent-power, from the fire at the bottom of the spine through the six successive lotus flowers of the Susumna, or spinal canal, until it merges in the ‘Infinite Divine Consciousness’ of the sahasrara, or thousand-petalled lotus, of the brain. All of these elements, of course, are not physical, but ‘astral.’ As the swami gives the cues, we imagine the serpent power mounting, lotus after lotus, supposedly feeling an exaltation and sublimation of our now stimulated animal nature.

which is supposed to lead to perfection, and on the other she also reads that one’s destiny is already determined by biology…


66
(4) *Ista-dhyana* and *Manas-puja*, or Meditation on the Ideal Person and Worship with the Mind. Now I am supposed to call up in my mind and image of the god or ideal person I most revere, the most lovely figure I know – it may be Siva, Kali, Rama, Krishna, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Jesus, Spinoza, my mother, wife or sweet-heart – and mentally exchange loving offerings as if my beloved were actually present in form. Again the Sanskrit chant, and again the silent worship.

(5) *Asirvad*, or Blessing. Now that we have reached the peak of spiritual joy and love, let us not be selfish, but send out to all beings, whether plant, animal or human, spiritual blessings, or vibrations of love and best wishes. Again the chant and the worship.

(6) *Atma-samarpana*, or Self-Dedication. To escape all trace of selfishness, we now dedicate the fruit of our holy exercises to the deity.44

Thomas then goes to explain that the rest of the one-hour group class consists of a lecture by the swami on *Raja Yoga* with time for the students to ask questions. Practice, according to Thomas, is not limited to the group, but also must be individually done twice a day at home; this involves the six “Steps in Meditation”, as well as a routine of *prana* exercises and the chanting of *om*.45

Vivekananda also stressed this, and it seems that 30 years after his initial preaching, that structure of practice was still in place. While this passage is after the particular time period of this chapter, it does provide us with a possible blueprint for the practice regiment that Vivekananda set up for the Vedanta Society. It is also interesting about Thomas’ participant-observation is that it reaffirms the multi-religious platform of the Vedanta Society and its focus on experience of divinity via the practice of yoga. This participant observation give us a little insight into what followers of Vivekananda and the Vedanta Society did (not just what they were told to do), which is important because it shows that Americans were not just drawn to yoga because of its alternative religious outlook, but also because of the bodily experience it provided.

---

44 Thomas, *Hinduism Invades America*, 122-123.
45 Thomas, *Hinduism Invades America*, 125.
Women and Yoga = Mistrust and Scandal

While Vivekananda and his successors tried to spread the word about yoga and the benefits of its practice, there was still much misinformation about yoga that captured the imaginations of many Americans who had a mixed relationship with the exotic. Back in 1896, Claude Falls Wright delivered a lecture on yoga in which he explained that yogis in India go to incredible lengths to achieve union with God. The reporter reporting on his lecture writes,

Mr. Wright went on to say that various practices were in vogue among different students in order to attain to this. The common, everyday saint begins by mortifying himself, by trying to root out his passions, and often by rendering himself very disagreeable to his friends and acquaintances. He puts on a long face and thinks he has cut himself loose from the world. This he believes will do some good for him, to make him become one with the Supreme Being. In the East very much more dangerous and exhilarating practices than these are carried on. The Hindu thinks he attains union by having a large hook passed through his side and being swung in the air; by fasting for months, or by letting his hair and nails grow long. There are thousands of yogis and fakirs dotted all over India, who will permit the most terrible things to be done to them in order to prove that they are controlled and united with the Supreme.46

Given that there was much mystery surrounding Hinduism and yoga, and given that they were both painted in very primitive and heathen ways, it is no surprise that much scandal followed yoga in the media; most especially since from the beginning women were the most ardent supporters of Vivekananda.

One woman, Marie Louise, was initiated by Vivekananda as Swami Abayananda, and in summer of 1897, she lead a group of practitioners to a retreat in west Michigan for pilgrimage and to “Practice Queer Rites.”47 The article sarcastically notes that the pilgrims will be practicing “cross-legged, in true yoga fashion, in the full glare of the

47“Don Yellow Robe?” Chicago Daily Tribune, 11 July 1897.
morning of midday sun. It is not known, however, whether or not corresponding 
preparations for the speedy treatment of sunstricken patients have been made."48

Another yoga follower, Ida C. Craddock was a priestess of the Church of Yoga, 
and was charged with the crime of distributing improper and obscene literature. While it 
is not entirely clear what her relationship to Swami Vivekananda and the Vedanta 
Society was, she considered herself a “Teacher of Divine Science”, and seemingly 
pREFERRED deATH to being sentenced to more time in jail (she had already served three 
months of a year sentence on the same charge). She killed herself via gas suffocation, 
and was found by her mother. Craddock left a suicide letter for her mother, which was 
published in the Washington Post. She writes that imprisonment would lead to her being 
forced to “recant my religious beliefs or else hypocritically pretend to do so”, and that 
“this earth life is illusion.”49

Mrs. Ole Bill left $500,000 to the Vedanta society when she died in 1911. Bull first 
met Vivekananda in 1894, after he had just attended the World Parliaments of Religion, 
and she was mourning the death of her mother. After her death, the daughter of Bull, 
Olea, contested her mother’s will. She argued that Vivekananda controlled her mother. 
Apparently, instead of visiting Olea when she was sick, Bull traveled to India. Some of 
her friends considered her insane: “Mrs. Bull was sick in body and mind… she said that 
something had come into her influence, a malign influence which had sapped her life, 
but now she was better and that she had conquered that influence.”50 Further alarm

48."Don Yellow Robe?"
arose because Bull claimed that, “Swami Vivekananda came to me from the spirit world.”51

Katherine Tingley, the woman who headed the Theosophical Society in the U.S. after the death of Judge had a Raja Yoga School (also run by the Theosophical Society not the Vedanta Society) also got some bad press with which yoga was associated. Gerry Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children sent representatives from New York to California to have children removed from the Raja Yoga School in Point Loma. One mother, Dolores Dias, charged that her son was “imprisoned, detained, confined and restrained of his liberty by Katherine Tingley and the Raja Yoga School”; Dias was in Cuba, but she had lawyers in San Diego to fight on her behalf.52 Another boy, Henry Baron, claimed to be the son of Tingley, but ran away from the Raja Yoga School because he was “discouraged and disheartened by the way the poor people are treated there,” but then the newspaper article reporting this only describes the food students are fed.53

Then there was Mrs. Stone (from the first chapter), the wife of the President of Purdue who ran away from her family to join a yoga cult (also, not associated with Vivekananda or the Vedanta Society). In a 1912 article in The Washington Post, a drawing of a while woman prostrating before a dark, mystical yogi figure, questioned why so many Hindus were coming to the U.S. to missionize (see Figure 2-1). The author writes, “The truth is that while our Christian churches were spending vast sums coerced from well-meaning donors for the purpose of Christian proselytizing in heathen

51 “Crazed By The Cult.”
52 “Mother vs. Mrs. Tingley In Suit For Child,” Los Angeles Times, 9 January 1903.
53 “Young Fugitive Says He Is Son of Mrs. Tingley,” Chicago Daily Tribune 18 November 1903.
land, the Hindus executed a flank movement."\textsuperscript{54} Citing the “sad” cases of Bull and Stone, the author argues, that these Hindu missionaries, “with their swarthy faces and dreamy-looking eyes” and their mystical teachings” are largely responsible for the deluded women who give away fortunes to ‘the cause,’ who give up home and children, and who, breaking down under strain, become hopeless lunatics.”\textsuperscript{55}

It is obvious that much misinformation and suspicion surrounded yoga (especially in regards to women’s bodies), it surprising that yoga continued to become even more popular in the coming years, because in the fifteen years following the death of Vivekananda, yoga was smeared more than revered in the American press, and often such scandal involved white women and Indian yogis (and this is even more interesting when one takes into account that the majority of yoga practitioners in the U.S. are Euro-American women). Looking at these primary documents involving women and yoga from the beginning of the 20th century, it is clear that there is a high-level of discomfort and anxiety regarding the practice of yoga by women. The tone of these documents show that the authors were concerned about these women, and felt that they were being duped and taken advantage of by yogis. In some way, these articles are one means of attempting to protect white or Euro-American women from these Indian men and their practices.

These fears regarding the ‘duping’ and subsequent protection of Euro-American women arise out of a particular context. The beginning of the 20th century was a period when “women freed themselves of the restrictive clothing of the Edwardian period to take up... new tasks,” and “the fear was that they would shed much of their moral

\textsuperscript{55}“American Women Victims of Hindu Mysticism.”
decorum as well.” Women’s rights was no longer just about voting, but also equality, and the idea that equality could seep into their sexual lives was troubling; European and Euro-American men were readily allowed to have sexual relations with subaltern women, but the reverse was unthinkable. Writing about the relationships between white women and black men in the post-bellum period, historian Martha Hodes explains that “liaisons” between the two groups “put black men and white men on a too-equal footing, illuminating the fact that white men could not always control white women, and blurred the lines of racial categories that were so crucial to maintaining the racial hierarchy previously sustained by slavery.” It seems that the initial resistance to yoga may also have been due to the inability to control the white women who flocked to the practice, and the possibility that the Indian men who taught it could be the equal to white men (who wrote about the ‘scandals’). Even though all the men involved in these ‘scandals’ were not Indian (Stone ran away with a white yogi), these women were attracted to something foreign, Eastern and not Christian, and that may have been troubling to some. These yoga men, however, were not like former slaves, who at the time were simply deemed as rapists or often lynched, nor were they East Asian laborers who were constructed as a-sexual. These men, whether Indian or Euro-American taking on Indian ‘characteristics,’ were educated, free and they could seduce. They were invited, had spiritual elevation, but they were dangerous because they attracted women to a practice that was foreign, Eastern and not Christian, and that was troubling to some.

---

57 Martha Hodes, White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the 19th-Century South (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 207.
Further, yoga was not simply a set of ideas to which one could prescribe to and think about; it was a practice, which involved a certain sort of disciplining of the body. This meant that the women that were drawn to yoga did not just listen (which is what many did in their churches), but also used their bodies in new and unknown ways: they sat on the floor, the breathed in new ways and sometimes traveled to 'exotic' locales to pursue the practice. Given the anxiety surrounding women's sexuality during the early 20th century (and throughout the ages), this new practice involving women following men with marked difference was troubling. While some Americans no longer followed a philosophy of Biblical inerrancy, this did not mean that they were totally ready to follow the practices of other religions, willing to see multiple truths, no longer xenophobic and less racist. Even today the road to religious tolerance and acceptance is not well paved, and thus it is not difficult to imagine that yoga was not immediately embraced upon its first few introductions to various U.S. populations. And yet, despite the early bad press, in later years yoga continued to take hold in the imaginations of Americans, and throughout this history, it is Euro-American women who continue to be the major actors that propelled the popularity of yoga. The participation of Euro-American women in the practice of yoga was their chance to participate in a practice that was exotic, timeless, foreign and mystical, and this was one means of power and defining their own lives.

The potential for participation in an exotic, timeless, foreign and mystical practice continued to fuel interest in yoga, but while it was becoming more popular, efforts were being made to ‘domesticate’ the practice and make it more palatable to American sensibilities. The trend of focusing on the practice of yoga and in many ways ignoring or obscuring the religious philosophies that were braided in with the practice, continued,
and hence yoga started to take on scientific and health-conscious sensibilities. It is clear, however, that at the turn of the century, while the World’s Parliament of Religions opened a venue for religious diversity, when this diversity was no longer mediated on the terms of the liberal Protestant organizers, such diversity was not fully tolerated, especially since they involved the disciplining of upper class and white women’s bodies outside the boundaries of “Whiteness” and Protestantism.

As we will see in the next chapter, yoga continued to be a lightening rod for newspaper scandal, and at the same time, yoga began to grow in popularity and acceptance. The focus of yoga was taken away from the Hindu philosophies of yoga, and moved towards the practical, scientific and healthy sensibilities and benefits of yoga. This slow acceptance was due in part to the foundation that Transcendentalists, the Theosophical Society, Vivekananda and his followers (Indian and non-Indian swamis) laid down in the late-19th and early-20th century, which was a part in the larger process of translating the yoga practices into an American context.
Figure 2-1. White woman prostrating before a “yogi,” from, “American Women Victims of Hindu Mysticism,” *The Washington Post*, 18 February 1912 (picture taken by author).
CHAPTER 3
POPULARIZING YOGA

Wooed As A God; Miss Leo Tells Her Story of Oom’s Courtship; Feared, Yet Loved Him

Miss Lee testified that she first met Oom [the Omnipotent] in Seattle on June 21, 1909 and he induced her to come East with him by promise to give her free treatment... ‘I am not a real man.’ Gertrude Leo testified Oom told her: ‘I am a god, but I have condescended to put on the habit of a man, that I perform the duties of a yogi, and reveal true religion to the elect of America.’

Oom the Omnipotent or Pierre Bernard is one of the figures who helped popularize yoga at the beginning of the twentieth century, but his road was not smooth and his “exploits” thematically fit with the early hysteria surrounding yoga and women’s bodies. From the beginning of the twentieth century through the end of the World War II, Pierre Bernard, along with two other Euro-Americans, William Walker Atkinson and Theos Bernard, and Indian yoga missionary, Yogananda, brought yoga further into the mainstream of the US culture. This chapter will employ these four representative figures to explore the growing popularization of yoga during the early half of the twentieth century. With the exception of Yogananada, these early yoga pioneers are not well known today, but they did help popularize yoga by highlighting some of yoga’s more practical applications, and in an age when American pragmatic philosophy was taking hold, practicality was trendier than the philosophical spiritual, mystical or psychic searches of the Transcendentalists and Theosophists.

While Pierre Bernard and yoga may have had a scandalous start, he actually reached affluent New Yorkers that made all things “Indian” quite fashionable, and gained much publicity for yoga, not only through his scandals but also by helping a famous boxer find success in the ring via the practice of yoga. Atkinson, via his...

---

pseudonym Yogi Ramacharaka published numerous books explaining how to practice yoga, which made yoga more accessible; he also explained how yoga could help various bodily functions, which made yoga more desirable. Theos Bernard was the first teacher/writer of yoga in the US that wrote a book with demonstrative pictures, thus making the various postures of yoga more understandable for inquisitive Americans. Of the three, he was the only one to actually base his yoga on Sanskrit texts, and he was also the only one of the three who actually went to India. Nevertheless, all three turned to India for their inspiration to help legitimate their ventures; combined, they also started to take focus away from Raja Yoga and towards the more physical Hatha Yoga. Indian guru, Yogananda, also became quite popular and helped make yoga more amenable to the liberal Protestant set by continuing the missionary standard set by Vivekananda – that yoga could supplement other religious (Christian) practices. All four of the figures that will be examined in this chapter held something else in common with Vivekananda in that they all turned to the language of science to explain and popularize the growing practice of yoga in the United States. The section of the American population that was becoming more open to the practice of yoga (liberal Protestants) was also openly embracing science, thus the two seemed and became an organic match.

**Pierre Bernard (Oom the Omnipotent)**

Not too much is known about Pierre Bernard’s early life. While later in life he went by Oom the Omnipotent or Pierre Bernard, he was born as Perry Arnold Baker either in Iowa or California. It is also not entirely clear how he was introduced to yoga or if he ever went to India to study yoga as he claimed.² What is clear is that around 1905/6 he

---

²Figuring out the place of his birth or where he first learned yoga is difficult, because different sources give different answers on this topic. Catherine Albanese states that he was born in Leon, Iowa
moved to New York City where Bernard established the “Tantrik Order in America” and published one edition of the *International Journal of the Tantrik Order in America*. Later in 1910 he opened “Oriental Sanctum” and then a few years later “New York Sanskrit College,” and finally in 1918 he moved his operation to an estate upstate New York.  

During this entire time period he was followed by scandal. Reading the previous introductory headline and description of Oom the Omnipotent, one might think of Vishnu, who came to earth as Krishna and revealed himself to Arjuna as more than a mere man on the battlefield of the great war of the *Mahabharata*. This story, however, does not end particularly well for Oom. It seems he may have shared something else with Krishna – his love of women. Oom apparently told Leo that, “in my sacred capacity I cannot marry, but our nautch girls serve us as wives”, thus “Gertrude Leo consented to become a sacred nautch girl… she jabbed a steel pen into the palm of her left hand and wrote her name in blood on the roster of the order.” Along with Leo, he also seemed to have a similar effect on Zelia Hopp, whom he promised to cure of her heart trouble. Both Hopp and Leo were frustrated with their situation, and conspired with each other to break free of Oom’s power with the help of the police. In the spring of 1910, Oom was arrested for kidnapping at his studio on the Upper West Side of New York City while teaching a class.

---

and was first introduced to yoga by a Syrian-Indian man, Sylvais Harnati. Hugh Urban says while one his alias’, Peter Coons, was from Iowa, his family was from California, and that in his teens he went to Bengal and Kashmir to learn yoga. The problem I find with both is that neither gives a primary source for their information.

I have tried to get a hold of this source. There is one library in the US that carries it, the Free Library of Philadelphia, but they have lost it. The only source I have for seeing the covers and a few pages is from Hugh Urban, “The Omnipotent Oom: Tantra and its Impact on Modern Western Esotericism,” *Esoterica: The Journal of Esoteric Studies* 3 (2001): 218-259.  

Even on this point, Albanese and Urban diverge. Albanese does not mention the “Oriental Sanctum”, only the “New York Sanskrit College”. Nor does she give a year.

*Wooed As A God.*
He was actually never convicted of abducting Zelia Hopp or Gertrude Leo, for they disappeared (presumably to the state of Washington) before they could testify against him. After the case against him failed, mystery and scandal continued to surround Oom. In a 1911 article about him, neighbors of his Sanskrit College complained: “what my wife and I have seen through the windows of the college is scandalous… we saw men and women in various stages of deshabille. Women’s screams mingled with wild Oriental music. We told the janitor to notify the police, but the orgies have continued.”

This same article also reports that the District Attorney was “also trying to get hold, of a certain red book, or ‘Introduction to the Science of Tantrik’” because it allegedly contained illustrations of a questionable character.

Mystery and sensation continued to surround Oom when he moved up to Nyack; and the press seemed to have an odd fascination with Oom and all that happened at his country club. For example, when Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Gay celebrated their tenth wedding anniversary at Oom’s Clarkstown Country Club, the press reported that coffins were used in the ceremony, though they could not ascertain for what purpose because of security. The now-anonymous journalist writes, “After the coffins had been employed in the more formal part of the ceremony… they were turned over… and used as tables for serving refreshments. The women guests were garbed to resemble nuns and the men wore fantastic Oriental costumes.”

Later in life, when Oom supposed gave up his religious quests, he was elected the president of the State Bank at Pearl River. The bank board apparently felt that despite

---

8. “Night Revels Held in Sanskrit College.”
his associations “elsewhere with strange forms of worship, mysterious rites, sensational charges, the District Attorney, the grand jury and the glaring newspaper headlines; his fortunes have prospered nevertheless.”\textsuperscript{10} Perhaps one of the reasons he was able to accumulate so much wealth was that he not only attracted New York elites, but also global elites. Mrs. Ogden Mills (married to US Congressman Ogden Mills), daughter of William Vanderbilt was a follower. As was Sir Paul Dukes, the former head of the British Secret Service. His popularity among the socialites of New York might also explain his presence in the press, but it also points to he reach and to the fact that he was selling/teaching/exposing something that was of some interest to a section of society with free time and a disposable income.

The question is, beyond the suspected “orgies” what exactly did Bernard teach his disciples. This is not entirely clear. In an article about the nefarious happenings at his Sanskrit College, it is reported that he apparently employed a Brahmin from India, Pandit P. C. Shastri, who gave “instruction in Yoga and Sanskrit every afternoon.”\textsuperscript{11} In one of his obituaries it is reported that, “police raided his placed in 1919, and state troopers found his followers doing simple exercises.”\textsuperscript{12} Apparently he also dressed in a “toga-like robe.”\textsuperscript{13} Apparently Bernard helped boxer Lou Nova train for his 1939 fight against Max Baer. Bernard helped Nova by teaching him “Pranayama (improved breathing), Asanas (exercise in posture), Agni-sara (contraction of the abdomen), Uddibandi (pulling the lower internal organs up toward the chest), Loukiki (circular rotation of the abdomen, as practiced by hula-hula dancers) and Ana-paana (massaging

\textsuperscript{11}“Oom Named Bankhead.”
\textsuperscript{13}“Pierre Bernard, ‘Oom the Omnipotent,’ Promoter and Self-Styled Swami, Dies.”
the scalp with toes).” 14 The author of the article “just made the last item up in our head, but the rest is no kid”; nonetheless the list is illustrative in that it gives a bit of insight into what Bernard had his students practice. 15

Despite there being little known about Bernard outside of media coverage, he is important to this story (and this chapter) because he help familiarize part of the American population with yoga and made it appealing to various elites of New York City. Helping a popular boxer also did not hurt his legacy, and solidified his place in this history.

William Walker Atkinson (Yoga Ramacharaka)

While Oom lived his life out through the media and wrote very little, his contemporary, William Atkinson was never in the newspapers, but left an entire library of books behind. As well as being the editor of the New Thought magazine, Atkinson published numerous works that in many ways defined the New Thought movement of the early twentieth century. 16 At the same time, and quite anonymously, Atkinson was also publishing books about yoga under the pseudonym with a completely different persona, Yogi Ramacharaka. While Ramacharaka may be a figment of Atkinson’s imagination, it is important that to many he is a real figure. And while his yoga may not be ‘classical’, through his many, many writings, Atkinson helped make yoga more accessible to many Americans, and even seemed to really help some.

---

To Atkinson, Ramacharaka, born in India in 1799, traveled throughout India searching for books to provide the basis for his philosophy. In 1865 he took on a young student, Baba Bharata, who eventually went to the Columbia Exhibition in Chicago to lecture on the philosophy of Ramacharaka. Bharata supposedly met Atkinson during his lectures, and the two collaborated to write down the philosophy of Ramacharaka. This hagiography is obviously very similar to that of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. There is no evidence to prove the narrative (nor to disprove it), but it is fair to say that Atkinson was obviously aware of Vivekananda and his teachings.

While the story of Vivekananda may have been lifted, the teachings were different. Atkinson’s (or Ramacharaka’s) yoga was firmly planted in the world of imagined Occultism and New Thought. Reading through Atkinson’s books on yoga, it becomes quite obvious that yoga is a tool to demonstrate his New Thought philosophy. On the ‘power’ or abilities of the yogi, Atkinson writes in the *Science of Breath* (1905), “He can and does use it as a vehicle for sending forth thoughts to others and for attracting to him all those whose thoughts are keyed in the same vibration.”\(^{17}\) For Atkinson, the yogi also has the abilities of “telepathy, thought transference, mental healing, mesmerism, etc. which subjects are creating such an interest in the Western world at the present time, but which have been known to Yogis for centuries, can be greatly increased and augmented if the person sending forth the thought will do so after rhythmic breathing.”\(^{18}\) Atkinson placed rhythmic breathing or *pranayama* at the center of yogic practice, for it

---

“will increase the value of mental healing, magnetic healing, etc., several hundred percent.”

Atkinson wrote, “The Yogi Complete Breath is the fundamental breath of the entire Yogi Science of Breath,” and he further remarks, “It will be seen that by this method of breathing all parts of the respiratory apparatus [are] brought into action, and all parts of the lungs, including the most remote air cells, are exercised.” What sets apart this type of breathing is its fullness or completeness: “One of the most important features of this method of breathing, is the act the respiratory muscles are fully call[ed] into play, whereas in the other forms of breathing only a portion of these muscles are so used.” When all the proper muscles are in use, then one is completely breathing and thus able to invoke the power of prana. He explains,

The Yogi practices exercises by which he attains control of his body and is enabled to send to any organ or part an increased flow of vital force or ‘prana,’ thereby strengthening and invigorating the part or organ. He knows all that his Western scientific brother knows about the physiological effect of correct breathing, but he also knows that the air contains more than oxygen and hydrogen and nitrogen, and that something more is accomplished than the mere oxygenating of the blood. He knows something about ‘prana,’ of which his Western brother is ignorant, and he is fully aware of the nature and manner of handling that great principle of energy.

For Atkinson, “Prana is the name by which we designate a universal principle, which principle is the essence of all motion, force or energy, whether manifested in gravitation, electricity, the revolution of the planets, and all forms of life, from highest to lowest.”

---

20 Ramacharaka, Science of Breath, 39 & 41.
22 Ramacharaka, Science of Breath, 10.
Atkinson, however, also had a physical dimension to his yoga. In the *Science of Breath*, he lays out a number of exercises for the practitioner to follow. He has a series of exercises that one does after mastering correct breathing. For one of the exercises, he commands his readers to, “(1) Stand erect with arms straight in front of you. (2) Inhale Complete Breath. (3) Swing arms around in a circle, backward, a few times. Then reverse a few times, retaining the breath all the while. You may vary this by rotating them alternately like the sails of a windmill” and all this must be done while exhaling “the breath vigorously through the mouth.”

In his book, *Hatha Yoga* (1904), Atkinson suggests that the yoga practitioner also does a “loosen-up” exercises such as “stand on a cushion, stool or large book and let one leg swing loose and limp from the thigh.”

He has a plethora of what he calls ‘physical exercises.’ For example he suggest the following for thighs: “With hands still on hips, place your feet about two feet apart, and then lower the body into a ‘squatting’ position, pausing a moment and then resuming original position…this exercise will give well-developed thighs.” He also has exercises for the rest of the body. What is interesting about these exercises is that they are not asanas, but really just exercises that Atkinson believed to be yoga. The positions he is advocating are active positions, not postures that one stays in for an extended time.

Atkinson also covers other topics, such as solar energy, fresh air, sleep, regeneration, mental attitude, spirit, food, and irrigation (of the body). These subjects, while important for overall wellbeing, ‘technically’ fall outside the realm of yoga, but not

---

for Atkinson. He dedicates an entire book to the subject of water, because he feels that the importance of it has been forgotten and ignored. He writes,

> To think that people should be required to be taught the natural use of water would seem as preposterous to them as that people should need to be taught how to breathe - and yet instruction in both of these things have been found by the Western peoples, whose 'civilization' has led them so far away from Nature that they have forgotten the first instinctive teachings of the Great Mother of all.27

While, the importance of water may have been forgotten in the West, Atkinson points out that this is not the case for Hindus: “To the Hindu-Yogi, water is Nature’s great Remedy - its great Restorative Force...he regards it as the milk from the breasts of Mother Nature, which she would furnish to her offspring.” 28 He covers the importance of drinking water, the effects of water on digestion, and various methods of bathing and using water. He even cites the importance of water for sexual vitality: “Cold Water applied to the outer ‘private parts’ at night before retiring, or in the morning upon rising, and then followed by vigorous, stimulating rubbing and drying, will be found very invigorating” and proof for this is that, “in India there are many cases in which sexual vitality has been preserved until very old age, or restored when once apparently lost, by this simple method.”29

It seems, that Atkinson was developing a set of practices for people to follow that would lead them to a healthier life, and that yoga was his ‘marketing tool’, his way of convincing readers that his methods were authentic. Like his predecessors and contemporaries, cloaking practice in the mystic of the East while outlining the practical and rational reasons for this practice was Atkinson’s way of presenting and selling his

---

ideas. He was very successful. Atkinson’s books written under the pseudonym of Ramacharaka are still published today, and made their way across the globe. After reading the various books attributed to Ramacharaka, it becomes clear that what Atkinson was writing about and doing is very different from Vivekananda, Bernard (Pierre and Theos, Yogananda and the others that followed, nonetheless, Ramacharaka is still very influential. One recent reference that I found to him was in a 1988 practitioners profile in the popular Yoga Journal. Nick Duncan, a cowboy from Utah and an avid yoga practitioner became sick at age 62 with rheumatoid arthritis. Rather than succumb to life in a wheelchair, Duncan decided to follow the teachings of Ramacharaka: “he used pranayama, visualization, and autosuggestion to heal himself. It worked. He never used the wheelchair, and pitched his cane away. Today at the age of 75 he is a robust mystery to doctors.” Thus, it seems, Atkinson’s imaginative construction has tangible physical effects. Ramacharaka is real to some. Little is known about his sources, but he left behind a bevy of print culture, which helped make yoga more popular.

**Theos Bernard**

The third Euro-American figure that help popularize yoga in the early twentieth century, Theos Casimir Bernard, was apparently a distant relative of Pierre Bernard, and was most likely introduced to yoga via his eccentric ‘uncle’. While neither Pierre Bernard or Atkinson went to India to learn yoga, Theos Bernard did go to South Asia to learn yoga, and his research became material for his dissertation, *Hatha Yoga: The*

---

30I have personally taken yoga classes in India and England where I was taught to swing my arms around in a circle, and when I asked the teacher where they learned this move, I was told, Yogi Ramacharaka (which lead me to look into him).

Report of a Personal Experience, which was published and was, for many years, a popular source book on the practice of yoga, on both sides of the Atlantic. Also unlike Pierre Bernard or Atkinson, Theos Bernard formally studied Indian and Tibetan philosophy at Columbia University, and in doing so earned a masters and doctoral degree.

After spending time with his ‘uncle’ at his compound in Nyack, Theos Bernard married socialite Viola Wertheim (the couple were introduced to each other by Pierre Bernard). Using his wife’s money, he went to India in 1936 after completing his master’s degree at Columbia. In India he briefly studied under Swami Kuvalayananda and his student, Sri Yogendra. Via these teachers, Bernard was introduced to the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, a 15th century text on Hatha Yoga. He also traveled to Tibet, where he was accepted as the incarnation of a Tibetan saint, and was thus allowed to see various Tibetan ceremonies not seen by an outsider before (this is all documented in his book Land of a Thousand Buddhas (1939)).

It was his time with Kuvalayananda and Yogendra that most influenced his dissertation and eventual book, Hatha Yoga: The Report of a Personal Experience (1944). Bernard writes, “This study is not an attempt to prove the merits of Yoga or to explain its results,” rather he endeavors to “present a report of my personal experiences in learning and practicing the basic techniques of Hatha Yoga, in order to give the Western reader an account of the conduct of a typical oriental course in that Yoga.”

He also writes, “My principal literary guide has been Hatha Yoga Pradipika; hence I shall adopt its sequence in relating my personal experiences in learning and practicing

---

these techniques,” and throughout his footnotes he makes reference to “Srimat Kuvalayananda” and his volumes on Asanas.\(^\text{33}\) Bernard describes Hatha Yoga as a discipline involving various bodily and mental controls, but central to them all is the regulation of the breath. Hatha is derived from two roots, ‘ha’ (sun) and ‘tha’ (moon), which symbolically refer to the flowing of breath in the right nostril, called the ‘sun breath,’ and the flowing of breath in the left nostril, called the ‘moon breath.’ Yoga is derived from the root ‘yuj’ (to join); therefore, Hatha Yoga is the uniting of these two breaths. The effect is believed to induce a mental condition called samadhi.\(^\text{34}\)

He also dedicates the majority of his book to explaining how to execute asanas (with pictures) and outlining their various benefits for the body (see figures 1-3). Bernard makes it clear that each pose takes time (months) to master and must be learned under the tutelage of a teacher, thus unlike Atkinson, his book is not exactly a how-to book (though he does provide numerous pictures). He also found in his study of yoga that there was nothing particularly divine or mystical about it, rather that it is a practice that holds its own rewards. Bernard explains, “I must say again that during my studies of the science of Yoga I found that it holds no magic, performs no miracles, and reveals nothing supernatural. I was directed at every stage to practice if I wanted to know its secrets.”\(^\text{35}\)

While his uncle lived his early life in the newspapers, Bernard found tabloid fame in his death. Upon his second trip to South Asia in 1947, Bernard attempted to go back to Tibet to find more manuscripts. He was caught in the middle of Hindu-Muslim riots in Punjab, and while it is not know how he died, his body was never found. In many ways the manner of his death made Bernard even more popular and romantic of a figure. While he may not have had the notoriety of his uncle, in many ways the younger

^{34}\) Bernard, *Hatha Yoga*, 15.  
Bernard had a larger impact and influence on how yoga is practiced today. Showing pictures of himself doing various yoga asanas was visually very powerful. It is one thing to read about how to practice, but quite another to actually see how each pose looks, and the visual makes it much easier to practice. Thus, while Bernard insisted his book was merely a report on his personal experience and journey with yoga, showing the pictures helped translate yoga into a much more ‘doable’ practice and one that could be imitated (even if one did not have the luxury of a guru).

**Paramahansa Yogananda**

While Pierre Bernard, William Atkinson and Theos Bernard helped popularize yoga via newspaper fodder and books, perhaps the most popular guru of this time period was Paramahansa Yogananda. Born as Mukunda Lal Ghosh in Bengal in the same year that Vivekananda came to the United States, Yogananda espoused the practice of *Kriya Yoga* or *yogoda* (a meditative practice which stresses the connection between the mind and breath), and spent his early life teaching throughout India. In 1920 he was invited by the Unitarians to speak at a Boston conference on the Science of Religion, which fit Yogananda’s philosophy for he drew from contemporary ideas in science to explain that yoga was a technique to recharge the body with spiritual energy. Also in 1920 Yogananda founded the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF), which was basically the ‘Western’ version of *yogoda* and currently has centers all over the world. Like Vivekananda, Yogananda was a product of his time, and thus his movement was a global movement - spread throughout the world by his followers.

While the SRF is a thriving movement, Yogananda is best known for his 1946 book, *Autobiography of a Yogi*. This book braids the adventures of Yogananda’s extraordinary life with a spiritual journey, thus it became very popular, not only in the
United States, but the world over (it has been translated into 18 languages). This book also appealed to a broad audience because Yogananda drew from a broad range of spiritual traditions, including Christianity, in order to spread his message, thus aptly fitting into the history of spirituality in the United States as told by Leigh Schmidt in *Restless Souls*.

In *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Yogananda explains that,

*Kriya yoga* is a simple, psychophysiological method by which the human blood is decarbonized and recharged with oxygen. The atoms of this extra oxygen are converted into life current to rejuvenate the brain and spinal centers. By stopping the accumulation of venous blood, the Yogi is able to lessen or prevent the decay of tissues; the advanced Yogi transmutes his cells into pure energy. Elijah, Jesus, Kabir, and other prophets were past masters in the use of *Kriya* or a similar technique by which they caused their bodies to dematerialize at will.36

In a footnote, he cites “The noted scientist, Dr. George W. Crile of Cleveland, conducted experiments by which he proved that bodily tissues are electrically negative, except the brain and nervous system tissues, remain electrically positive because they take up reviving oxygen at a more rapid rate.”37 From the outset, Yogananda defined yoga as something apart from any one religious tradition and something a part of every religious practice. He continually draws on figures from other faiths to prove his point. For example, Yogananda writes,

St. Paul knew *Kriya yoga*, or a technique very similar, by which he could switch life currents to and from the senses. He was therefore able to say: ‘I protest by our rejoicing which I have in Christ, *I die daily.*’ By a method of centering inwardly all bodily life force...St. Paul experienced daily a true yoga union with the ‘rejoicing’ (bliss) of Christ consciousness. In that felicitous state, he was consciously aware of being dead to the sensory delusions of *Maya*.38

His reliance of other faiths to explain yoga did not go unnoticed. While Wendell Thomas has little to say about the practice of yogoda, he does note that, “In every way possible Yogananada makes a combination of East and West. In addition to morning meditation, he recommends the devotional study of the Bible.” Later, when SRF was celebrating their 50th Anniversary, one of his disciples, Sri Dayamata, said, “30 years ago Yoganananda predicted a marked increase in Western interest in teachings of the East, ‘but that does not mean we are divisive.’ She said SRF teaches the Bhagavad-Gita and the New Testament ‘side by side.’”

While this may seem most pragmatic, for Yogananada had to ‘sell’ yoga to a mainly Christian audience, there was much awe for the divine in how he explained his life. Upon hearing about his opportunity to go to the U.S in 1920, Yogananda was questioned as to how he would finance his journey to America. Yogananda’s reply was “The Lord will surely finance me” and the next day he was given a check. This type of reverence may have appealed to his Christian audience, and seeing as he wrote this book after spending time in the States, such a sentiment may also have been influenced by the Christian theology of the times. In particular, he may have been exposed to the rising popularity of Pentecostalism. While followers of Pentecostalism or any other conservative Christian sect would likely not have given much time to Yogananada, he may have heard of them and caught wind of their ideas. In his 1925 book, *How the Pentecost Came to Los Angeles*, Frank Bartleman wrote about his mission life and whenever he was short of money, he explains that he simply prayed and Jesus

---

provided him with his material needs. While Yogananda’s circle included more liberal
Protestants who envisioned Jesus as a historical figure who provided Christians with a
template for making the world a better place, it is not a stretch to imagine that he may
have been also influenced by more conservative Christians like Bartleman who relied on
divine intervention while waiting for the destruction of the material world and the second
coming of Christ.

While these conservative Christians probably did not pay much attention to
Yogananda, liberal Protestants did. Thomas argues that Yogananda was more
accepted by this population than Vivekananda because he arrived a generation later
when Americans had more exposure to yoga and thus it was more familiar; nonetheless
Yogananda still had his share of bad publicity. In 1928, he “was ordered to leave Miami
Wednesday for ‘his own safety’ by Chief Quigg, who explained that the husbands of
more than 200 Miami women were preparing to ‘get the Hindu,’” and this was because
“The police officials had been informed by the delegations that the Swami was charging
Miami women $25 for each of his so-called religious lessons. Since Wednesday the
police have been active in protecting Yogananda.”42 Another incident that made
national headlines was when Swami Giri-Dhirananda, one of Yogananda’s students
from India filed suit against Yogananda over the proper techniques of how to teach and
how to live out Hindu philosophy. In turn Yogananda accused Dhirananda “of accepting
money in excess of that for bare living expenses, in violation of the tenets of their
 teachings, and threatening to ruin him by publicizing these accusations.”43

---

42 “Court Gets Plea from Yogananda: Swami in Miami Seeks to Stay in Town Despite Ire of 200
Husbands,” Los Angeles Times, 5 February 1928.
43 “Swamis Accuse Each Other in Legal Battle,” Los Angeles Times, 12 May 1935.
Despite some bad press, SRF and Yogananda remained quite popular and spent his time in the States advocating for inter-cultural and economic exchange between the U.S. and India. He is quoted as saying, “Both India and America have a one-sided development, and India can give to America a spiritual message, just as America can give to America a material message, Swami Yogananda said.” And in a letter to the New York Times editor regarding immigration, he argued, “American and India can make valuable contributions to each others’ well-being…as India is the only nation whose best minds for centuries have studied religion as a science, with underlying laws which must be known in order to demonstrate its truths, it is inevitable that this addition by India to the sum of human knowledge will be investigated more fully in the Western world as time goes on.” And he also argued against sending religious missionaries to India, arguing that, “This country best can benefit India by sending ‘missionaries of industry’…’send to India the contributions of your Edisons and your Fords, but until the Pope and the Bishop of Canterbury can exchange pulpits, keep your religious missionaries at home.’” Much like his predecessor Vivekananda, Yogananda felt that Indian men have “organized the brain, disciplined it, taught it control, while the men of the Occident have organized the outward, material world. India’s propensity, he said, has brought physical laziness, and the particular trend of the Western endeavor has brought spiritual blindness.”

Yogananda recruited Euro-Americans to continue SRF. For example, James J. Lynn whom Yogananda renamed Rajasi Janakanananda who took over SRF when

46 “Fords, Not Bishops, Need of India, Says Swami Yogananda,” Washington Post, 10 January 1927.
47 “Fords, Not Bishops, Need of India, Says Swami Yogananda.”
Yogananda died and also gave $1 million to SRF upon his death. Yogananda’s died in the States in 1952; his funeral was a “two-hour half-Indian, half-Christian ceremony,” and included “a 30-minute organ recital of Yogananda’s favorite tunes including ‘Ave Maria,’ ‘Ah Sweet Mystery of Life,’” and people also “read verses from the Bible and…chanted verses from Indian scriptures and the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi.”

To add another twist to his life lead in an interfaith manner, he was buried, not cremated.

**Science and Yoga**

The four ‘characters’ in this chapter are all very different. Beside their wildly different backgrounds and personalities, they also all seemed to have different ideas in regards to the practice of yoga. Whereas Yogananda focused on *pranayama* and interfaith meditation, Theos Bernard’s focus were yoga postures. Atkinson and Pierre Bernard’s practices of yoga were more piecemeal in that they seemed to patch together what they imagined yoga to be from their disparate exposure to all things ‘Eastern’ and their own philosophical outlooks.

What they did have in common, however, was a reliance on the language of science, which helped each of them popularize and legitimize the presence and importance of yoga in the U.S. All four of these early practitioners and teachers of yoga used either the word or concept of science in their rhetoric. There had to be a reason to practice something from the ‘not-as-advanced East’, and there had to be a reason to abandon just practicing Christianity. The emerging popularity of science over irrational mythology was the perfect linguistic vehicle in which to ground yoga; it was but one

---

method of translating yoga into understandable terms for the American public, and it also helped to translate the religious out of yoga.

The Bernards, Atkinson and Yogananda were not unique in their reliance on the language of yoga. This trend started with Vivekananda, who used science as a way of explaining and selling yoga to his Western audience. He writes, “The teachers of the science of Yoga… declare that religion is not only based upon the experience of ancient times, but that no man can be religious until he has the same perceptions himself. Yoga is the science which teaches us how to get these perceptions.” From almost the beginning Vivekananda described yoga as a science, for it is a science then it can be practiced along side the faiths of those that he was selling to in the West.

Besides Vivekananda using the language of science to explain and sell yoga, the rhetoric and popularity of science was becoming more pervasive in the U.S and in India, albeit for different reasons. In the U.S., more Christians were starting to abandon the idea that the Bible was inerrant, and looking closer at the ideas coming out of the scientific world. In her book, Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism, Susan Jacoby argues that “the period from… 1875-1914 represents the high-water mark of freethought as an influential movement in American society”, which meant an expansion in American exposure to and interest in art, literature and science. In particular, Jacoby argues that the theory of evolution as explained by Charles Darwin in The Origin of Species, helped drive the “Golden Age of Freethought”. Darwin garnered much controversy and became a point of disagreement in American Protestantism. Liberal Protestants took to the ideas of evolution and science in general because the two

---

49Vivekananda, “Raja Yoga,” 127.
seemed to prove a progressive view of history; and if humans could continue and control progress through science, then they were simply moving closer towards creating the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The idea that humans could be active agents in their lives and society was an outcome of the Second Great Awaking and the new ideas of Darwin and science furthered this theology.

At the same time, it is important to note that not all Christians liked Darwin, for his theory of natural selection led to the conclusion that humans evolved from non-humans, and “this seemed to reduce humanity’s special place in the universe, to dislodge any sense of the special dignity of human beings. It took away any sense of mystery about human existence”. Further, Darwin’s theory was a threat to those who believed that the account of creation in the Bible was an historical event; for them the Bible was inerrant and they found the new field of Biblical criticism to be sacrilege. This split between liberal and conservative Protestants came to a head in 1926 with the Scopes Trial, which was over whether evolution should be taught in the classroom. While the anti-evolutionists won the trial, the liberals won the public relations war and the established institutions (schools, churches, scholarships, etc…), which forced the various non-liberal Protestant groups to retreat and start their own institutions. This small trial in Tennessee garnered much public attention because of the media coverage, which sided with Scopes. One journalist in particular, H.L. Mencken, was particularly instrumental in garnering bad publicity for the anti-evolutionists. In one scathing column, “Homo Neanderthalensis”, he writes,

The so-called religious organizations which now lead the war against the teaching of evolution are nothing more, at bottom, than conspiracies of the

51 Leslie Murray, Liberal Protestantism and Science (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 20.
inferior man against his betters. They mirror very accurately his congenital hatred of knowledge... Certainly it cannot have gone unnoticed that their membership is recruited, in the overwhelming main, from the lower orders - that no man of any education or other human dignity belongs to them... Whatever lies above the level of their comprehension is of the devil... The hypothesis of evolution is credited by all men of education; they themselves can't understand it. Ergo, its teaching must be put down... The inferior man's reasons for hating knowledge are not hard to discern. He hates it because it is complex -- because it puts an unbearable burden upon his meager capacity for taking in ideas. Thus his search is always for short cuts. All superstitions are such short cuts. Their aim is to make the unintelligible simple, and even obvious... The popularity of Fundamentalism among the inferior orders of men is explicable in exactly the same way. The cosmogonies that educated men toy with are all inordinately complex... But the cosmogony of Genesis is so simple that even a yokel can grasp it. It is set forth in a few phrases. It offers, to an ignorant man, the irresistible reasonableness of the nonsensical. So he accepts it with loud hosannas, and has one more excuse for hating his betters.52

Mencken basically drew a line in the sand between those who stood for progress versus those who did not, and acceptance of Darwin and all things scientific was one marker for progress. Given this environment in the U.S., and given that yoga was probably more appealing to the liberals of Protestantism rather than the conservatives, champions of yoga were smart to brand yoga as science and spiritual (but not as Hindu); yoga as a practice that would scientifically and spiritually better the condition of the body. It is this explicit connection between science and spirituality that made yoga so popular. The idea that science could help lead one to a better understanding of 'spirituality" and vice versa, explicitly linked the two, and this link, for some, was created by yoga. In essence, yoga could lead to progress on two fronts: science (away from irrationality) and spirituality (away from organized religion).

Science was seen as a vehicle for progress in the U.S., and this was also the case in India, however, in India the embrace of science was not the consequence of a battle

between liberals and conservatives of a particular faith, but rather a means of standing up to the treachery of colonialism. Both Vivekananda and Yogananda felt that India had much to learn from the U.S and Great Britain (their colonizers) in the fields of science and technology. One way to combat this ‘inadequacy’ was to cast yoga in scientific terms, for while India may not be on par with their colonizers, with yoga they could claim both spiritual superiority, and if yoga is a science, then perhaps they were not so far behind after all.

One figure that was part of this process was Swami Kuvalayananda, who started practicing yoga in the early twentieth century and in 1943 secured the funds to start, Kaivalyadhama Sreeman Madhava Yoga Mandira Samhiti in Pune; this institute specialized in the medical and scientific investigation of yoga (he also started an ashram, which focused more on the spiritual benefits of yoga). Beyond being an influence on Theos Bernard, Kuvalayananda embarked on a project in India to study yoga as a science, which meant measuring the effects (via x-ray, breathing machines and blood pressure gages) of yoga on the human body. Joseph Alter writes that Kuvalayanda’s “scientific focus on the human body enabled a translation of a branch of Indian philosophy into a form of practice that is, like Modern Science itself, putatively free of cultural baggage while clearly linked to the history of a particular part of the world.”

It is clear that a process of translation was occurring in India and in the U.S., and while Kuvalayananda facilitated this translation in India, in the U.S., the Bernards, Atkinson and Yogananda helped popularize yoga as a science in the U.S. While yoga was still a site for scandal during this time period, it also gained more popularity and

53 Alter, *Yoga in Modern India*, 77.
acceptance because it gained a greater exposure and legitimacy through the Bernards, Atkinson and Yogananda. Relying on science to taut the benefits of yoga on the human body created the path for future yoga gurus to further shift yoga from the realms of the mystical and religious towards the worlds of pragmatism, health and fitness.

Further, the idea of yoga as a science and not a religion is one that has much traction in the contemporary period. In a letter to the editor, written in the *Washington Post* in 1992, the author, Phulgenda Sinha is adamant: “Yoga is a science. It is rooted in the ancient civilization of India, and it's historical record of development from 3000 B.C. to 800 A. D. has not been made available… every step of yoga’s practice is scientifically explained.”\(^{54}\) She goes onto day that “most people in American and also in India are still learning yoga from religious teachers, who relate all its practices with Hinduism and its beliefs.”\(^{55}\) It is apparent that in many ways the translation of yoga from religious to secular and scientific was successful; so successful that even the association of yoga with Hinduism is seen as fraudulent. This is where yoga exhibits signs of being rhizomal (and maybe even a bit schizophrenic), for it is able to exist simultaneously as scientific, religious and totally secular. While this may seem contradictory, a rhizome has no roots and thus is able to move and translate frequently, and while there are attempts to give it a rooted history this attempt never quite sticks. While the idea of yoga as science is quite prevalent, it is important to remember that the Bernards, Atkinson, Yogananda and even Kuvalayananda, all were quite taken with the mystical side of yoga, thus yoga was able to simultaneously fulfill two progressive pursuits: the scientific and the spiritual.


This is also true in regards to those in the next chapter that spread the health benefits of yoga in the mid-twentieth century.


CHAPTER 4
DOMESTICATING YOGA

The studio set is 1960s Eastern Mystic Cornball: carpeted risers with vaguely Hindu mandalas floating on the back wall. Seated cross-legged on the riser, Hittleman explains that Hatha Yoga’s goal is to impart to its practitioners the ‘inescapable appearance of beauty and poise in all activities.’ Hittleman does not perform the yoga postures himself. Rather, he explains them as his two helpers, a young man and a young woman in leotard and tights demonstrate. The second half of the program is devoted to a brief lecture on Eastern philosophic topics, such as karma, and a guided meditation period to soft music. Hittleman urges viewers to float their consciousness into a golden triangle on the screen. ‘Wishing you yoga and health,’ he bows his head as the closing credits scroll up the screen.¹

This excerpt came from a guide on morning exercise programs in the year 1984. In particular, the excerpt is describing the long-running yoga program of Richard Hittleman, *Yoga for Health*. Hittleman, along with the students of Sri Tirumala Krishnamacharya (Indra Devi, B.K.S. Iyengar and K. Pattabhi Jois), and also Swami Satchidananda and Yogi Bhajan helped further translate yoga into a domestic American practice and product. They helped navigate yoga through the tumultuous 60s; they all furthered and, in many ways, intensified the focus on the importance of yoga for human health. While yoga was still imagined as somewhat mystical and Eastern, it starts to be viewed less and less as a religion, more viewed a ‘spiritual’ or even a completely secular practice, and definitely something a part from any one religious tradition.

This chapter will explore how yoga starts to become an American domestic practice by exploring how Hittleman, Devi, Iyengar Jois, Satchidananda and Bhajan helped define yoga as a practice that could easily be done from home and by anyone for improved health and physical wellbeing. They had the help of Vivekananda, Pierre

Bernard, Atkinson, Theos Bernard and Yogananda who had all used the language of science and health to popularize yoga. This next generation of yoga teachers became more prolific in selling these points of yoga and molded the benefits of yoga to fit the necessities of the 1960s and 1970s.

Richard Hittleman

Richard Hittleman, whose books are still vastly popular today, came back to the United States from India in 1950, started the American Academy of Yoga in Miami and by 1961 he was teaching yoga via his nationally syndicated television show, *Yoga for Health*. His many popular books reached millions of Americans, and combined with the description of his show, provides insight into how Hittleman taught and imagined yoga.

From the above description of Hittleman’s show, it is clear that he explicitly retained an ‘eastern’ and ‘mystical’ vision of yoga. While the outer or visual aspect of Hittleman’s yoga may have been constructed to appeal to a certain ‘mystical’ aesthetic, good health and a better body was ultimate goal, thus the journey was most pragmatic.

Hittleman was lucky enough to be profiled in a 1961 *Los Angeles Times* twelve-part series by Beverly Wilson and a 1970 *Chicago Tribune* twelve-part series by Mary Daniels. Wilson and Daniels used Hittleman’s teaching to make yoga more accessible to their readers while providing free publicity for Hittleman. These two authors helped sell yoga as a perfect tool for Americans to use to better their lives. Wilson concedes that while “you’ll scare your hubby out of his wits when he sees you in some of your more extreme yoga postures, yoga is not a strange rite practiced by an oddball religious sect. It’s a serious set of techniques developed by Indian sages centuries ago to

---

2 Segments of this show just became available for purchase, thus demonstrating his staying power (though this could also be because he left his wife bankrupt upon his death).
produce a healthy body and tranquil mind."³ A decade later, Daniels commented, “yoga is the perfect antidote to the tense and frantic American life-style.”⁴

Along with article press, courtesy of Wilson and Daniels, Hittleman also advertised his classes in the New York Times. A six-week course at his New York City studio was $42, and promised to help in achieving better health and a trimmer body (see Figure 4-1). This same advertisement also highlights that participation in Hittleman’s class means joining Hollywood and Broadway starts. In another advertisement (see Figure 4-2), Hittleman is a feature of Gimbel’s (a since defunct department store) India fortnight; during this time the customer can buy Indian handicrafts, saris and jewelry, drink Indian tea and learn yoga from Hittleman. This may be the only time that Hittleman’s yoga is explicitly tied to India. In general, his advertisements focused on the pragmatic, non-spiritual benefits of his classes, such as a trimmer body, less stress and better balance (see Figure 4-3).

Even the titles of his many books show his pragmatic approach to yoga. One of his first books, Be Young With Yoga (1942), written before he went to India explored the anti-aging benefits of yoga. His book, Yoga for Physical Fitness (1960) is what he originally based his television show on, and Yoga for Health (1962) covered yoga postures and nutrition. Yoga for Physical Fitness was mainly geared toward the sedentary worker, who is “confined to a desk during most of the workday… whose work is performed in relatively few positions… or… whose work consists of a limited number of repetitious movements.”⁵ For these workers, Hittleman feels that yoga is the perfect solution, because “In Yoga are included enjoyable, non-strenuous, revitalizing exercises

that require a minimum of time and can be done not only before and after the workday but also during the workday – in the office, during lunch hour or even the coffee break!"\textsuperscript{6}

To further illustrate his point, Hittleman provides the reader with pictures of sedentary workers, in their office clothes practicing yoga (see Figures 4-4 & 4-5). While most of the pictures are of practitioners in leotards, Hittleman has eight pages of practitioners in their work clothes; perhaps this was his attempt to fully illustrate that yoga could be done at work as well as at home (while watching his show).

His most popular book, \textit{Yoga: 28 Day Exercise Plan} (1969), best showcased his blend of pragmatics with the occasional sprinkling of ancient yogic wisdom. In \textit{Yoga: 28 Day Exercise Plan}, Hittleman outlines a 28 day regimen for anyone (any woman) to follow; each day, a new exercise is introduced, and every fourth day, there is a review of the previous exercises. The topics range from beauty and weight regulation to nutrition and meditation. Each ‘day’ introduced the reader, via photographs, to a new posture, laid out the practice regimen for the day, and then finished with “thoughts for the day”. Hittleman’s “thoughts for day” attempted to connect the practice of yoga to everyday concerns for the American woman. In one section, “Yoga and the Housewife,” Hittleman writes, “Housework and all that it entails may not be fun, but it is important and must be accomplished with a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction.”\textsuperscript{7} Hittleman acknowledges that this is not always easy, thus he suggests to “(1) Stretch often during your housework; (2) Make it a rule to always move with poise and balance regardless of how mundane you may think your activities are.”\textsuperscript{8} He is advocating mindfulness, and applying to the

\textsuperscript{6}Hittleman, \textit{Yoga for Physical Fitness}, 18.
\textsuperscript{8}Hittleman, \textit{Yoga: 28 Day Exercise Plan}, 118.
context of many mid-20th century women who did have to stay home and do housework. While he advocates daily practice, Hittleman makes yoga particularly accessible to this particular part of the population because he does not tell his audience to practice vigorously – he presents yoga as not strenuous and in small manageable parts, which can also help other aspects of their lives.

Hittleman died in 1991, and though his popularity may not be as strong as it was in the 1960s (his popularity started to wane in the late-1980s), he did help American workers and housewives imagine yoga as a tool to benefit their everyday lives and thus helped lay the groundwork for yoga to be further translated into an American practice. His accessible style is in many ways a departure from characters of chapter two – Hittleman did not just explain yoga, but he gave practitioners distinct methods on how to practice and explained in concrete ways why these practices are beneficial to one’s body.

**Sri Tirumala Krishnamacharya: The Mysore School and its Ambassadors**

Sri Tirumala Krishnamacharya, a famous yoga teacher in India, also focused on how yoga could be beneficial to the health of the body. Born in a small town in the Indian state of Karnataka and raised in Mysore (a city in Karnataka), Krishnamacharya traveled all over India in pursuit of education in Hindu philosophy, ayurveda and yoga. His depth and breadth of knowledge impressed the Maharajah of Mysore, who gave him an entire section of his palace in which to start a school for yoga (which only closed down in 1950 since India had won independence and the Maharaja was dethroned). After moving from Mysore, Krishnamacharya eventually found himself in Madras (Chennai), where he lived and continued to teach yoga till he died at the age of one hundred.
The approach that Krishnamacharya took to yoga was different from his contemporaries at the Ramakrishna Math and Mission of Vivekananda, as well as the Yogoda Satsanga of Yogananda. While he shared Vivekananda’s and Yogananda’s inter-faith platform and taught members of any faith yoga, unlike them, Krishnamacharya never left India for the U.K. or the U.S; rather it was his students that exported his methods. Krishnamacharya focused on the combination of pranayama with asana practice and meditation. Fernando Pages-Ruiz writes that because “Krishnamacharya's pupils were primarily active young boys, he drew on many disciplines—including yoga, gymnastics, and Indian wrestling—to develop dynamically-performed asana sequences aimed at building physical fitness.”⁹ At the center of his yoga system was the Surya Namaskara (sun salutation), which is a series of poses strung together to honor the sun. While the Surya Namaskara maybe imagined by many yoga practitioners as an ancient series of asanas designed to honor the sun, Joseph Alter traces it back to 1928 and Bhavanrao Srinivasrao Pant Pratinidhi, the Rajah of Aundh, a king from a small kingdom in Maharashtra. In his book, Gandhi’s Body: Sex, Diet and the Politics of Nationalism, Alter argues that Pratinidhi was more concerned with physical health, strength and fitness, rather than with yoga. He developed Surya Namaskara “after his conversion from the ‘old school of wrestling’ and the consumption of ‘unnecessarily fatty foods,’ and after ten years of body building done with equipment from the United States, and after twenty year of experimentation, modification and practice.”¹⁰ He then published his ‘invention’ in a book (written in English) called Surya Namaskara, which quickly sold out and was thus republished many times. Alter finds

that yoga was not connected to Pratinidhi’s *Surya Namaskara* until 1940, and there is no physical evidence of Krishnamacharya purchasing this book or of meeting Pratinidhi. Krishnamacharya’s student, K. Pattabhi Jois, claims that the two of them traveled to Calcutta in 1934 and found a lost yoga text, *Yoga Korunta*, which prescribed the *asanas* for *Surya Namaskara*, but since there is no evidence for the existence for such a text, this story seems doubtful, and more hagiographical rather than biographical.11

Despite its more secular roots, the *Surya Namaskara* became the center practice for Krishnamacharya’s yoga; thus today this series of moves is associated more with yoga than with a king from Maharashtra. Krishnamacharya translated Pratinidhi’s moves into *asanas* and paired them with Sanskrit verses. He also taught his students to seamlessly move or flow from *asana* to *asana*, which is now referred to as a *Vinyasa* style of yoga. Krishnamacharya was also very concerned with how yoga benefited one’s health, which is one of the reasons that the Maharajah of Mysore, a diabetic, became his patron. Part of this approach meant tailoring practice to the ability and health of the each of his students. Ruisz writes, “a doctor asked him to help a stroke victim. Krishnamacharya manipulated the patient's lifeless limbs into various postures, a kind of yogic physical therapy. As with so many of Krishnamacharya’s students, the man’s health improved.”12 Along with yoga practice, Krishnamacharya would also prescribe ayurveda remedies and focus on the diet of the patient. He even refused medical treatment on himself when, at age 96, he broke his hip. Of the incident, his grandson, Kausthub Desikachar, writes:

> My grandfather tripped and broke his hip in the late 1980s. When he fell

---

down and could not move my father (TKV Desikachar) called for the family doctor immediately. When he arrived, the doctor knew right away that he had broken his hip, and called for his colleague who was a specialist in setting bones. However Krishnamacharya was in no mood to entertain a set of doctors working on him. The moment the specialist arrived, he yelled at them to “get out of here. I can handle myself and heal myself and I will prove it to you within three months. I don’t need your help.” Obviously hurt by this comment, the specialist stormed out of our house telling my father “don’t waste your time on a ninety-six year old insane man. He is not going to last long.” Even at a moment of injury, Krishnamacharya never lost faith in the yoga that he had learnt from his master. His theory was if he could heal at all, then surely yoga could help him heal more quickly. Around the third month after the fall, he called my father one day to his room and said, “Call that specialist.” When my father telephoned the specialist and informed him of Krishnamacharya’s request to meet him, the specialist sarcastically remarked, “So, now he wants me to come and help him.” When he arrived home, Krishnamacharya greeted him in his room and said, “That day you asked my son not to waste time on me. Look what I can do.” With this he began to show the range of movements he could do now, after healing himself with yoga. He demonstrated that he could get up on his own, walk a few steps and could do a whole set of postures, that would make even a normal healthy person feel envious. The doctor was speechless and he recommended us to “please record these movements on video. Otherwise, no one will believe this is possible.13

While it maybe easy to dismiss a grandson’s awe of his grandfather, it is nonetheless an amazing story, and one that helped fuel Krishnamacharya’s legend in India. It is quite fitting that a man that spent his life creating individual programs for his students to follow, used the very same technique to help/heal himself. This story may be more fitting of a hagiography, but it is not hard to imagine that his creation and life-long practice of a physically involved yoga aided in his hip recovery.

Beyond developing a style of yoga focused on physical strength and bodily health, Krishnamacharya’s legacy is also tied to his students and their adapting Krishnamacharya’s teaching for a global audience. Three of his students in particular,

---

Indra Devi, B.K.S. Iyengar, and K. Pattabhi Jois, were instrumental in translating the yoga of Krishnamacharya into an American context by stressing the accessibility, practicality and healthiness of yoga practice.

**Indra Devi**

Eugenie Peterson, Russian by birth, American during life and Argentine at death, went to India and applied to study with Krishnamacharya. At first Krishnamacharya rebuffed Peterson because apparently he felt he could not teach yoga to women (or foreigners). She continued to request instruction; Krishnamacharya gave in and designed a ‘gentle’ lesson plan for her and trained her as a teacher. Based on his teachings, Peterson published many books on yoga, which reached a wide audience of women all over the United States and the world. Often described as an ambassador of yoga, Peterson changed her name to Indra Devi and helped introduce yoga to China, Russia, Argentina and the U.S.; she even convinced (communist, anti-religious) Soviet officials to legalize yoga, after explaining yoga to them. Elizabeth Arden, a leading cosmetic and beauty figure at the time was a patron of Devi, which gave her exposure to quite a few students from Hollywood. Her second husband also built her a compound in New Mexico, where she trained American yoga teachers. Her obituary stated that she took the teachings of Krishnamacharya, “and built a style of yoga accessible to Westerners. It was characterized by gentleness.”\(^\text{14}\) Devi left the U.S. for Argentina in 1982, and continued to teach yoga there, until her death; she lived to be 102 years old.

Like previous yoga masters teaching in the U.S. (save Pierre Bernard), Devi was a prolific writer with many popular books. One of her earliest popular books, *Forever*

Young, *Forever Healthy* (1953), was a combination of her spiritual journey (like Yogananda) and a practical guide for health (like Ramacharaka, Theos Bernard and Hittleman). She published numerous other books, and one of them, *Yoga for Americans: A Complete 6 Weeks’ Course for Home Practice* (1959) was (obviously) tailored for her American audience.\(^{15}\) The book was dedicated to her friend and famous American actress, Gloria Swanson, which probably helped with book sales and legitimacy in the eyes of her audience, American women. In her ‘Introduction’ Devi acknowledges the Hindu roots of yoga, but she counters,

> Many people still think that Yoga is a religion. Others believe it to be a kind of magic. Some associate Yoga with the robe trick, with snake-charming, fire-eating or sitting on nail-beds, lying on broken glass, walking on sharp swords, etc. Sometimes it is even linked to fortune telling, spiritualism, hypnotism and other ‘isms’. In reality, *Yoga is a method, a system of physical, mental and spiritual development.*\(^{16}\)

Devi attempts to divorce yoga from some of the more austere or touristy practices of Hindu mendicants and entertainers, but is also attempted to frame yoga as separate from any one religion or any one culture. Given that she learned from an Indian in India, this is a bit confusing, but seen in light of that fact that she attempted (successfully) to spread yoga globally, her attempt to take the religious or the India out of yoga makes sense. It was probably easier for Devi to convince people to practice yoga, especially in Cold War America, if it was presented a universal, scientific, and healthy practice. Thus, she asserts that since yoga is not a religion, Christians can practice yoga. Devi addresses this in her introduction and her second appendix, which has a sampling of

\(^{15}\)This is unique, for I have not found any of her other books to be specifically written with one national audience in mind. Also, since this book was published before Hittleman’s *Yoga: 28 Day Plan*, it is conceivable that Hittleman got his idea to break up his lessons into weekly and daily from Devi, though there is not concrete evidence for this.

letters from students that have benefited from Devi’s instruction. One of these letters is from a Methodist minister, Roy A. Langston, who started practicing yoga in his sixties so that he could alleviate stiffness in his limbs. Yoga helped his pain, and he writes, “It is my sincere belief that if I had known and practiced principles of Yoga many year ago, I could have enjoyed not only a higher degree of good health, but could have given better service to God and man.”

From this good review, it seems that Devi, like Hittleman and her guru, did not completely erase the mystical out of her representation of yoga. For example, she describes prana as “a subtle life energy existing in the air in fluid form. Everything living, from men to amoebae, from plants to animals is charged with Prana. Without Prana there is no life.” While this may seem a lot like the Force (perhaps George Lucas read Devi), the assertion that all is connected is a type of worldview that also has ethical and practical. In her section, “Yama-Niyama and Contemplation” she outlines “ten riles of the Yoga code of morals”; Yama consists of “(1) inoffensiveness (non-destruction, non-injury); (2) truthfulness; (3) non-stealing; (4) non-desire for what belongs to others; (5) continence (frugality in diet, disinclination toward sexual enjoyment” and Niyama requires “(1) purification; (2) contentment; (3) strength of character (abstinence, forbearance, discipline, non-complaint, patience, calmness of mine; (4) study; (5) complete self-surrender to the Lord (which includes sharing with others that which has been given to you).” While she makes it clear later in this section that sexual abstinence is not necessary for the practice of yoga, she takes this seriously when dealing with other beings that she is connected to via prana. For example, when she

17Devi, *Yoga for Americans*, 204.
18Devi, *Yoga for Americans*, xxiv.
19Devi, *Yoga for Americans*, 150.
had ants invade her home, she chose to not to kill them, but to talk to them. She asked “them to go where they belonged” and promised “to keep some sugar for them outside.” This, Devi claimed, worked, and is most illustrative of the ethical outlook she follows and wishes for her readers to follow.

The thrust of this book is not ethical, however, it is practical (through which one reaches a heightened ethical state) and thus the majority of the book describes a series of yoga breathing exercises and postures, which the student was to master in a period of six weeks, and she organized it this way because “a great number of people her in the United States – and elsewhere – were anxious to be given an outlines program they could follow day by day.” Interestingly, Devi does not give instructions for Surya Namaskara, even though it was central to Krishnamacharya. This could be because when she learned from him, he thought it might be too strenuous for a woman or because he himself had not learned it yet. Despite this omission, Yoga for Americans proved helpful to many. Beyond learning how to properly breathe, various stretching exercises, and yoga postures, Devi provides her reader with four sample diets (Cleansing, Health, Reducing, For People Over Thirty-Five) and a variety of vegetarian recipes. Devi’s tone and style is easy to follow, which, like Hittleman, makes her style of yoga accessible, doable and ‘gentle.’

B.K.S. Iyengar

While Indra Devi introduced the physical yoga of Krishnamacharya to the U.S., this physical or asana yoga became most popular under the organization of Bellur Krishnamacharya Sundararaja (B. K. S) Iyengar. Born in 1918, he started studying with

---

20 Devi, Yoga for Americans, 151.
21 Devi, Yoga for Americans, ix.
Krishnamacharya (who was also his brother-in-law) when he was 15, and set up his own institute for the study of yoga in Pune, Maharashtra three years later. Iyengar stressed the physicality of Krishnamacharya’s yoga practice, and introduced the importance of bodily alignment and the use of props to aid in that alignment. While he may be one of Krishnamacharya’s most famous students, he did not like the Vinyasa style of yoga that was taught by Krishnamacharya. In her memoir, First There Is a Mountain, Elizabeth Kadetsky reports that Iyengar seemed to have an intense dislike and rivalry with Jois, and of the Vinyasa style said, “I did it like him for a year with my guruji. Realizing the ill effect of it, I said good-bye.”22 With the help of American violinist Yehudi Menuhin, Iyengar came to the United States in 1956, and the two of them traveled all over together, making this form of yoga one of the most popular of the time and even today. Iyengar would hold lectures, during which he would also demonstrate various yogic poses while explaining the various health benefits of each one. Described as a man with a “rubber-muscled body” who “writhed about the stage in postures that would make a contortionist creak”, he nonetheless made yoga accessible.23

Iyengar reached immense popularity after the publication of this book Light on Yoga - The Bible of Modern Yoga in 1966. What is significant about this book is that it is in many ways the most comprehensive and detailed book on yoga practice – the focus is on the asanas that made Iyengar Yoga so popular. He positions his book as the authority in his preface by slighting his competition: “Unfortunately most of the books published on Yoga in our day have been unworthy of both the subject and its first great

---

22 Kadetsky, First There Is a Mountain, 270.
exponent, as they are superficial, popular and at times misleading.\(^{24}\) He starts the book out with two prayers. The first honors Patanjali, and the second prayer seems to be from Swatmarama’s *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*: “I salute Adisvara (the Primeval Lord Siva) who taught first the science of Hatha Yoga – a science that stands out as a ladder for those who wish to scale the heights of Raja Yoga.”\(^{25}\) After his introduction to yoga, he provides the reader with 369 pages with 592 pictures showing the reader how to practice 200 different *asanas*. Along with his exhaustive explanations of *asanas* he also provides the reader with thirteen *pranayamas* that one should practice either after or separately from *asanas* (but not before). This direction along with the amount of attention given to *asanas* as opposed to *pranayama* is demonstrative of how much importance he places on *asana* practice.

All these *asanas* are demonstrated by Iyengar himself, thus providing evidence of his immense flexibility, strength and limberness at the age of 48 (see Figure 4-6 & 4-8). For each *asana* that he demonstrates, he provides the reader with variations (if relevant), as well as detailed instructions on how to perform the *asana*. For example, when demonstrating *Salabhasana*, he lists six instructions for one to achieve proper technique:

1. Lie full length on the floor on the stomach, face downwards. Stretch the arms back.
2. Exhale, lift the head, chest and legs of the floor simultaneously as high as possible. The hands should not be placed and the ribs should not rest on the flood. Only the abdominal front portion of the body rests on the floor and bears the weight of the body.
3. Contract the buttocks and stretch the thigh muscles. Keep both legs fully extended and straight, touching at the thighs, knees and ankles.
4. Do not bear the weight of the body on the hands but stretch them back to exercise the upper portion of the back muscles.


5. Stay in the position as long as you can with normal breathing.
6. In the beginning it is difficult to lift the chest and the legs off the floor, but this becomes easier as the abdominal muscles grow stronger.\textsuperscript{26}

This detailed list explains what to do and what not to do for correct practice. In the first appendix of his book, Iyengar provides the reader with a 300-week course. These weeks are divided into three groups: primary, intermediate and advanced. By designing an almost six year course which may result in the mastery of yoga, Iyengar demonstrates that such mastery is not an easy task and one that requires perseverance, discipline and time. Every few weeks, Iyengar lists a new sequence of asanas for the student to practice and master. Like Devi, Iyengar omits Surya Namaskara, but unlike Devi, because of his location and closeness to Pratinidhi in Maharashtra, it is likely that did know of its existence. Given that Surya Namaskara was central to Krishnamacharya and rival Jois, he might have omitted it as a way to differentiate his style of yoga from that of their Vinyasa style. He does, however, introduce the various asanas that make up Surya Namaskara, including, Adho Mukha Svanasana (downward dog pose), which is a central move in the sequence (see Figure 4-7).

Along with these extremely detailed and precise instructions, for every one of the 200 asanas, Iyengar also provides the reader/practitioner with the various effects that a particular asana will have on one’s internal and external body. For Salabhasana Iyengar explains that this particular pose,

\begin{itemize}
  \item aids digestion and relieves gastric troubles and flatulence. Since the spine is stretched back it becomes elastic and the pose relieves pain in the sacral and lumbar regions. In my experience, persons suffering from slipped discs have benefited by regular practice of this asana without
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{26}Iyengar, \textit{Light on Yoga}, 99-100.
recourse to enforced rest or surgical treatment. The bladder and the prostrate gland also benefit from the exercise and remain healthy.\(^{27}\)

Iyengar is not only concerned with correct form, but also with how these various postures will affect the health of the practitioner. In the second appendix of *Light on Yoga*, Iyengar lists *asanas* that could be helpful for 87 ailments or bodily problems. He writes, “After working 25 years as a teacher, I am giving groups of asanas for different functional and organic ailments and diseases.”\(^{28}\) The ailments that Iyengar seeks to aid range from digestive difficulty and circulatory problems to muscle aches, fertility issues and loss of memory. He cautions the seeker of a healthier body to only adopt practice of *asanas* “according to one’s ability, suppleness of body and constitution… it is important to use common sense and to watch the reactions of your body.”\(^{29}\) Iyengar stressed that practitioners of yoga should not over stress their body and work on correct alignment before moving on to the practice of more intermediate and advanced poses.

Beyond his book, Iyengar added the use of props to his style of yoga that made it easier for many to practice the correct alignment that he believed to be so important. Iyengar’s focus was correct alignment and props were a way for practitioners at all levels to attain Iyengar’s standard of alignment. It was also a means of adding a material dimension to practice, upon which he could capitalize. The Iyengar Association of Greater New York explains the why props are important in the following way:

> B.K.S. Iyengar introduced props into the modern practice of yoga to allow all practitioners access to the benefits of the postures regardless of physical condition, age, or length of study. Props help all practitioners (including the most advanced) gain sensitivity to the use of effort and receive the deep benefits of postures held over significant time periods. Props are introduced from the beginning for students with specific physical

\(^{27}\)Iyengar, *Light on Yoga*, 100.

\(^{28}\)Iyengar, *Light on Yoga*, 487.

\(^{29}\)Iyengar, *Light on Yoga*, 487.
limitations and gradually in regular classes to enhance personal understanding of a posture and its effects and to develop skill and confidence. Props include sticky mats, blankets, belts, blocks, benches, wall ropes, sandbags, chairs, and other objects that help students experience the various yoga poses more profoundly. Props may be used in class to encourage students, bolster confidence, and create optimal body alignment. Allowing students to practice asanas (yoga postures) and pranayamas (breathing patterns) with greater effectiveness, ease, and stability, props provide support for the body and allow the mind to relax and more profoundly receive the benefits of the yoga.30

Iyengar’s ‘invention’ of yoga props are a testament to the importance he placed on alignment. They were also a way for yoga practitioners at all levels to participate and reap the benefits of Iyengar’s style of yoga. The other side of the props is that they added a material dimension to the practice of yoga. Practice no longer simply involved the body, but also objects (commodities) that needed to be produced, shipped and sold. In other words, props for better yoga practice was a new way for the market to intertwine with yoga.

The combination of Light on Yoga and the introduction of yoga props made Iyengar one of the most influential yoga teachers of the twentieth century. In 2004 he was named one of the 100 most influence people by Time Magazine, and still continues making trips to the U.S. Most recently he came in 2005, during which he attended a Yoga Journal sponsored conference. The combination of his detailed instructions (that made it easy to follow), his explanations of health benefits and development of props to aid alignment made yoga sensible, understandable, doable and trendy – in other words, yoga being domesticated to fit an American context.

K. Pattabhi Jois

K. Pattabhi Jois is another of Krishnamacharya’s students that made yoga trendier in the U.S., especially since later in his life he garnered the attention of popular celebrities like Madonna, Gwyneth Paltrow and Sting. Jois may have made yoga trendier and like Devi and Iyengar he also highlighted the health benefits of yoga, but his style of yoga is not known for being particularly easy.

Neither Devi nor Iyengar focused their teaching on Krishnamacharya’s Vinyasa style of yoga. While both followed Krishnamacharya in tailoring yoga practice to the level of their students, Devi’s instruction was geared towards women and it is not a stretch to imagine that Krishnamacharya did not teach Devi this physically grueling style; and Iyengar concerned himself with the correct alignment of asanas, rather than flowing (or as he called it – jumping) from pose to pose. Jois, however, took Krishnamacharya’s Vinyasa style of yoga, modified it and created another popular form of modern yoga, Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga.

Jois started the Ashtanga Yoga Institute in 1948 in Mysore, and wrote the book, Yoga Mala, in 1962, which has 62 pictures of asanas and a chapter on the importance and methods of pranayama. This book was not translated into English until 1999; nonetheless, Jois became popular in the American yoga circuit prior to that because of David Williams. Williams went to Jois in the early 1970s to learn from Jois, and brought him to California in 1975 to teach Ashtanga Yoga to an American audience. While this is much later than the rest of the yoga teachers highlighted in this chapter, Jois did emphasize the ways in which yoga is beneficial for one’s health. Also, since his book was technically written before Iyengar’s, Jois’ format of giving detailed instructions and
then explaining the health benefits may have influenced Iyengar (though he would be likely to deny this).

The center of Jois’ Ashtanga Yoga is Surya Namaskara, which Jois asserts, “has come down to us from the long distant past, and is capable of rendering human life heavenly and blissful… people can become joyous, experience happiness and contentment, and avoid succumbing to old age and death.” According to Jois, the Sun is also the god of health, thus yoga is not only devotional but also has bodily benefits: in other words yoga is not just a spiritual pursuit. Jois believes, that, “Diseases that cannot be cured by medicine can be cured by yoga; diseases that cannot be cured by yoga cannot be cured at all. That is definite.” It is from this twelve-asana sequence that practitioners of Ashtanga Yoga flow into other asanas, all of which have specific health benefits. The actual method of Vinyasa also has health benefits. Jois’ official Ashtanga Yoga Institute website explains that,

The purpose of vinyasa is for internal cleansing. Breathing and moving together while performing asanas... boils the blood. Thick blood is dirty and causes disease in the body. The heat created from yoga cleans the blood and makes it thin, so that it may circulate freely. The combination of the asanas with movement and breath make the blood circulate freely around all the joints, taking away body pains... The heated blood also moves through all the internal organs removing impurities and disease, which are brought out of the body by the sweat that occurs during practice. Sweat is an important by product of vinyasa, because it is only through sweat that disease leaves the body and purification occurs... After the body is purified, it is possible to purify the nervous system, and then the sense organs.

From this explanation it is clear that the center of Ashtanga Yoga comes down to the health of the body (blood). While Jois was insistent that the student of Ashtanga be

---

32 Jois, Yoga Mala, 29.
mindful during practice, true mindfulness could not be achieved without a certain level of purity, which could not be achieved without a healthy amount of sweat.

Jois, in a manner similar to Iyengar, first explains, in detail, how to perform a specific asana; where they differ is that Jois explains each asana in relation to the asanas of Surya Namaskara. For example, when describing Navasana (see Figure 4-9), he not only explains how to do this pose, but also how to flow into it after performing seven of the twelve steps of Surya Namaskara. Jois also provides the health benefits of each asana that he describes, which for Navasana is not only improved digestion, but also this pose helps quell the (sexual) desires of women, thus it is also a means of birth control. Jois finds that Navasana is a method for women to control their sense organs, which helps limit the number of children they produce. This is important to Jois because, “If our country is to produce robust, intellectual, and long-lived children who believe in God, we must… learn to control our sense organs,” and yoga is better means for birth control for “it is best to avoid unnatural, allopathic means which are against nature and bad for the body.”

Remembering that Jois did not start out with an American, but rather Indian audience in mind makes him different from Devi and Iyengar. Despite his audience, his method of yoga was still able to translate into an American context. A major reason for this is the actual method of Vinyasa, which made yoga into a form of aerobic exercise, thus beneficial for one’s physical health.

Gurus of the Counterculture and Drug Detox

Iyengar, Devi and Hittleman were all practicing and preaching during the cultural turmoil/upheaval/revolution of the 1960s, and particularly in the United States with the popularity of the counter-culture, the fight for civil rights and the disillusionment of the

---

34 Jois, Yoga Mala, 82.
Vietnam War, yoga became very attractive, and started to be viewed and used as a solution to various health and societal ills. For example, yoga started to be taught in prisons. At a prison in Lorton, VA, a prisoner, William W. Carter, who had a tattoo of a swastika on his left bicep because it is “an ancient Indian sign signifying the four types of yoga,” taught yoga twice a week to a group of about 20 fellow inmates.\(^{35}\) He held a session/class that consisted of a short lecture on the “eight steps of Raja Yoga,” recitation from the Bhagavad-Gita Gita, some exercises, and “a recitation of a Hindu creed which commanded them to ‘live up to your religion every moment of life.’”\(^{36}\) While his understanding of the swastika may have been misplaced (especially in a post-Holocaust prison), it seems that the practice of yoga was beneficial for the inmates that chose to participate in Carter’s class.

Beyond prisons, yoga was also seen as a solution for the massive drug problem that resulted from the open experimentation of the Hippies. Two yoga gurus in particular, Yogi Bhajan and Swami Satchidananda, were particularly interesting, in that they both exemplified the guru of the counter-culture movement. The two met in 1970 at the Holy Man Jam in Boulder, Colorado, a music concert that brought together various ‘eastern’ spiritual leaders. Both these connected with the counter-culture; but both yogis also attempted to provide solutions to ensuring drug problem created by the counter-culture movement, which, along with using health and science to market their brands of yoga, ensured their longevity in the American mainstream.

Yogi Bhajan (born Harbhajan Singh Puri) traveled all over India to learn yoga before immigrating to Canada in 1968. Later that year, he moved to Los Angeles, and

\(^{36}\) Gresham, “Lorton Inmates Study Yoga.”
started teaching yoga to members of the counterculture. In 1969, he started the Happy, Healthy and Holy Organization (3HO) in New Mexico, and by 1972 there were over 100 3HO ashrams all over North America. These ashrams functioned as a hybrid of family and business – they would practice yoga together morning and night, and then during the day run a business of some sorts to sustain themselves. This type of organization was most appealing to those of the counterculture movement for it provided a means of sustenance in a communal and egalitarian setting outside of the mainstream. These businesses started by these ashrams in the early 1970s, such as Akal Security in Michigan and Golden Temple in Oregon (which makes Yogi Tea, Peace Cereal and other ayurveda health products for Trader Joe), are still quite successful today.

Yogi Bhajan referred to his brand of yoga as *Kundalini Yoga*, which “is a science by which the subconscious mind is cleared of the doubts and fears that hinder relationships from reaching the essence of higher consciousness: that spiritual presence in the soul of all humans and in all creatures.”37 In the early years of 3HO, teachers would pan out and teach *Kundalini Yoga* seminars at colleges and community centers; the cost for individuals was $54 and $90 for married couples. Like many other American yoga movements, this one was also presented as interfaith. One practitioner explained: “Yoga is considered a universal science and not a religion. All religions can practice it… ‘We believe that around everybody’s philosophy there is one truth we all believe in and that one truth links us together as a human race. We all come from one creator.’”38

---

In a 1972 *Washington Post* article, Bhajan claimed his method of drug detoxification has treated over 100,000 drug users, most successfully. What is not clear is if these users were all addicts or if some or most were recreational users. One heroin addict did find success with 3HO, for he had tried methadone for three and a half years, and did not shake heroin until he tried yoga. At the same time, this beneficiary, William Richardson, also claimed he had been addicted to heroin for 23 years. While this may seem a bit exaggerated, this program seemed to work for Richardson. The 3HO detox program involves “a diet of beet juice and carrot juice to ‘resuscitate the liver’” and the practice of “basic yoga exercises.”\(^{39}\) Another former drug addict explained that “In Kundalini we deal with the same exact energy as drugs release…you can’t go back to drugs once you’ve tried this yoga,’ he concluded. ‘They’re a down’,” and another added, “‘it’s more lasting than marijuana… All I have to do now is breathe and I’m stoned. I wish I had a better word because it’s a better trip.’”\(^{40}\) One could argue that they were swapping one high for another; however, many also added that they now retained mental clarity.

Swami Satchidananda, another yoga guru of this era, who opened the Woodstock festival in 1969, thus solidifying this place in counter-culture history, also gained popularity for similar reasons to Bhajan. He was born C.K. Ramaswamy Gounder, and given the name Satchidananda by his Guru, Swami Sivananda, who taught him the various paths of yoga (*Bhakti, Karma, Jnana, Raja* and *Hatha*). Balance of the various paths of yoga continued to be important to Satchidananda when he immigrated to the United States in 1966, and founded the Integral Yoga Institute, which also stressed that

---


a yoga student must integrate these various branches of yoga. Satchidananda added on more yoga path, that of *Japa Yoga*, which involves the repetition of a mantra. Satchidananda encourages this integrated approach because a combination of methods is best to “develop every aspect of the individual: physical, intellectual, and spiritual. It is a scientific system which integrates the various branches of Yoga in order to bring about a complete and harmonious development of the individual.”  

Satchidananda set up the head quarters for his institute in Buckingham, Virginia at a place called Yogaville, which is a 700-acre community where one can practice yoga, attend retreats to relieve various diseases or learn massage therapy. Like Bhajan, Satchidananda’s organization is intensely interfaith. Beyond symbolical representing many religions on the lotus that symbolizes the Integral Yoga Institute, at Yogaville Satchidananda built LOTUS (Light of Universal Truth Shrine), which is a shrine that attempts to have a space for every religion (Hinduism, Judaism, Shinto, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, African Religions, Native American Religions, ‘Other Known Religions’ and ‘Those Still Unknown’).

Beyond trying to be super-inclusive, his organization also provided drug rehabilitation services in the 1970s. With the help of the New York City Addiction Services Agency and the National Institute of Mental Health, a drug therapy program was started that claimed “a dropout rate of about 30 percent compared with the 60 or 70 percent typical of many addict-reform programs.” This particular program involved morning meditation, “followed by strenuous exercise in the Hatha Yoga class – body

---


twists, stretches, headstands and hairpin bends.”\textsuperscript{43} Each student also had chores (cleaning, cooking, clerical work) and, after their vegetarian lunch, had to attend lectures on yoga or “rap sessions, a form of group therapy, during which students sit in a circle to challenge and explore each other’s behavior.”\textsuperscript{44} One student, who was addicted to LSD “said yoga gave him a ‘perspective I can relate to no matter what happens. I can accept my feeling because I know they won’t take me over.’”\textsuperscript{45} Another student, however, felt she became a super-yogi for a while, replacing the drugs with “meditation and exercises”, saying “’it was an escape, a phase…yoga practices can help you, but you have to fit them realistically into your life.’”\textsuperscript{46}

Both Bhajan and Satchidananda were able to create communities that revolved around the practice of yoga without isolation from the real world – they both found ways to meld yoga with mundane life concerns, which made them relevant beyond a community of ‘hippies.’ It seems a focus on health, is one way that yoga has found permanent relevance in the American landscape. Further, the focus on health helped make yoga more multifaceted – it was a practice beyond just spiritual betterment, and one that could lead to a better body, more energy, youthful looks and drug detoxification. The link between yoga and health was one that all the yogis of this time period, from Hittleman to Satchidananda, exploited in a most successful manner.

\textbf{Yoga for Health}

As early as 1937, there was an article in \textit{The Atlantic Constitution} that linked yoga to fitness and health. In the article “Your Figure, Madam,” Ida Jean Kain writes, “Last

\textsuperscript{43}Wohl, “Good Head, No Habit…”
\textsuperscript{44}Wohl, “Good Head, No Habit…”
\textsuperscript{45}Wohl, “Good Head, No Habit…”
\textsuperscript{46}Wohl, “Good Head, No Habit…”
year we adapted exercises which induce relaxation, and this year it’s exercise from the Yoga, to discipline mind and body. Whatever the original purpose of these exercises, they are all grist to the mill of the American woman bent on streamlines. “47

Twenty years later, in a 1957 Washington Post article, yoga was heralded as the secret to youth (for looks and health) and that one who practices might succeed “where Ponce de Leon struck out.”48 The article cites the example of Ruth St. Denis, a 79 year old woman who “doesn’t even breathe heavily when she walks up the stairs,” and explains that yoga circulates “the blood in the body, ”which will then, “wash the brain,” thus making yoga “a form of ‘brainwashing.’”49 Yoga as a tool for health even starts to infiltrate American politics. Marie Smith, a journalist for the Washington Post, reports “Mrs. Richard M. Nixon, who said she has never in her life exercised to slim her figure, got down on her knees in the Diplomatic Reception Room of the White House yesterday and took a lesson in yoga.”50 Apparently, she did this in front of about a dozen reporters, as well as some teenaged girls who had just completed a self-improvement course.

Yoga was also seen as a method to help athletes. Pierre Bernard trained boxer Lou Nova, and other athletes followed. Two generations later, “Lee Mueller, a race driver, said he hasn’t lost a race since he started practicing yoga. He said, ‘It’s all about your mind and body relationship…nothing religious--strictly yoga for health. The whole reason I do it is it makes me feel better.’”51 Other athletes, such as tennis and football

47 Ida Jean Kain, “Your Figure Madam,” The Atlanta Constitution, 15 October 1937.
49 Newman, “Yoga is the Secret of Youth.”
players, also looked to yoga to improve their physical health and psychological focus –

popular yoga magazine, the Yoga Journal, also dedicated an entire issue to yoga and

sports in the early 1980s.

Like the idea of yoga as a science, the link between yoga and health was not only

explored in the U.S. The vast interest in and popularity of yoga in Western countries,

“spurred the Indian Government and medical researchers to study them scientifically to

find therapeutic applications of these mystic practices.”52 They found, after “six months

of systematic training in yoga exercises… several beneficial effects,” including weight

loss, better appetites, less tension and stress, lower blood pressure and cholesterol, as

well as less use of drugs and alcohol. These Indian scientists even found improved

conditions among the rats they had “doing one of two hours a day of sirsasana or

standing on the head, in open-end glass tubes.”53 If rats benefited from practice with

just a couple hours a day, then perhaps humans would benefit with an hour a day as

well…

It is also important to note that the group targeted by the various newspaper

articles on yoga and some of the yogis of this period (especially Hittleman and Devi)

wrote to women about how yoga could help maintain their figure, looks, youth, flexibility

and housework. Unless this was a concern and societal stress for women, Devi,

Hittleman and the lifestyles sections of various newspapers would not have targeted

women as specifically as they did. R. Marie Griffith, in her book, Born Again Bodies,

shows that bodily preoccupation was a concern in Protestantism, and “as the tradition

that has most comprehensively influenced the course of American history,” played a


53 “India Evaluating Effects of Yoga.”
significant role in creating a system (often targeted towards women) to make “bodies healthier, more beautiful, more powerful, and longer lived than others.” If health was a concern in the larger forces of Protestantism, one way for yoga to be marketable was to address such concerns; in other words yoga was tailored to meet the needs of mid-twentieth century Protestant women. Whereas the women that followed Vivekananda may have turned to him for freedom and found positions of power in the Vedanta Society, in later years women turned to yoga in an attempt to live-up to a societal ideal (fueled by the market). This translation was not too difficult seeing as Indians in India were using yoga as a means of increasing the nation’s health (and staving of colonialism), thus for Iyengar, Jois, Bhajan and Satchidananda a focus on health was familiar.

Further, using yoga to discipline female bodies in a specific way (to make them more slender, fit, etc…) is part of a larger means of social control of women. Susan Bordo argues that via these disciplines of self-modification or improved femininity, female bodies “memorize… the feel and conviction of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough.” She further notices that, “viewed historically, the discipline and the normalization of the female body – perhaps the only gender oppression that exercises itself, although to different degrees and in different forms, across age, race, class, and sexual orientation – has to be acknowledged as an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control.” Yoga, then, was used as one means to control women’s bodies via the promise of health and the discipline of yoga, as a practice

---

beneficial to women, was fueled by growing market forces. Along with better health and a better body, there was also the promise of an additional experience of the mystical or foreign.

All of the yogis of this chapter used yoga to blend the domestic concerns of bodily health with a desire for a foreign or mystical experience, which may have been especially appealing to women wishing to possess an experience that took them just slightly out of their ordinary lives, if only for a moment in their everyday lives. Further, because of yoga's foreignness it may have been as perceived as more appropriate for women because foreignness and the exotic are often constructed as feminine. In the colonial and post-colonial era, foreign men are often feminized as a means to strip them of power, thus the activities that they bring over to the 'masculine west' (such as yoga) are immediately placed into a feminine category, and yoga, in particular, then stands in contrast to more 'masculine' and 'American' activities such as body building. This becomes messy because yoga was seen as seductive to females, thus not completely emasculated as a practice. Yoga was used as a means to help athletes (male and female), but overall the practice was targeted to women, I think, because it was more accepted and thus easier for a woman to participate in a subaltern space than it was for a man. It was also a desirable practice for upper class, Euro-American women to participate in, because they could get fit with the practice and still participate in the consumption of something exotic, timeless, foreign and mystical (the elements that attracted many women when Vivekananda first introduced this practice to many upper-class, Euro-American women).
At this point in the history, yoga was no longer a male-centered practice that one devoted their whole lives too by going off to an ashram in the middle of the woods, but rather a practice geared mainly to women who could do it with a bit of practice everyday. Even the ashram life of 3HO involved participation in domestic and economic life. A key part of translating yoga into the realm of the domestic was to market its health benefits – something that yogis from Vivekananda to Satchidananda attempted to do. For scholar Amanda Porterfield, the link between religion and health is a historical one that is emblematic of America’s attraction to the pragmatic, the technical, the scientific and the effective. She writes that, “Many Americans have worked systematically to bring God down to earth and to build practical knowledge about how to tap into the divine and make it work for human well-being.”57 This is exactly how the various actors in this and previous chapters have translated yoga; while they all might not be American by birth, the majority of them catered to American audiences, and stumbled upon the value many Americans placed on pragmatism, health and effectiveness. While the practice of yoga might have started out as practice in the U.S. on the fringe and within the counter-culture, that it was also a practice that did not take all day, yet was healthy and did effectively improve the body made eventually yoga appealing in the mainstream. Porterfield explains that as the “spirituality movement became less counter-cultural and more mainstream… the connection between religion and health became more open to methods of scientific investigation that did not presuppose the independent existence of God, the anima, or any other object of religion or psychological belief.”58

It is this shift that makes it easier for practitioners to participate in yoga for pragmatic rather than mystical reasons. Yet, at the same time, the mystical or spiritual was not completely translated out of yoga, which makes for some fuzzy lines when attempting to decide whether yoga is a religious or a secular practice. Perhaps this fuzziness is why so many yogis prefer to explain yoga as an interfaith practice: it is a pragmatic means of retaining some of mystical while making it a possibility for all to participate. The question of whether yoga is religious or not is one that continues to linger as practice becomes more pervasive, visible and ingrained in the American landscape of physical and spiritual health. These questions surrounding yoga only become more complicated as yoga starts to enter into American print culture (mainly via the Yoga Journal), and as non-yogi Indians start to immigrate to the U.S. The next chapter will examine these two phenomena and their effects on the practice and place of yoga in the U.S.
Figure 4-1. Advertisement for Hittleman Yoga Class, from the *New York Times*, 2 Jan 1969 (picture taken by author).

Figure 4-2. Advertisement for Gimbel's India Fortnight, from the *New York Times*, 17 May 1966 (picture taken by author).

Figure 4-3. Advertisement for Hittleman classes, from the *New York Times*, 21 February 1966 (picture taken by author).

Figure 4-5. Female office worker practicing yoga, picture from Richard Hittleman, *Yoga for Physical Fitness* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1964), 168-169 (picture taken by author).


CHAPTER 5
COMMUNALIZING YOGA

With this first issue of the Yoga Journal, we are concerned with both an end and a beginning. We have complete, as it were, a small circle which reached out with The Word to a select few—now we are intent on expanding our circle and hopefully our consciousness, by creating a broad-spectrum Yoga Journal. As the journal grows, it will provide a forum for communication among yoga teachers and students. It will serve as an information clearinghouse on current yoga-related activities. And it will present a variety of good quality articles—articles of popular appeal as well as serious treatments of specialized areas. Our intention is to bring you material that combines the essence of classical yoga, with the latest understandings of modern science.1

In 1975, the California Yoga Teachers Association (CYTA) decided to expand their local newsletter, The Word, into a national magazine, the Yoga Journal. Their first issue was ten pages and reached 300 people. As stated above, their goal was to cover the current world of yoga, and in the process of doing so they have become the premier national and global yoga magazine. While the Yoga Journal was starting out, Indians from urban India were starting to legally immigrate and work in the U.S. To reach this growing population, Gopal Raju started India Abroad in 1970. This newspaper served the new population and covered issues that were important to the young community.

This chapter will look closely at the Yoga Journal and how it has changed over the past 34 years. The Yoga Journal was essential in communalizing yoga by making it more visible on the American cultural landscape. From the beginning their cover, article and advertisement choices fit together to create a habitus, a community of yoga practitioners with a set of distinct values, and as yoga has become more popular the editors of the Yoga Journal expand to serve as many people as possible. This chapter will also examine how India Abroad covered the topic of yoga over the past 39

years and what that reveals about the changing role of yoga in the Indo-American. This changing coverage illustrates how yoga went from being a footnote in Indo-American life, to an integral part of Indian and Hindu identity in the U.S. Finally, Swami Ramdev will be profiled to provide an example of how yoga is becoming more popular with Indians all over the world. While Ramdev is similar to other yoga gurus in that he does not exclude other religions from practicing his brand of yoga, he does not shy away from the ‘Hindu’ label, and he caters specifically to Indo-Americans by appealing to the community’s value of science and medicine. He is one means by which some Hindu Indo-American are de-communalize yoga and recast it as an essential part of modern Hindu practice.

**The Yoga Journal and the Creation of a Habitus**

The CYTA started in 1973, and created one of the first yoga teacher training programs. Their first newsletter, *The Word* served this community as any newsletter would: it updated members of various events and reported on the state of the community. With the start of the *Yoga Journal* in 1975, the CYTA embarked on a different journey; that is to cater to people beyond the yoga teaching community and to educate the American public about yoga. *Yoga Journal* started out as a black and white, ten page circular with only CYTA adverts; now the yoga journal is a colorful, glossy magazine with an entire section devoted to just advertisements. This magazine currently reaches about one million people and produces 8 issues per year. The *Yoga Journal* does provide a lot of information for anyone remotely interested in yoga. Every year they provide lists of yoga teachers, studios, retreats and conferences. Looking at the *Yoga Journal* there is much evidence to show the process of how yoga became a lifestyle, and how yoga became “divorced” or separated from religion. Combined, the
covers, the articles and advertisements, cast yoga a physical and spiritual practice, one that is separate from Hinduism, but from India. They cover a bevy of topics relating to yoga and 'spiritual' practices in various religious traditions. Further, from the beginning the Yoga Journal has been a vehicle for the promotion and creation of many yoga products, which have always ranged from the useful to (some might say) the ridiculous - they are an advertising haven for yoga and yoga-related products. In the next three sections, the changes in Yoga Journal covers, the types of articles and the varieties of advertisements will be explored.

Covers

The Yoga Journal covers have changed greatly over the years. For the first 25 years, the covers were quite eclectic, however, for the past nine years, the covers have almost exclusively been of fit yoga practitioners (mainly women) in a yoga or meditative posture. Twelve covers from the past 34 years of the Yoga Journal have been chosen to illustrate the changes that the yoga journal has experienced from the first issue to the present day.

The first Yoga Journal cover was of a woman in a leotard in what is commonly known as a triangle pose (see Figure 5-1). This black and white cover was only distributed to 300 people, but ironically is closest to the type of covers that have dominated the last 9 years. It is a very simple cover, but the choice to put a yoga pose on the cover is indicative of the type of yoga that the CYTA endorsed – one focused on the physical asanas, rather than the meditative pranayamas.

The second and third Yoga Journal covers, from the summer of 1977, are in color and show how the editors of this magazine inherited from Thoreau, Vivekananda and others a predisposition to essentialize difference between the 'east' and 'west'
Figures 5-2 & 5-3). The Yoga Journal cover from May/June 1977 is a view from a temple of a river in India. The cover makes reference to “Mother India” and promises to cover Indian dance and cooking. The Yoga Journal cover from July/August 1977 is of a man doing a handstand with the Golden Gate Bridge in the background. The headline reads, “East Meets West” and promises to cover “Yoga’s Western Applications,” and these include therapy, healing and prisoner rehabilitation. These two covers demonstrate that even 100 years after Thoreau and Emerson, Americans still held the view that the ‘East’ is mystical, while the ‘West’ is practical.

“The Americanization of Yoga” is the subject of the next Yoga Journal cover from December 1981, and is of a football player doing a yoga stretch (see Figure 5-4). The Yoga Journal has consistently been concerned with how yoga integrates into the everyday lives of their readers. The March/April 1999 cover shows a woman in a suit practicing yoga at work (see Figure 5-11). For the Yoga Journal, yoga is not something that is apart from daily life, not does one have to give up anything in order to practice yoga (there is no need for a sanyasi or celibate lifestyle). Rather, the Yoga Journal offers the ways and means for yoga to be a part of everyday, American life.

The fifth and sixth Yoga Journal covers, from February 1983 and May/June 1994 are of couples (see Figures 5-5 & 5-9), which further exemplifies how yoga is a tool for everyday people with everyday concerns (healthy marriage/coupledom). The February 1983 cover shows a Euro-American couple gazing into each other’s eyes, and the main headline reads “Tantra – Sex and Spirituality.” The May/June 1994 cover shows an East Asian American couple in a more intimate embrace, with the headline blazing, “Sacred Sex – Inside a Conscious Loving Workshop.” What these covers show is the desire for
the Yoga Journal to again showcase the practical applications of yoga beyond just its spiritual benefits – yoga can help with sports, work and sex (quintessential concerns of many Americans).

The sixth Yoga Journal cover is from the volume that commemorates the 10th anniversary edition of the magazine (see Figure 5-6). It is of a man in a warrior pose, with the ocean in his background. Throughout its history this magazine has been hyper-aware of its uniqueness and its historical significance. As the first yoga magazine in the U.S., it has done much to sell yoga to the American public and create forum/haven for yoga practitioners. While they have been reflective about this, they have not necessarily been critically reflective.

Looking through the pages of the first years of the Yoga Journal, it is apparent that the editors sought to stretch their articles beyond just yoga to cover social justice issues. The cover of the July/August 1987 issue is illustrative of this (left-leaning) ethos. It features two (gay) men, and the headline reads, “Living with AIDS” (see Figure 5-7). Covering AIDS is in line with a growing trend in the US – between 1987 and 1990 there was an increase in media coverage of AIDS. In this issue they have an article about the benefits of yoga for the immune system, and showcase how ‘AIDS survivors’ are living life despite having HIV/AIDS. The cover from November/December 1999 is also illustrative of the journal’s dedication to the world outside the practice of yoga (see Figure 5-10). It is of a man meditating in the woods, and the headline for this issue (“Earth Yoga – A Practice for the Planet”) is indicative of the Yoga Journal’s constant commitment to environmental issues.

The Yoga Journal has also always had an interfaith outlook. Thus often they will have non-yoga (and non-Hindu) figures on their cover (i.e. the Dalai Lama or Yoruban priests). Their 10th anniversary cover, above the warrior pose and ocean, has a small inset picture of Shlomo Carlebach to advertise an article about “Judaism’s New Renaissance.” The cover from September/October 1989 is of the Buddha as a psychologist (see Figure 5-8). The headline, “IF BUDDHA HAD BEEN A SHRINK – The Link Between Psychotherapy and Spirituality” points to another trend of the present age – that is the link between religion and/or spirituality and one’s individual therapeutic betterment and psyche. This is a current trend that Yoga Journal constantly participates in; thus while this magazine may set trends it also is a part of the larger culture and fully participates in perpetuating the ascent of the individual. This is probably also why they are able to take such an interfaith approach, because they trust the individual to create their own spirituality by picking and choosing among the world’s various faiths.

The final cover is of a woman doing a complicated headstand (see Figure 5-12). Starting in 2000, the covers started to almost exclusively feature fit women doing various (mostly complicated) asanas. The magazine was sold in 1998 to John Abbot and in 2000 he re-launched the magazine with a new Editor-In-Chief and a totally new design. It seems, however, that the cover change is not only due to a new owner, but also a change in the place of yoga in the larger American culture. At the end of the twentieth century, yoga reached new heights of popularity, and for many new practitioners, yoga was a catch all means to get fit and find inner peace, and its practice was no longer exclusive to the liberal population in the U.S. Having covers with two gay
men or a woman in a suit would probably not sell as easily as a scantily clad and fit woman in body conscious yoga pose.

The twelve covers analyzed in this section show how the Yoga Journal has changed through the years, but they also show that this magazine has never been a one-note publication. They have gone beyond the subject of just the practice of yoga in one's everyday life, and ventured into the arena of social concern. They also show how the journal has dealt with yoga's history and current incarnation and illustrate how the journal has attempted to catch readers in a myriad of ways (this was especially important during their early days). Their articles also reflect this eclectic sensibility.

Articles

The first couple issues of Yoga Journal, in many ways, set the tone for the future of the journal. The very first issue had four articles and two ‘feature spotlights’. One of the features was on asanas. The particular asanas they chose to highlight for their first issue was the uttanasana and the padangusthasana, both of which are variations of forward bends (see Figure 5-13). This first feature on asanas is drawn, but later as the magazine became more sophisticated, glossy photos replaced the drawings. For the most part, asanas were and are the focus of the Yoga Journal. Every once in a while there will be an article that focuses exclusively on pranayama. In October 2006, Claudia Cummins wrote an article on the benefits of pranayama. Her article, “Just Breathe” explains that pranayama is different from simple meditation and concentrating on one's breathe, in that it “emphasizes changing the way we breathe,” but warns that “pranayama is said to require more skill and attentiveness than even the most
demanding asana.” Focus on asanas (and sometimes pranayama) points to the continued focus on practice that the Yoga Journal had from the start. Since the 2000 re-design of the journal, practice has an entire section (thus a slew of articles) dedicated to the topic – at the end of the day, yoga is something meant to be physically done, and the Yoga Journal editors have been keen on stressing practice throughout their history.

The second feature of the first issue of Yoga Journal was to profile a yoga teacher (Naomi Elliot) – they explained who she was, where she was born (New Zealand) and where she teaches yoga. Featuring an asana and a practitioner of yoga (teacher, but later also students) became a regular staple in the Yoga Journal, and this type of profiling made its way into feature article. For example, in their 10th anniversary commemorative edition, the Yoga Journal reporter, Richard Leviton, profiled six yoga teachers across the U.S in his article, “From Sea to Shining Sea.” Leviton focused on how the yoga teachers were introduced to yoga, where they are located, and what ‘school of yoga’ or technique they adhere to and teach; the point of the article in implicit terms, however, was to show yoga was becoming American, because it was being domesticated by (Euro) Americans. In a way, profiling everyday Americans was one way that the Yoga Journal made yoga more accessible.

The articles of the Yoga Journal also help make yoga more accessible and useable. Two of the four articles in the first issue of the Yoga Journal were on yoga and health. One was on “Yoga, Diet and Sensitivity,” which was on how to tailor one’s diet to be lighter, and the other, called, “Yoga, the Heart and Breath” explains how inverted asanas and certain pranayamas can help with better blood flow. Another one of the first issues of the Yoga Journal covered the ways in which yoga could help the endocrine

---

system. One of the ways that yoga became more popular in the US was when Americans discovered its health benefits and the Yoga Journal seems to understand that, and thus health and healthiness has been a constant fixture in the magazine through the years. After the Yoga Journal was re-designed in 2000, “Health” gained a whole section heading, thus every issue has between two and five articles on health. This is most fitting given that the very first issue had two articles on this subject.

The other two articles in the first issue of the Yoga Journal covered the self, spiritual growth and psychological understanding. “Hatha Yoga as Meditation” by Judith Lasater explains how the practice of Iyengar yoga quickly teaches one humility, which leads to spiritual-growth and greater self-awareness. “Self and Self-Acceptance” by Travers Elliot looks at how the self is conceived of in the ‘west’ and the ‘east.’ He writes, “The self in the West is usually presented as a bio-social animal in the process of becoming. The Self in the East is realized to be the spiritual essence that is one with Ultimate Reality.”4 Conceptualizing the ‘west’ as intrinsically different from the ‘east’ and romanticizing and essentializing the ‘east’ is a continuing trend in the history of yoga in the U.S. (starting with the Transcendentalists), and one that continued and continues to pop up in the pages of Yoga Journal.

In particular and for obvious reasons, India is often profiled in the Yoga Journal. Whether it is giving advice to spiritual tourists, informing them on ‘exotic’ Hindu pilgrimages, profiling Kali and explaining why she’s the perfect goddess for the West, probing into the latest medical research on yoga in India or explaining Patanjali, the Yoga Journal turns to India as material for many of their articles. India and by extension, Hinduism, is held as different and apart from the U.S. (this may explain why there are

rarely/never Indo-Americans in the magazine). In one article (perhaps my favorite), India and the U.S. are actually cast as similar. In “Two Epic Tales: The Ramayana and Star Wars” are compared by Ramana Das: Luke, Han Solo, Leia Organa, Darth Vader, Chewbacca, Obi-wan Kenobi are likened to Rama, Laksman, Sita, Ravan, Hanuman and Visisth (see Figure 5-14). Das writes, “the two adventures go a long way to showing that there are stories that surface in the collective consciousness again and again in history.” While Das is clearly borrowing from Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell and essentializing the other way is also problematic, he is unique in that he is looking for similarities.

Beyond Hinduism, many other religions are profiled in the Yoga Journal. In one of their early issues, Sufism was profiled. Frequently Judaism (either alone or in connection to yoga) is also a popular subject. One of their most interesting articles “A Non-Indian’s Guide to Native American Spirituality,” explores issues surrounding white appropriation of Native American traditions, but then goes on to provide a how-to-guide to getting Native American medicine men to teach interested parties (the readers being mainly Euro-American). Another telling article looks at how practitioners of Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam integrate yoga into their lives. All the yoga practitioners that they profile are able to do this because they do not consider yoga to be a religion, but rather “a technique that helps anybody do their own religion better.” The author holds that there is a difference between spirituality and religion, and explains that “spirituality… has to do with one’s interior life, the ever-evolving understanding of one’s

---

self and one’s place in the cosmos.” In contrast, “religion… can be seen as spirituality’s external counterpart, the organizational structure we give to out individual and collective spiritual processes: the rituals, doctrines, prayers, chants and ceremonies, and the congregations that come together to share them.” Drawing a line between religion and spirituality also allows people to get around the modern conundrum of practicing two religions, and if yoga is spiritual, then it can easily be molded and fit into the non-Hindu religious lives of practitioners. This is akin to the cafeteria tray model for New Age spirituality – one that borrows desirable elements freely from a variety of traditions.

Beyond the self, the Yoga Journal has always tried to address social justice issues that affect society at large. As mentioned previously, the Yoga Journal addressed AIDS and has consistently urged their readers to lead an environmentally sound lifestyle. In a most interesting article, “U.S. Energy Policy,” Ike Lasater argues that the yoga community should concern themselves with “secular issues of importance” and speak out against nuclear power. In an accompanying article, Sandy Newhouse explains how the Ganges River is at risk from plutonium pollution due to a nuke that the CIA lost/abandoned in the Himalayas in the 1960s. Concern for the world around might not be so apparent in the more recent issues of the Yoga Journal, but this was an important part of their early history.

Finally, every 10 years or so, the Yoga Journal offers articles on the history of yoga in the U.S. These retrospectives are glossy, happy histories that start with the Transcendentalists and Vivekananda and end in the present day with Iyengar or Satchidananda (much like this dissertation). What are missing are the scandals and the

---

7 Reder, “Reconcilable Differences,” 83.
8 Reder, “Reconcilable Differences,” 83.
bad xenophobic press. Yoga is seen as a gift from India that happily translated into the context of the U.S. Interestingly, Atkinson, in their telling, is a “stressed-out lawyer” who retreated to India, studied with a guru named Baba Bharati, then returned as Swami Brahamcharaka.” And there is mention of the Bernards (not exactly of Oom), and the start of the yoga school in Nyack is attributed to Pandit Acharya, not Pierre Bernard. These histories, beyond an attempt to give historical roots to the history-dodging rhizome, are presented as unproblematic and quite rosy. While this should not be surprising (it is a magazine), it is indicative of a larger trend – a total lack of critical reflectiveness as a magazine that contributes to the commodification of something they hold relatively sacred.

Advertisements

One definite arena in which the Yoga Journal has contributed to the commodification of yoga is through their advertising. This was not their original intent, rather it seems like it just spiraled out of control. Ike Lasater was the first CYTA member in charge of advertising. He told me that from the beginning he wanted to branch out beyond just yoga products. This was quite apparent, for in the second issue of the Yoga Journal he had solicited an ad from an organic vegetarian restaurant in the Bay Area. Soon he was getting ad revenue from Birkenstock and Indian import stores that sold yoga clothes directly from India (see Figure 5-15). There were advertisements for some silly things, like a yoga watch, where the minute and hour hands did poses (see Figure 5-16), and of course there were advertisements for “Sexual Energy Seminars” based on Tantra, because sex sells (see Figure 5-17).

---

11 I have not been able to verify not fully disprove the existence of Acharya.
Beyond the somewhat silly and absurd, however, the advertising reflected the desires and values of a community. One early page of advertising is actually quite indicative of this (see Figure 5-18). On this page there are seven advertisements. The five small ones were for a yoga seminar, a magazine on homeopathy, and a magazine on vegetarianism, natural birth control and astrology services. The two big adverts were for travel to India (one from a travel agency and the other from Air India, which reads “We have flights leaving for another world,” thus further adding to the construction of east/west as different). This particular advert page from the first year of the Yoga Journal points to the interests that the readers have (and would gain from seeing the adverts). Only one of the seven directly relates to yoga, all the rest are tangential – what is being formed through advertising is a community that in many ways stretches beyond yoga.

Another example of creating a community through advertising is a section that was created in the mid-1990s called “Career Connection” (see Figures 5-19 & 5-20). In this section, training schools could advertise their course for potential students to see. There are a couple advertising yoga teacher training, but the majority of these training schools were for the healing arts: massage, ayurveda, acupuncture and ‘oriental’ medicine. Also advertised are masters and doctoral programs for degrees in education/health/music, transpersonal psychology and Buddhism. Degrees in Feng Shui (interior design) and natural gourmet cooking are among some of the more unique opportunities presented in “Career Connection.” In many ways the variety of these ads point to the interfaith outlook that the Yoga Journal has had from its beginning. What is interesting in this section is what is missing – there are no ads for technical/mechanical work or for
Christianity, Judaism or Islam (i.e. Divinity School). All these ads are for ‘alternative’
careers, one that might appeal to the sort of people that do yoga and assumes that one
that does yoga would not go to a seminary.

The Yoga Journal also provides ad space for vacations (beyond India) that might
appeal to the sort of people that do yoga (see Figure 5-21). In this particular section all
the holidays are for Mexico, and they advertise vegetarian food, various outdoor
activities, massages, meditation, alternative therapies, ayurveda and of course yoga.
The activities they are offering mirror the other advertisements. In addition the Yoga
Journal advertises products that appeal to the ethics of its readers. As mentioned
before, this magazine pays much attention to the care of the earth, and thus attracts
products that claim to be eco-friendly (see Figure 5-22). One must assume that at some
point yoga practitioners must have to clean their yoga pants, and why not clean them
with Ecos, an eco-friendly laundry detergent. Another product that may seem tangential
on the surface, but that shows up in the Yoga Journal is jewelry. Often this is beaded
necklaces and bracelets, but recently, Chopard, a high-end designer jeweler decided
advertise their gold and platinum, diamond om necklaces (see Figure 5-23).
Underneath the necklaces is a quote from Deepak Chopra that explains what om
means. Given that this ad was recently published in 2005, it indicates that perhaps
yoga practitioners are becoming more affluent, or that yoga is appealing to a more
affluent audience because it has become trendier in the last decade.

Beyond products that may appeal to the yoga practitioner, the Yoga Journal also
advertises products that help the yoga enthusiast practice yoga. For example, one can
buy Yoga-Paws, which attach to the hands and feet and serve as a yoga mat for the
practitioner who is traveling (see Figure 5-24). The journal also has articles or features on yoga products, which serve as free advertisements. In early issues of the Yoga Journal, there were many advertisements for Iyengar’s various yoga props. In particular, his back bender, which cost several hundred dollars, was often featured. In the November/December 1987 issue, Ruth Steiger wrote an article, “Take-It-Easy Yoga”, which extolled the virtues of Iyengar’s back bender (see Figure 5-25). Starting in the late-1990s, the Yoga Journal started to have little features on various trends in yoga. This space was also used to tout certain products. For example, one could buy a yoga mat with the 100 poses needed for Ashtanga Yoga printed on the mat (see Figure 5-26). There are many advertisements in any given Yoga Journal for yoga clothes, but they also use article space to recommend one product (OMGirl Plush Pants) over others (see Figure 5-27). While this may come across as somewhat dishonest, it is standard practice in the majority of magazines today. The Yoga Journal needs to advertise – advertising is what keeps most publications afloat. This is probably why they venture beyond being a venue for just yoga and yoga-related products. In order to be successful, they have to create and lifestyle that readers can identify with; in other words they have to construct a habitus, and make it seem like it is organic and natural.

The Yoga Habitus

In the Logic of Practice, Pierre Bordieu writes,

The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which deposited in each organism in the forms of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and

150
their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms.¹³

What he is describing is a community (its norms, practices, symbols and values), and how these community ideals are reinforced through the creation of an accompanying history. The building of a *habitus* is also a means of controlling norms, practices, symbols and values; thus creating a *habitus* around the practice of yoga is one means of attempting to ‘root’ or stabilize the rhizome that is yoga. Looking back over the covers, articles and advertisements of 39 years of the *Yoga Journal*, it was bit like looking into how the norms, practices, symbols and values of a community of yoga practitioners in the U.S. was formulated and sustained. I would not go so far as to argue that the *Yoga Journal* single-handedly created this *habitus*, but they did organize the *habitus* by providing a print forum for the community. Yoga may have been practiced in the U.S. for over eight decades, but the *Yoga Journal* was the first central forum for yoga practitioners to connect and learn about each other across the country. It provided information beyond the actual practice of yoga, but also what to associate with yoga and how to live in the world as a practitioner of yoga. The *Yoga Journal* does not just present yoga as a form of exercise or spiritual practice, but as lifestyle that is embedded into a larger communal experience. Organizing the *habitus* around the practice of yoga, in many ways, is what accounts for its success, and this success is why there are so many copycat yoga magazines (*breath, ascent, Yoga Monthly Magazine, Yoga + Joyful Living*, along with a bevy of local yoga magazines that cater to particular cities that have thriving yoga communities). While they all are slightly different, they all follow the formula of the *Yoga Journal*: they provide information on how to practice yoga and what

products would signify membership in the community. Another other key is that the
*Yoga Journal*, from the beginning, provided histories of yoga and yoga in the U.S. for
readers to identify with, and quite adeptly, the *Yoga Journal* reminds readers of this
history.

Often when scholars look at the turn away from mainline, denominational
Christianity towards ‘alternative’ religions, they stress that these individuals are seeking
the therapeutic and the value of the individual is stressed. Robert Bellah notes that
religious individualism is a running theme throughout American religious history, starting
with Roger Williams and Thomas Jefferson through the contemporary period. Bellah
warns, however, that religious individualism “without community is merely loneliness.”

Part of what the *Yoga Journal* seems to be trying to do (perhaps not intentionally) is
combat possible loneliness by creating a *habitus*. This *habitus*, however, like all
communities, is subject to market forces and cultural trends, which is apparent looking
at the past 34 years of the *Yoga Journal* covers, articles and advertisements. The
*habitus* that the *Yoga Journal* helped to create, not only gives information on how to
practice yoga and which products are best for this but they also provide a series of
values for the community to follow.

First, looking at the covers, advertisements and articles, one value is healing of
self by creating one’s own spiritual path, which fits Bellah’s observation concerning the
rise of therapy as a facet of modern American religious life. Another value that emerges
from the data is that one who practices yoga should have knowledge of and concern for
the health of the earth – this adds another dimension of cohesion to this *habitus*,

---

beyond the practice of yoga, which helps ensure its success. This habitus also has to position itself in the world, and they firmly situate themselves as Westerners who have a deep interest and immense appreciation in the ‘east’. The Yoga Journal community follows the east/west divisional lines drawn by the Transcendentalists, Theosophists, Vivekananda and Yogananada; they reaffirm this division in their covers, articles and adverts by continuing to taut an image of India as exotic, esoteric and innately spiritual, which decrying the materiality of their location in the ‘west’. Finally, like the Theosophists, Vivekananda, Yogananda and other yogis they promote a multi-religious platform by asserting that yoga is not Hindu and can be practiced by anyone (despite their faith).

Further, men and women started this magazine, but over the years, the editors have geared the magazine more and more towards women. Part of this means they are following their market research that shows that 75% of yoga practitioners are women, which helps explains why in the last ten years the covers feature fit women doing difficult asanas, and why many of the advertisements (jewelry, clothes, bags) are targeted to women.¹⁵ The Yoga Journal may help attract women to the practice of yoga, but they are not the sole reason that this practice attracts more women rather the Yoga Journal is simply responding to the needs of the habitus that they helped organize. The question is, why are women practicing yoga more in the U.S. then men – what about this habitus appeals more to women? Perhaps this goes back to the issue of health and yoga’s role in the quest for the perfect body that was discussed in the last chapter. And it could also be that women, in general, are more targeted by the market than men. Finally, despite all its attempts to communalize yoga and make it part of American

¹⁵Yoga Journal, Yoga in America’ Market Study Press Release.
public property, the foreign aspect of yoga could not be fully translated away. Perhaps this might take some more time, but yoga’s foreignness is not yet forgotten, meaning it is still ‘easier’ for women to participate in this practice, thus they comprise the majority of the Yoga Journal readership.

Any community, however, is not only defined by who is within the boundaries of the community, but also who is outside the communal lines. While some may contend that yoga is just a part of larger Euro-American, urban, middle-class habitus, I have argued that the Yoga Journal has contributed to the process of building a habitus around the practice of yoga; this yoga-centric habitus may be partially embedded in a the aforementioned habitus but also enjoys autonomy for the practice of yoga in the U.S. is not relegated to Euro-American, urban or even middle-class Americans. While the majority of practitioners depicted or profiled in Yoga Journal covers are Euro-Americans, there is the occasional East Asian-American, African-American or Native American found with the pages of the Yoga Journal. What is most interesting is that Indo-Americans are one group left out by this habitus. Looking at the covers, articles and advertisements of the Yoga Journal, Indo-Americans are never really depicted, written about or marketed to; the only Indians that appear in the magazine are yogis from India that are being profiled. Though there does not seem to be any way of measuring this, it would be interesting to see how many of the new Indian immigrants to the U.S. have historically subscribed to the Yoga Journal, which started around the same time that Indians started to immigrate consistently. Despite this ‘exclusion’, Indo-Americans (particularly Hindus) have found ways to include themselves in the story of yoga in the U.S., partially as a reaction to the attempt to communalize yoga outside the
Hindu tradition, and also as a reaction to the forces of colonialism that previously suppressed their ability to control the narrative histories of their traditions.

**Yoga and New Indo-American Community**

In 1965, the U.S. passed a new immigration act that opened the door for those Asian immigrants that were professionals (with higher degrees or in pursuit of one). With the presence of the *Yoga Journal* and so many schools of yoga practice in the U.S., one might imagine that the new Indian immigrant population might immediately embrace the practice of yoga. The majority of these immigrants were urban, educated and middle-class, thus many of them had already been exposed to the philosophies of Vivekananda and the popularization of the physical practice of modern yoga (via yogis like Kuvalayananda and Krishnamacharya). Thus when they came to the U.S., the presence of yoga was not entirely unfamiliar and strange.

Yet, taking a closer look at these immigrants’ early devotional practices and the stories about religion covered by *India Abroad*, it does not seem that yoga was first practice embraced by this new community. They brought with them their more material and “ethnic” practices – pujas, fasts, dances, and thus it was not too long after their arrival that Hindu temples started to dot the American landscape and sacralize the States as sacred Hindu ground. This type of Hinduism, with its elaborate rituals, material embodiments of divinity and sectarian divisions stood in stark contrast to the austere, simple and ecumenical Hinduism that Vivekananda, Yogananda and Iyengar introduced to the US. It was not until the 1990s that new Hindu immigrants and *India Abroad* started to occupy and embrace the space carved out for Hinduism by various Gurus and their American followers.
*India Abroad* started as weekly paper in 1970 designed to serve the growing Indian community in the U.S. (mainly East Coast Indo-American immigrants), and quickly became respected for covering the South Asian subcontinent with an even hand. Looking through the stacks from years 1972-1992, yoga was barely mentioned.\(^\text{16}\) In passing there were a few articles about yogis walking over hot coal or about research involving measuring how rats benefited from yoga, but, surprisingly, yoga was not covered extensively at all. In their weekly announcement section in the March 31, 1978 issue, there was a notice about a talk sponsored by the Haverford Philosophy Department by Swami Kriyananda from the Self-Realization Fellowship; other than this, there was little to be found about yoga events or classes. Thus at the very same time that yoga seemed to be becoming more and more public (especially via the venue of the *Yoga Journal*), *India Abroad* which catered to a mainly Hindu Indo-American population barely broached the subject.

Most of the announcements in these sections through the first years of the *India Abroad*’s publication were for Bollywood films and Hindu temple services. In this same section, sometimes they provided readers with religious calendars. Depending on season, they had an Indian Calendar with Hindu, Christian, Sikh and Muslim Holidays (see Figure 5-28). Sometimes they also had a Hindu Calendar, with explanations of the holidays being celebrated and in which part of India the holiday is usually celebrate (see Figure 5-29). This shows a certain amount of attentiveness to their readers on the part of *India Abroad*. First, they realized that the population they catered to was not exclusively Hindu, and they were sensitive to the fact that the Hindus that did immigrate to the U.S. were not all from the same region.

\(^{16}\)The earliest year I was able to find of *India Abroad* 1972.
This sensitivity continued when they their first feature about Divali. In October of 1978, in time for the holiday, they had a “Divali Supplement.” They described the different ways the Divali is celebrated in different part of India and the varying mythology behind the popular holiday. The article, “How To Set Up a Divali Party”, the author gives suggestions for decorating (sand and rice designs, candles or Christmas lights), for fun (games, but no fireworks because they are dangerous), and for eating. The author even has three sample menus with recipes for dinner, brunch or high tea. This may have been a welcome guide for new immigrants who had to learn to adapt their traditions to a new context. The presence of this article is telling for it shows what the new Indo-American community missed the most in their new country: holidays and celebrating, not yoga. Furthermore, while yogi missionaries and the Yoga Journal were celebrating yoga as India’s greatest gift, and India Abroad author was declaring palmistry as India’s best export. In the 1974 article by Manmohan, “Palmistry, India’s Gift to the World”, palmistry is explained and exalted as vedic science brought west by Gypsies, that holds the answers to many questions about the personality and destiny of individuals.

Even the advertisements in India Abroad were completely different from the advertisements in the Yoga Journal. India Abroad’s ad space was sold to Indian restaurants, gold jewelers, astrologers, sari shops, appliance shops and sweet shops (see Figure 5-30). What they did have in common were advertisements for travel to India, however, these ads did not present India as a mystical place, but rather as home and place to see palaces (see Figure 5-31).

Starting in the mid-90s, India Abroad started to cover yoga more often, with an article here or there. In December 2001, India Abroad started to feature a column by
Shameem Akhtar about how to integrate yoga into one’s everyday life. This regular column demonstrated various yoga asanas and pranayamas, explained the health benefits of yoga and provided the reader with food recipes to compliment the yogic practice. Over the last eight years, Akhtar’s column is published every other to every third week. Given that *India Abroad* is a newspaper that is to cover all subjects of importance to the Indo-American community, this amount of coverage given to the practice of yoga (not just covering yoga stories), is quite impressive. It seems that in the last ten to fifteen years more Indo-Americans (especially Hindus) are turning to yoga.

One sign of this is that many Hindu temples in the U.S. have started to offer yoga. In India, yoga is practiced in ashrams (and now at gyms), whereas temples are for devotional services. Given that many temples in the U.S. serve as devotional arenas as well as community centers, there is space for language classes, dances classes, Bal Vihar and yoga classes. These classes tend to be free or cheaper than the yoga classes taught at trendy yoga studios. Unlike studio yoga, however, Hindu temple yoga is not seen as an aid to religious practice or as a way to just get fit, but rather as a part of Hindu traditions. Often time at these classes there will be chanting beyond a simple *om* or *namaste*, and poses will be connected to specific Hindu gods or ideas/philosophies. Whereas this might happen in some ‘secular’ yoga studios in that many of them still retain the use of Sanskrit name for the various *asanas*, there is not guarantee that a majority of these practitioners are Hindu or would understand certain references to *Shiva* or *Atman*. At a Hindu temple, it more likely that the majority of

---

17From her name Shameem Akhtar could be either Muslim or Parsi, showing that even in the Indo-American community, not all yoga practitioners are Hindu.
participants in a yoga class would be Hindu, and thus it would make more sense to reinforce practice with religious mythology and ideas.

**Swami Ramdev**

Another sign that more Hindu Indo-Americans are turning to yoga is the growing popularity of Swami Ramdev. Perhaps the most popular yoga guru today in India and around the world is Ramdev, but most likely, unlike the various students of Krishnamacharya, Satchidananda, Yogi Bhajan, Yogananda or Vivekananda, one will not find him profiled in the *Yoga Journal*, but *India Abroad* does cover him (especially his visits to the U.S.).\(^{\text{18}}\) Ramdev ‘sells’ his brand of yog, pranayam and aasan not to Europeans or Euro-Americans, but to Indians around the world.\(^{\text{19}}\) Born Ramikishan Yamdev, it is rumored that he was paralyzed as a child, but that the practice of yoga (particularly pranayam) cured him.\(^{\text{20}}\) Swami Shankar Dev founded the organization to which Ramdev belongs, the Divya Yog Mandir Trust in 1995, and this Trust is based on the Kripali Bagh Ashram, which was started in 1932 by Shankar Dev’s guru, Swami Kripali Dev.

While Ramdev and his gurus extol the virtues of yog as scientific and medicinal like many of the other nineteenth and twentieth century merchants of yoga, what sets the teachings of the Divya Yog Mandir Trust apart from most yogas today is the main emphasis on pranayam. Ramdev has developed a sequence of seven breathing exercises, which if practice properly not only has spiritual benefits, but also helps relieve

\(^{\text{18}}\) In the last few years, the *Yoga Journal* has covered Ramdev in their blog, “Yoga Buzz,” but he has yet to show up in the pages of the actual magazine.

\(^{\text{19}}\) Ramdev insists on yog vs. yoga, pranayam vs. pranayama and aasan vs. asana because he feels it is the proper Sanskrit way to transliterate and pronounce these words, thus in the section, when appropriate, Ramdev’s spelling will be used.

\(^{\text{20}}\) I have not been able to verify this. Also his birth year is in dispute – from my research it seems it is sometime between 1953 and 1965.
stress and cure a variety of diseases. In fact one of biggest goals of Ramdev and the Divya Yog Mandir Trust is to create a disease free world.

Ramdev, like Hittleman, teaches his yog classes on television, which allows him to reach millions of people in India and around the world. He broadcasts on Zee TV every morning, a network that broadcasts in all the languages of India and is available for Indians all over the world via satellite television. Combined with the emphasis on pranayam, this allows people of all ages, levels of health and nationality to participate in their classes. Ramdev does include aasan in his lessons, but these are clearly secondary to pranayam, for while everyone can practice pranayam, not everyone can perform aasan. His trust also promotes the use and research of ayurvedic medicine. Sometimes, part of his shows include testimonials from his students on how they have been healed from practicing pranayama, which helps students feel connected to the participants they see on television and even gives them hope to carry on with the practice.21 His website claims,

His Holiness Swami Ramdevji Maharaj is first, in the world health history, to use freely available Pran (Oxygen) as a medicine and in turn remains successful in treating thousands of grief stricken persons suffering from lethal diseases like Diabetes, H.B.P., Angina, Blockages in Arteries, Obesity, Asthma, Bronchitis, Leucoderma, Depression, Parkinson, Insomnia, - Migraine, Thyroid, Arthritis, Cervical Spondalities, Hepatitis, Chronic Renal Failure, Cancer, Cirrhosis of Liver, Gas, Constipation, Acidity etc. which are still a challenge in modern medical science.22

Such claims do attract controversy, and this was certainly the case in 2006 when he told health ministers in India that, “Sex education in schools need to be replaced by yoga education…The government should stop polluting the minds of innocent young children

21These testimonials are reminiscent of the testimonials one can see on various Evangelical Christian shows where participants share their experience of being healed by the Holy Spirit.
with sex education…AIDS cannot be prevented by talking free sex and by using condoms.”

Despite this controversy, he is still very popular and has made several visits to the U.K. and the U.S. to teach yog classes to Indians living there. When he visited Texas in the summer of 2008, he blessed the land upon which his Indo-American followers will be building a $20 million dollar yoga and ayurveda research center. His camps and talks in the U.S. are mainly, if not exclusively, attended by Indo-Americans and some of his most ardent supporters in the U.S. are Indian doctors. When he was in Houston, he even held a special talk just for the area’s Indo-American doctors, and many of the doctors who follow his brand of yog extol Ramdev’s virtues. In an article about Ramdev’s visit in India Abroad, an example was given of Dr. Dilip Sarkar, a vascular surgeon, who had to undergo triple bypass heart surgery even when he had low risk factors, no family history of heart disease, diabetes or hypertension. He said after his heart surgery, ‘I decided to quit surgical practice, went to India and attended Swamiji’s camp in Haridwar [in Uttarakhand] and started doing the seven pranayams. I do it every day, and my cholesterol, which was 210, is today without any medication 127. When I had the coronary bypass, I was put on four medications - beta blocker, ace-inhibitor, statin and aspirin, but now after doing the pranayams daily, my blood pressure is 100 by 80 and my blood sugar is 80; everything else is normal’. He was challenged by other physicians who asked that if he had an option, whether he would have not done the bypass surgery but decided to only do the pranayams. He said what Ramdev was preaching was not against allopathy, but complementary. ‘What I had was an acute coronary syndrome and at that time, we needed acute intervention. But after secondary prevention, that’s what the pranayams are helping me and helping others,’ he said. Sarkar said that is why he had begun to propagate ‘an integration of Western medicine with Eastern.’

---

24 Aziz Haniffa. “Swami Ramdev aims to train instructors to spread authentic yoga,” India Abroad, 8 August 2008.
This statement by Sarkar about his ‘recovery’ via Ramdev’s sequence of pranayam is quite telling. Given the value that many Indians place on the profession of medicine, Sarkar is talking/testifying from a position of power – his action shows great faith in pranayam and in Ramdev. Sarkar is offering a possibility, one that may be convincing enough for people to follow (at least try). Further, he also feels there is a difference between ‘east’ and ‘west’ and feels that he can integrate the two, like so many before him.

It is curious as to why Ramdev appeals so much to Indo-Americans, but does not seem to garner too much attention among Euro-American yoga practitioners. It may be that his ardent nationalism is a turn-off. He also conducts many of his classes in Hindi. Mainly, he does not seem to appeal to Euro-Americans because he does not market to that particular group. Ram Dev is most intentional about appealing to the Indo-Diaspora community: when he travels abroad he meets with Indians. This makes him quite different than the many yoga gurus who have come before Ram Dev.

Yoga Reclaimed?

In a recent article, “Let’s Take Yoga Back,” posted on the Hindu American Foundation blog, a young Hindu-American woman, Sheetal Shah, laments about yoga taught in this country is devoid of the Hindu label. In particular, she is dismayed that the Yoga Journal avoids using the word Hindu while selling yoga, that there are no Hindus in her yoga classes, and that she could find many yoga teachers, but none that were explicitly Hindu.25 As the history of India Abroad shows, yoga was not an initial interest

of the Hindu Indo-American community in the U.S. Rather the focus was on astrology, devotion, holidays and temple building. Yoga only became a permanent fixture in the weekly newspaper in the mid-1990s. Temples were never built as spaces for yoga; rather they were built and still are primarily devotional spaces. While the initial practice of yoga by the Hindu Indo-American community was slow, in the past 15 years, it has become quite popular. Intensified coverage by *India Abroad*, classes in Hindu temples, and Ram Dev on Zee TV is a testament to this rising popularity.

The question is, why the eventual acceptance of yoga as something to be practiced by the Indo-American community? Amartya Sen writes,

> The internal identities of Indians draw on different parts of India’s diverse traditions. The observational leaning of Western approaches have had quite a major impact – positively and negatively – on what contributes to the Indian self-image that emerged in the colonial period and survives today. The relationship had several dialectical aspects, connected to the sensitivity admirations and dismissals from the cosmopolitan West as well as to the mechanics of colonial confrontations.  

What Sen is suggesting is that one of the reasons that Indo-Americans are attempting to communalize yoga is because it was popular among Euro-Americans. In many ways one could say that Indo-Americans bought into the image of them as austere yogis. At the same time, all Indo-Americans (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Jewish, Parsi, Jain, etc…) hold onto their material and devotional practices. This accounts for the constant need to build particular houses of worship and the continued participation in the celebration of religious holidays. It seems that yoga and the superstitious practices that early Hindu missionaries tried to ‘hide’ can exist in the same *habitus*. It is not unreasonable to see that the Hindu self-image in India and U.S. has been heavily influenced by colonial forces, and thus the desire to reclaim yoga and other practices

---

makes sense; there is a true genuine desire to connect with a pre-colonial past, of which yoga is but a sliver. While this is not historically possible (since the very practice of yoga has changed so much), the desire to ‘re-territorialize’ or re-communalize the rhizomes, which have been deterritorialized by the forces of capitalism (and in this case colonialism), is not unique to Hindus, but rather a condition of contemporary life in a capitalist world.

This process of reclaiming yoga among Hindu Indo-Americans, in the first and second generations, however, is also intimately connected with a project of defining Hinduism as a particularly exceptional religion. Yoga is one means by which Hindu Indo-Americans are seeking to reclaim, but also re-imagine Hinduism. This is part of a larger dynamic. On the one hand there is a movement to historicize Hinduism and its mythology as something that historically happened. In other words, just as Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam have historical landmarks and figures, so does Hinduism. The bombing of the Babri Masjid in 1992 on the “grounds” that it was the “actual” birthplace of Rama is emblematic of this 20th century desire. On the other hand, there is an attempt to construct Hinduism as timeless and eternal (but still scientific), and the practices of classical dance, ayurveda and yoga are the building blocks for this construction of a religiousness that is not bound by time or space. These dynamics are played out in all forms of Hinduisms, from the most liberal and tolerant to the most conservative and Hindu nationalist.

The desire, to define Hinduism as both historical and timeless, is connected to the perceived and real lack of the control Hindus have historically had in defining their own religion. Attempting to reclaim yoga as a Hindu practice is a reaction to this lack of
control over the defining of what Hinduism is, which is tied up closely with the colonial experience. In many ways, what Hindus in the U.S. are doing today, is not too different from what Vivekananda and Yogananda were doing years ago. They are trying to define their history and heritage on their own terms, a part from colonial and capitalist forces, however, at the same time this is near impossible because both the early exporters of yoga and Hindu Indo-Americans are products of the colonial and capitalist systems. They are reacting to forces that, in part, created them, and thus could not and cannot escape from this particular dialectic. In other words, just as Vivekananda and Yogananda fell into the trap and propagated the colonial constructions of ‘east’ as intrinsically different from ‘west,’ the relationship that Hindus today have with yoga is connected to the very market forces that have defined yoga as not Hindu. In many ways, the quest to reclaim yoga is partly a desire created by the market, in that it helped make yoga (and India) popular and sought after.

While the Hindu community in the U.S. tries to reclaim yoga, the question of ownership over yoga is raised. Does yoga belong to the territory of Hindu traditions? Does yoga belong to one particular community and does that community have the right to control who practices it and how? There are some Hindus who would say yoga is Hindu, but since yoga has entered the capitalist marketplace, it can be bought (deterritorialized) and has been bought by many. It is this dynamic between Euro-American yoga practitioners and Hindu immigrants that shows part of the rhizomatic nature of yoga; that it can accessed by different groups in different ways and for different purposes. The market amplifies malleable nature of the rhizome, such that every time one tries to root it, the more derivatives and translations arise. In other
words, every attempt to codify yoga results in more yogas emerging. In the next chapter some of these new derivatives and subsequent controversies/complications will be explored.
Figure 5-1. First Yoga Journal cover March/April 1975 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-2. Yoga Journal cover May/June 1977 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-3. Yoga Journal cover July/August 1977 (picture taken by author).
Figure 5-4. *Yoga Journal* cover December 1981 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-5. *Yoga Journal* cover February 1983 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-6. *Yoga Journal* cover March/April 1985 (picture taken by author).
Figure 5-7. Yoga Journal cover July/August 1987 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-8. Yoga Journal cover September/October 1989 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-9. Yoga Journal cover May/June 1994 (picture taken by author).
Figure 5-10. *Yoga Journal* cover November/December 1998 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-11. *Yoga Journal* cover March/April 1999 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-12. *Yoga Journal* cover August 2005 (picture taken by author).
Figure 5-13. Asana feature from first issue of *Yoga Journal*, from Jan Herhold, “Yoga Asanas,” May 1975, 4 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-14. Picture comparing characters from *Ramayana* and *Star Wars*, from Ramana Das, “Two Epic Tales: The Ramayana and Star Wars,” *Yoga Journal*, November/December 1977, 38 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-15. Advertisement for Birkenstock and Yoga Clothes, from *Yoga Journal*, July 1975, 25 (picture taken by author).
Figure 5-16. Advertisement for The Yoga Watch, from *Yoga Journal*, November/December 1976, 26 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-17. Advertisement for Sexual Energy Seminars, from *Yoga Journal*, September/October 1979, 24 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-18. Advertisement page with 7 adverts, from *Yoga Journal*, May 1977, 72-73 (picture taken by author).
Figure 5-19. "Career Connection," from Yoga Journal, January/February 1997, 133 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-20. Next page of “Career Connection,” from Yoga Journal, January/February 1997, 134-135 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-21. Vacation advertisements from Yoga Journal, September/October 1997, 158 (picture taken by author).
Figure 5-22. Ecos laundry detergent advertisement, from *Yoga Journal*, May/June 2004, 23 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-23. Chopard *Om* necklaces advertisement from the *Yoga Journal*, December 2005, 5 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-24: Yoga Paws advertisement, from *Yoga Journal*, August 2006, 130 (picture taken by author).
Figure 5-25: Advertisement article for Iyengar Backbench, from Ruth Steiger, “Take-It-Easy Yoga,” *Yoga Journal*, November/December 1987, 68-69 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-26: Advertisement article for Ashtanga Yoga Mat, from Todd Jones, “The Illustrated Mat,” *Yoga Journal*, March/April 1999, 21 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-27. Advertisement article for OMGirl Plush Yoga Pants, from “Material World,” *Yoga Journal*, May/June 2004, 22 (picture taken by author).
Figure 5-28. "Indian Calendar," from *India Abroad*, 28 December 1973 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-29. Hindu Calendar, from *India Abroad*, 5 October 1973 (picture taken by author).

Figure 5-30. A variety of advertisements, from *India Abroad*, 14 March 1980 (picture taken by author).
Figure 5-31. Travel advertisements to India, from *India Abroad*, 5 October 1973 (picture taken by author).
Yoga and the Devil: Issue for Georgia Town
Officials in this northeastern Georgia town have canceled a government-sponsored yoga class, bowing to pressure from protesters who contend that yoga invites Devil worship. ‘Some felt that they were under too much pressure,’ Mayor Bill Harris said of the commissioners. Philip Lawrence, a local chiropractor who has been leading the protests that he said included Baptists, Lutherans and Church of God members, asserted that people who relax their minds by performing yoga are opening the door to the Devil. ‘The people who are signed up for the class are just walking into it like cattle to a slaughter,’ he said. ‘Half of yoga is a branch of Eastern mysticism, and it has strong occult influences.’ Roger Terrell, the program director for the recreation department, said yoga was added to class offerings because several people had requested it, and was to involve only simple stretching and relaxation techniques. ‘We can't be promoting religion or anything,’ Mr. said. ‘It's strictly for health reasons.’ Leonard Greenspoon, a Clemson University religion professor, said yoga had become a secularized form of exercise and relaxation. ‘There's certainly no necessary connection between yoga and Devil worship,’ he said. ‘Anybody who's equating Eastern religion with Devil worship has made a big mistake.’

This article, in many ways, encapsulates the issues surrounding yoga in the United States today. Even after decades of presence in the American religious market, there is still an element of the mystical or mysterious surrounding yoga, which can be seen as both good and bad. While this mystical element to yoga is still quite pervasive, there are many that just see it as a secular exercise, one that can be adapted to many contexts. Many questions arise out of these issues. Why are there so many variations of yoga and yoga products? Can yoga be adapted to Abrahamic faiths? Has Hinduism been translated out of yoga, and thus is it still yoga? Is yoga a sacred or profane practice? What is the relationship of yoga to the state if it is profane or religious? How has the commodification of yoga changed yoga?

---

The following three sections, “Current Variations of Practice and Products,” “Muslim, Jewish and Christian Yoga” and “Yoga in the Public Sphere” will hopefully give some insight into these questions, show the many ways in which yoga has been translated since the Transcendentalists, and that the commodification of yoga has contributed to both the translation and practice of yoga. Combined, these sections will offer evidence for the chapter’s thesis that the contemporary uses of yoga have become complicated the inherent rhizomal quality of yoga and its commodification has enabled it to mix into other parts of culture and society; this mixing or transgression is complicated because it exposes the fragile construction of boundaries, which to many is disconcerting and uncomfortable. “Current Variations of Practice and Produces ” will survey (a fraction) of the types of yoga and products that are available (beyond what is covered in previous chapters) to practitioners today and examine how yoga and the market thrive of each other. The second section on Abrahamic faiths and yoga will explore the creativity needed to blend (and un-blend) traditions. Finally the section on “Yoga in the Public Sphere” will examine the issues that arise when yoga comes ‘close’ in any way to the government in a country where the line the between church and state is ‘sacred.’ What these three areas of inquiry have in common is that they all deal with the issue of yoga and mixing (either with the market, with other religions or with the public sphere), and how this mixing is... complicated.

**Current Variations of Practice and Products**

From the data in the previous chapter, it is well established that the *Yoga Journal* not only provides information on the practice of yoga, but also has helped in creating a yoga life style, one that involves various products and workshops. Beyond the iyengar
props, yoga pants, mats, etc. there exist a whole other world of programs and products that have started to enter the market.

Perhaps one of the most sensational and unique yoga trends to emerge in the past few years is *doga*, yoga that you can practice with your dog. This type of yoga yields yoga benefits for the human and canine practitioner while also providing bonding time for the owner and pet. *Doga* classes have started to become popular in various cities around the U.S., and following trend, print culture on the topic has also emerged. Jennifer and Brilliant and William Berloni have written *Doga: Yoga for Dogs*; this book is more for the benefit of the dog. Brilliant and Berloni show dogs or dogis in various yoga-like poses and provides dogi wisdom (from the dog) for the reader. This book does not provide instruction for yogi and dogi to practice together. Brenda Bryan’s book, *Barking Buddha: Simple Soul Stretches for Yogi and Dogi*, is about how a dog can aid a human in her yoga practice. She writes, “Traditional yoga practices are about creating a union with the divine in all. Dogs are pack animals, and pack mentality is also about union; in that sense, dogs are natural yogis.”\(^2\) The core of Bryan’s practice revolves around connecting the yogi’s heart with the dogi’s heart, thus forming a union, which Bryan sees as the core of yoga. Bryan teaches her classes in Seattle, Washington, but as of Summer 2008, she has started holding *doga* teacher training workshops, which are two days of classes for $200. Bryan does not provide an explanation for why she uses the term ‘Buddha’ to describe her form of *doga*; it seems this particular word is used as an adjective that provides alliteration and is a recognizable ‘eastern’/mystical word.

---

Another new and popular yoga practice to enter the yoga landscape in the U.S. is *Yoga Booty Ballet*. This trademarked class was started by Swerve, a fitness studio in Los Angeles, CA. They describe *Yoga Booty Ballet* as, “a fun, sexy and spirited workout that gets your SWERVE on! Work on your body, engage your mind and lighten your spirit as you practice this East meets West amalgam of meditation, cardiovascular dance, ballet, Kundalini and hatha yoga.”³ This class, mainly marketed to and attended by women, has made its way to late-night infomercials, thus can be practiced by anyone in the country who is willing to buy the 18 DVDs. One can also become a certified *Yoga Booty Ballet* teacher – one just has to attend a workshop and pay the appropriate fee. To become a level one instructor, the price is $539, and the price for a level two instructor is an additional $169.

While this is more than a doga teaching workshop, it is actually a bargain compared to the cost of other teacher training programs. For example to become a teacher of *Bikram Yoga*, one must cough up $6000, plus at least $3,900 for hotel accommodations. Another trademarked and copyrighted form of yoga, *Bikram Yoga*, started by Bikram Choudhury in 1979, is a sequence of 26 asanas practiced in rooms heated to 105°F. While he had copyrighted his book, *Bikram’s Beginning Yoga Class*, and trademarked the name of his school, *Bikram’s Yoga College of India*, it was not until 2002 that he created controversy by trying to copyright his style of yoga (that is the sequence of 26 asanas), because he saw too many imposters in the market. This did not make the government of India too happy, and they countered by putting “100 historians and scientists to work cataloguing 1,500 yoga poses recorded in ancient

texts… India will use the catalogue to try to block anyone from cornering the market on the 5,000-year-old discipline of stretching, breathing and meditating.”

Bikram’s reason for seeking a patent is because “‘it's the American way. You cannot drive the car if you do not have a driver's license,’ he explains. ‘You cannot do brain surgery if you are not a brain surgeon. You cannot even do a massage if you don't have a license.’ And, he says, you shouldn't be able to teach his Bikram Yoga unless you pay him for a license.” Bikram was sued by another yoga organization, but they settled out of court before they reached trial. While this chapter in American yoga history ended amiably, it is illustrative: Bikram reasoned that it was ‘American’ for him to patent his style of yoga. Not only was he attempting to further domesticate his produce, but he was also trying to control his market through monopoly, a most American practice. This attempt to patent did not translate well back into an Indian context (thus explaining their scramble to historically catalogue all things yoga), but it also did not sit well with American yoga practitioners. While many cast yoga as an inherently secular activity, it still retains a mystical and religious quality, and from the early days of the U.S. republic, Americans have fiercely protected their religions from any sort of government interference (which a patent would be).

While it is easy to be cynical regarding some of the new yoga trends that have recently emerged, they are not all totally geared around selling, copyrighting and patenting. One trend, which has been covered by the Yoga Journal, is to pay attention to the care of the earth. The center of this movement is the Green Yoga Association (GYA), whose mission is to “deepen into the ultimate meaning of yoga as union. Yogis

---

5Fetterman, “Yoga Copyright raises questions of ownership.”
have always known that all life is interconnected, and that we must treat all beings, even the elements of nature… Our work is to awaken this great teaching in our lives, and to share it with the world.”\textsuperscript{6} They use the term “Green Yoga” because it “indicates our conscious chlorophyll, which represents the life-sustaining relationship between Sun and Earth,” and “Green is also the color of the primary representation of Tara in Tibetan Buddhism….her green color symbolizes active compassion.”\textsuperscript{7} The GYA, which scatters various ‘green’-interpreted \textit{Vedic} quotes throughout its website, also provides several services for their community beyond just values. They maintain a Green Yoga directory, sanction ‘green’ accreditation for Green Yoga studios, suggest ways that one can ‘green’ their studio, arrange Green Yoga retreats and organize Green Yoga conferences. One of the organizers of this conference, Loyola Marymount University, also offers a “Yoga and Ecology (Green Yoga)” certificate program (for $750).

Their intentions may be noble, but it is important to remember that green yoga (or any yoga) is not separate from market forces. In order to practice a ‘greener’ yoga, one must employ eco-friendly products, and this point is where this movement enters the market. The GYA has the “Green Yoga EcoStore,” which they maintain via amazon.com, and through this store one can buy eco-friendly yoga or meditation props, recommended books, CDs and DVDs, neti pots, reusable food utensils/containers and water bottles. Beyond the GYA, there are numerous companies that have emerged in the last decade that provide the earth-conscious yoga practitioner with mats, props, clothes (organic, of course) and other yoga related products. One of the major concerns of the day is the well being of the earth and yoga is adaptable to this trend, and one

\textsuperscript{6}Green Yoga Association, \textit{About Green Yoga Association} (accessed 26 August 2009), available from \url{http://www.greenyoga.org/aboutus.html}.
\textsuperscript{7}Green Yoga Association, \textit{About Green Yoga Association}.
means of adaptation is creating more fuel for the very market that has aided in creating the current ecological crisis.

Beyond the attempt introduce eco-friendly products to the market there are many other yoga products out there that continue to feed the engines of capitalism. Over and above the various yoga products described in the previous chapter, there are now yoga-focused retreats paired with other interests such as chocolate, wine, painting, writing or hiking. Products also signal communal belonging, thus an entire sub-sector of products that signify an interest in yoga has become popular. T-shirts with yoga slogans or pictures, yoga posters, magnets, decals and sculptures have all been created and marketed to practitioners of yoga. Buying any of these products and displaying them (on the body or in the home) is a signal that one belongs to the yoga *habitus*. Of these tangential products, one item that has done particularly well is yoga jewelry. Much of this jewelry is simply ornamental: an *om*, lotus, or Hindu deity strung with beads for a necklace or fixed with hooks for the ears; but some jewelry makers also claim that yoga jewelry is helpful for yoga practice. Depending on the company or type of jewelry, certain gemstones are supposed to help with practice and balance of charkas; one company, the Sun Sphire, even turns science to show how this works. For further information on this “scientific” study see Sunsphire, *Clinically Proven Holistic Jewelry* (accessed 26 August 2009), available from http://www.thesunphire.com/page9.html. Gemstones and metals, in cultures across time and space, have been used for purposes beyond the ornamental for purposes of healing and helping, and thus it does not seem to be too much of a stretch that this use of jewelry would be used for yoga; yet it is still interesting because it is demonstrative of yoga’s market reach and possibilities.

So complex, affluent and permeating is the reach of yoga in the market that
marketers have come up with a term, “Yoga Mamas” to classify a rich sub-section of the market to be specifically catered to. This market of “Yoga Mamas” does not refer to a woman who only needs yoga products, but all the other tangential products that are associated with the yoga lifestyle: organic food, trendy clothes for the children, expensive gadgets for child rearing, symbolic jewelry… Interestingly the Yoga Journal website has a ‘marketplace’ section, that links to other sites that sell products (from props and yoga jewelry to wrinkle cream) that might be appealing to a “Yoga Mama.”

Further, it is illuminating that marketers do not use the term ‘Yoga Papa,’ rather turning to gender to define this population of the market. The feminization of this market slice is evidence of the dominance of women in the contemporary practice of yoga, and to how the market targets women when attempting to sell a lifestyle, especially one that is from a subaltern space. Part of the reason that these tangential products are becoming successful is because they belong to something larger beyond practice (a *habitus*), which allows their justification in the market.

All this marketing and product specialization is overwhelming, at times amusing, even silly and also emblematic of capitalisms influence in life; thus this *habitus* is also ripe for satire, and one site that has done this is www.yogadawg.com. Yoga Dawg is, well, a dog that is a yogi, who has a hagiography (which channels Yogi Ramacharaka), a magazine, a store with a multitude of yoga products, etc… Basically, it is a site that makes fun of the current market proliferation of yoga. For example, Yoga Dawg encourages his followers to open a studio to become rich, and is insistent that this

---

studio needs a shop, and this part of the studio,

is where you want to lavish the most attention and care. This is your perennial money maker, so always think bigger is better. As a general rule, the yoga studio shop should be the largest space in the studio. You also want to position it right by the front door so as not to be missed by your students as they enter the studio for classes. To maximize your yoga profits, have the yoga shop occupy at least half of the studio. Then strategically place the receptionist desk in the middle of the shop with yoga merchandise overflowing from shelves and displays placed all around the desk. This allows your students to do some much needed yoga shopping before their yoga class. TIP: Always design your studio and shop so that students are forced to make their way through it before they go to class.\(^{11}\)

Yoga Dawg even has a store of his own, the GreatTranscendentalYoga Superstore, the mission of which “is to further the concept of one world, one Yoga store and studio chain.”\(^{12}\) Here Yoga Dawg ‘sells’ yoga electronic devices (i.e. the ThermoChakra Thermometer), yoga home products (i.e. the KarmaYoga Outdoor Grill), yoga video games (i.e. the Rockum/Sockum Yogis Action Game), and, of course, yoga jewelry (i.e. the AryuvedicKarmaYoga Bangle). While the full intentions of the Yoga Dawg creator are not known, from her writing, she seems to be shining a spotlight on the relationship between yoga and the market. This relationship is not new, but there are parts that may be of some discomfort, which arises whenever two seemingly unrelated entities mix.

**Muslim, Jewish and Christian Yoga**

Yoga is also mixing into the practice of Abrahamic faiths, not just the market - new yoga classes such as Christian yoga and Torah yoga are a ‘testament’ to how religious groups can be affected by market trends. Some synagogues are using yoga to entice people to observe the Sabbath, and Christian yoga classes are tailoring various asanas


to Biblical scriptures. While there are criticisms of this, the market is not concerned with religious boundaries, but rather with profit margins – in other words, if there is a new Jewish Yoga book & DVD set, there will be a space for it to be sold.

Interestingly, despite rampant Hindu/Muslim tension in contemporary politics, there are some Muslims who practice yoga. While some Muslims insist that the postures involved in salat correspond to yoga asanas (and have superior benefits), others are able to take classes at their local Muslim community centers. There is, however, not the same presence in the market for Muslim yoga products as there are for Christian and Jewish yoga products. Further, in some Muslim countries, such as Egypt, there is a fatwa against the practice of yoga. Yoga has taken a stronger hold in Judaism. Yoga Mosaic, a 15-year-old association for Jewish yoga teachers, provides resources and answers for those that which to practice Judaism and yoga. There are two popular book/DVD series – Torah Yoga, which blends yoga with Jewish mystical texts, and Alph-Bet Yoga, which bases its various postures on the Hebrew letters. Unlike Muslim and Christian communities, there is little to no demonization and controversy in Jewish communities over yoga. Some synagogues even use yoga as a means of attracting devotees to Sabbath services.

The relationship between Christianity and yoga seems to dwell somewhere in the middle ground – some Christians embrace yoga (like Jews), while some outright reject yoga (like most Muslims). It was Christians (Protestants) that organized the World Parliament of Religion in 1893 that brought Swami Vivekananda and Raja Yoga to the United States. A little less than a decade later, a new religion, Christian Yoga, was formed. One of the priestesses of this religion, Mrs. Jesse Babcock, blended Christianity
and yoga, especially in regards to their beliefs about the after-life: “‘If one has attained full knowledge and enough spirituality, he can come back after death and pick out the parents to whom he will be born again… that will further develop his spirituality.’”

Twenty-seven years later, Unitarians organized the International Congress of Religious Liberals, and through that conference, the US was introduced to Paramahansa Yogananda and Kriya Yoga. Throughout Autobiography of a Yogi, following in the footsteps of Vivekananda, Yogananda refers to Christian scripture and uses Christian imagery to position Kriya Yoga as an interdisciplinary practice. It is important to remember that both Vivekananda and Yogananda came to the US partly to raise money for their projects in India – they had to make yoga appealing to and non-threatening for Christians and their beliefs. Yoga, specifically pranayama, was a supplement not substitute for Christian practice.

By the mid-20th century, as practice shifted from pranayama to asanas, the market was transforming yoga into non-religious exercise, and Indian yogis continued to sell yoga as a practice that is “compatible with all of the world’s great religions.” In the summer of 1971, a Catholic Women’s College, Annhurst, hosted the second annual Yoga Ecumenical Retreat, where nuns, priests, monks, rabbis, and “long haired young people” all came together to learn yoga based on the teachings of Swami Satchidananda. In the New York Times article about the retreat, Sister Maria said, “Deep prayer always involves transcending the body and the senses… Yoga is a definite help in doing this. It helps to relax the body and mind and integrate your whole

---

15Fiske, “Priests and Nuns Discover Yoga Enhances Grasp of Faith.”
Sister Rose Margaret Delaney felt that yoga was not prayer, rather a preparation for it: “I don’t use a mantra…I meditate on the Gospel of the day and use Yoga as a way of disposing myself to prayer.”

Today, Christians are continuing to use their Biblical roots to reformulate yoga. Many practicing Christians take yoga classes at gyms or yoga centers, but some do not like the overtly Hindu references, meditation and chanting that they may find in some of these classes. They would rather chant “Sha-LOM,” rather than just plain old “AUM,” which is what parishioners do at New Community Church in Washington. Some Christians are also uncomfortable with the poses referencing worship to Hindu gods. According to Patanjali, asana “is realized by relaxing one’s effort and resting like the cosmic serpent on the waters of infinity,” which could be a reference to Ananta, the cosmic serpent that Vishnu sleeps on. Like Sister Rose Margaret Delaney, many Christian yoga classes use Biblical verses to recite during certain poses, and keep their mind focused on God and Jesus Christ, rather than Isvara, the Lord of Yoga.

For example, Surya Namaskara, which has become a popular practice associated with yoga since the early 20th century, is a sequence of asanas that has become central to some modern forms of yoga. Some yoga gurus have even attached Sanskrit verses to each of the twelve steps, which may signal to some a Hindu (or Buddhist) orientation. In many Christian yoga classes, to avoid the Hindu symbolism, Sun, S-U-N, is changed to Son, S-O-N, thus when they are doing the twelve steps, it is not in worship of Surya, rather various postures are to show devotion to Jesus. This is somewhat fitting,

---

16 Fiske, “Priests and Nuns Discover Yoga Enhances Grasp of Faith.”
17 Fiske, “Priests and Nuns Discover Yoga Enhances Grasp of Faith.”
19 Yoga Discipline of Freedom, 56-7.
interesting and most rhizomal behavior given that the roots of Surya Namaskara may not have been Hindu, but rather Indian Nationalist (see Chapter Four, section on Krishnamacharya).

At St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church, the practice of Christian yoga is called “Yogadevotion,” and although there are some members who are skeptical, one of the pastors, John Keller, is supportive because “it draws potential converts through the church’s doors”, for “about a quarter of Yogadevotion students are not churchgoers.”

Both Christian and Jewish yoga practices, it seems, use market trends - yoga - to sustain sacred interest and membership numbers.

Not all agree with this blending of practice - there are plenty of Christian and Hindu criticisms of the concept. There are some Hindus that do not take offense to this type of yoga. In a Washington Post article on Christian and Jewish yoga, a DC area Hindu, Praveen Tewari “believes the yoga principles of fitness of mind and body are universal and should be shared” and says, “Why not share the joy? Why miss out on it… My firm belief is that ultimate reality is the same. Every religion teaches basically good things.”

Yet other Hindus feel that yoga is Hindu, and that having Christian or Jewish yoga does not make sense, for “Hinduism is not like a recipe ingredient that can be extracted from yoga.” Another concern is the use of yoga to evangelize for other religions. Their criticisms force the question, is yoga essentially Hindu? Do the various postures and breathing techniques discipline the body to be Hindu?

---

22 Cullen, “Stretching for Jesus.”
Many Christian critics of yoga would say yes to these questions. One critic feels that using yoga to lure people to church is not innocent, rather a means of “dancing with the devil.” There are a growing number of books warning Christians about the mixing of yoga and Christian practice. In his book, *Yoga and the Body of Christ*, Dave Hunt writes, “Yoga originated in India as part of the paganism practiced there” and claims that yoga is one way in which the West is being conquered.

Perhaps the most creative and interesting criticism of Christian yoga comes from Laurette Willis, founder of the Christian alternative to yoga, *PraiseMoves*, which along with *Fitness to His Witness* are trademarked systems of exercise and good health, plus the benefit of Jesus. Willis describes herself as a former “New-Ager” who found God in 1987, grew up practicing yoga with her mother, but says, “from experience I can say that yoga is a dangerous practice for the Christian and leads seekers away from God rather than to Him.” Like the Hindu critics of Christian yoga, Willis argues that yoga cannot be separated from Hinduism, for each of the “yoga postures are offerings to the 330 million Hindu gods.” And Christian yoga, for Willis, is an “oxymoron” that is an example of *syncretism*, which by her definition, is “an attempt to blend conflicting belief, religions or philosophies.” So, as an alternative to Christian yoga and Hindu yoga,

---

Willis has started the patented *PraiseMoves*, which is not Christian yoga, but a “Christ-centered alternative to the practice of yoga.”

There are five components to *PraiseMoves*: (1) The *Walking Wisdom Warm-ups*, during which the participants chant, sorry, recite “I AM STRONG IN THE LORD” and finish with “AND THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT”; (2) the *PraiseMoves Postures* such as the Eagle, during which participants listen to classical or worship music and are to reflect upon various Biblical verses; (3) the *PraiseMoves Scripture Sequence* which are posture sequences where each posture corresponds to a verse in either the Lord’s Prayer or the 23rd Psalm; (4) then during the *PraiseMoves Alphabetics* phase, in a technique similar to the Jewish Alph-Bet Yoga, participants perform one letter from the 22 standard letters of the Hebrew alphabet; (5), then finally comes *WWJD Meditation/Relaxation* time, which means “NO traveling out of our bodies, visualizing colors and lights or breathing in spiritual nonsense… this is… WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) relaxation time.” If one so wishes, one can learn *PraiseMoves* by buying the DVD for $16.95 or by taking a class with a properly trained CPI or Certified *PraiseMoves* Instructor. One can also become a CPI and learn how to run a *PraiseMoves* business, but in order to do this, one must also sign a statement of faith. Willis answers her critics, arguing that even though this might seem like yoga, and that the class is organized like many yoga classes in the U.S. and India, it is really not. She acknowledges that some of the *PraiseMoves* postures resemble yoga postures because she has “discovered there’s not an infinite number of ways the human body can move,” and insists these postures have been created by God, and that

---

28Willis, *Why A Christian Alternative to Yoga?*
PraiseMoves is “a way to untwist these beneficial postures back to glorify God.” Then one could say, that Willis’s trademarked technique is an enterprise of religious recovery, shedding away Hindu rhetoric to reveal a pristine and long-forgotten Christian practice. Putting aside her interpretation of yoga and misreading of syncretism for the moment, what is interesting is that she has trademarked this Christian technique in a manner similar to Bikram and Yoga Booty Ballet - if it is a religious practice that originated from God and intended for worship, can it be trademarked? Is her reason for so adamantly differentiating her system from yoga for religious reasons or for market monopoly, and why is she so insistent upon building a fence between what she does and yoga?

The very forces of globalization that have helped create Yoga Booty Ballet and doga, have also had a hand in shaping the views of Willis. In a book on religion after the 1960s, Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion, Wade Clark Roof argues that the effects of globalization on religion are many; while it leads to great diversity, “depth to any tradition is often lost, the result being thin layers of cultural and religious meaning,” thus what “follows is pastiche, collage, religious pluralism within the individual, bricolage, mixing of codes, religion à la carte.” What Roof is describing is a creative process, and while some may find this play empowering, other may find it shallow and disconcerting. The market facilitates these infinite options, and just like some may have discomfort with the mixing of religion and market, some may also have discomfort with religions mixing for it exposes the human construction of boundaries. Willis is an example of someone who is discomforted by this mixing, and obviously has reacted by attempting to build a fence between Christianity and yoga –

---

30 Willis, Why A Christian Alternative to Yoga?
one could say she is trying to create root for two rhizomal entities, however, this goes against the nature of the rhizome. Further this fence is based on a “thin layer of religious meaning,” thus it is easy to break through, exposing the faulty construction.

**Yoga in the Public Sphere**

The market and religion have a deep history of interaction with each other, and all religions have at some point have mixed for they are all syncretic. One boundary that is particularly new, however, and most 'sacred' in the U.S. is the separation of church and state – that religions may not interfere with the government *and* that government may not interfere in matters regarding the state. This boundary is, in many ways, uniquely American and key to the experiment of non-monarchical, representative-based nation building of the ‘Founding Fathers.’ Perhaps Willis is concerned about the categorization of yoga because if yoga is not classified as Hindu, then what is the harm in teaching it in public schools; in her eyes this would mean a breakdown of the Willis has thought of this: she has a program called *PowerMoves Kids*, which is designed to be taught in schools instead of yoga. While Willis may object to yoga being taught in public schools because of its Hindu roots, she does not seem to mind (or perhaps be aware) that *PowerMoves Kids* is based of *PraiseMoves*, which has Christian roots, thus cannot be taught in public schools. It seems, when dealing with religion of any kind in the public spheres, the location of the boundary between church and state is often based on convenience and personal ideology.

Willis is not the only person concerned with yoga becoming part of the American school curriculum. In 1999, the Altman family sued the Bedford School District for teaching students New Age religions, which included yoga, but this case got thrown out on a technicality (the children were out of school, the various activities were not part of a
coordinated effort to establish a certain religion and public funds were not used). In 2003, the parents of 12 children at Aspen Country Day School, a private school, pulled their children out of yoga class. A local priest who sided with the parents commented: "the ultimate goal of the yoga is to balance the body, the mind, the soul and the spirit... When you are talking about the soul and the spirit, then aren't you in the realm of religion? And if so, which religion?" On the other side of the debate, "Trisha Lamb Feuerstein of the Yoga Research and Education Center in Santa Rosa, Calif., said, ‘From our viewpoint, yoga is not a religion. Really, it's a spiritual practice, and we don't equate spirituality with religion.’"

While this is a problematic dichotomy to draw, for it separates religion from spirituality, it is a stance that many modern yoga groups take. For example the American Yoga Association, on their webpage, write, “There is a common misconception that Yoga is rooted in Hinduism; on the contrary, Hinduism’s religious structures evolved much later and incorporated some of the practices of Yoga.” If yoga is constructed as separate from Hinduism, then it can be taught anywhere in the public realm and thus it also can belong to anyone (not just Hindus and India).

One teacher who has developed an entire yoga system around this idea is Tara Guber, founder of YogaEd; she has “stripped every piece of anything that anyone could vaguely construe as spiritual or religious out of the program.” Much in the same manner as Willis, Guber has “crafted a new curriculum that eliminated chanting and

---

33Sink, “Yoga in Aspen Public Schools Draws Opposition.”
translated Sanskrit into kid-friendly English. Yogic panting became ‘bunny breathing’, and ‘meditation’ became ‘time in.’" Many schools have adopted this, and have found it to be beneficial to their students, but many questions still remain: Is yoga a religion or not? Where is that line between separation of church and state and is it being crossed with yoga being taught in schools?

One case that might give us some insight is Malnak v. Yogi (1979), where a local mother in New Jersey sued Maharishi Mahi Yogi for teaching Transcendental Meditation (TM) in a public school. While TM maintained that it was not a religion, the court ruled that it was and thus the establishment clause was violated. For this case, the court had to define religion. The court felt,

Expectation that religious ideas should address fundamental questions is in some ways comparable to the reasoning of the Protestant theologian Dr. Paul Tillich, who expressed his view on the essence of religion in the phrase ‘ultimate concern’. Tillich perceived religion as intimately connected to concepts that are of the greatest depth and utmost importance... As such, they are to be carefully guarded from governmental interference, and never converted into official government doctrine. The first amendment demonstrates a specific solicitude for religion because religious ideas are in many ways more important than other ideas... Certain isolated answers to ‘ultimate’ questions, however, are not necessarily ‘religious’ answers, because they lack the element of comprehensiveness... A religion is not generally confined to one question or one moral teaching; it has a broader scope. It lays claim to an ultimate and comprehensive "truth." Thus the so-called ‘Big Bang’ theory, an astronomical interpretation of the creation of the universe, may be said to answer an ‘ultimate’ question, but it is not, by itself, a ‘religious’ idea. Likewise, moral or patriotic views are not by themselves ‘religious’, but if they are pressed as divine law or a part of a comprehensive belief-system that presents them as ‘truth’, they might well rise to the religious level.37

In the opinion of this appeals court, TM was thought to have an ‘ultimate concern’ in that it went beyond one question or moral teaching and gave a comprehensive view of

---

36 "Stripped of Religion, Yoga Enters Public Schools."
purpose in the universe. While this definition is problematic in that it seeks to use Protestant ideas to define something this not Protestant, it does serve as jumping off point for thinking about yoga in the public sphere. The problem is that yoga has never had a clear history or genealogy the way TM has a clear history and founder. The question regarding the ultimate concern of yoga as well as if it gives a comprehensive purpose really depends what type of yoga one follows. And while there is a compelling argument regarding the formation of a *habitus* around the practice of yoga in the U.S., categorizing a *habitus* as a religion becomes slippery. Further yoga has deviated so much in the market that it is hard to track, and thus hard to adjudicate any answer on its place in public schools.

It seems that this question may not be answered until a legitimate case concerning the place of yoga in public schools is brought before a court. In particular, it will be interesting to see if the American judicial system draws a parallel between yoga and Intelligent Design (ID), which, after the ruling of Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District (2005), can no longer be taught in public science classrooms. The court found that there was too much evidence regarding the ID’s “religious nature” and that ID cannot be considered science because, “it cannot be adjudged a valid, accepted scientific theory as it has failed to publish in peer-reviewed journals, engage in research and testing, and gain acceptance in the scientific community.”

While yoga is not taught in a science classroom, various practitioners and schools of yoga have and continue to promote it as scientific, and just like ID has a religious history (and thus religious nature), one could argue that yoga has a religious nature. If and when this issue ever is presented before a

---

court, it will be difficult, tangled and complicated. Furthermore, it will be interesting to see if the same people that argued against Creationism and ID in the public science classes will feel the same about yoga in the public gym classes.

The answer regarding how someone views the teaching of yoga in public schools hinges on whether one sees yoga as Hindu or religious. If one follows the guidance of the American Yoga Association, then the answer is that it is not religious and thus can be part of the public sphere. However, if yoga is not religious, then what it is it? And seeing as it is a billion dollar business concerning health and the human body, should it be regulated by the state? Once yoga practitioners strip the veil of religion from their practice, the First Amendment no longer protects them. Yoga studios in New York, Michigan and Virginia recently found this out when state governments sought to classify the training of yoga teachers as a type of vocational course. While officials in New York dropped their efforts, in Michigan and Virginia the bureaucracy has stepped in and is now sifting through yoga teacher training license applications. Given that many yoga studios do not apply for church status with the IRS and given that it is a growing presence in the market, it is not surprising that states are pursuing this path of additional tax revenue. Allowing state regulation would make the case for yoga in public schools clearer, however, it would also mean giving up on the 'mystical' aura of yoga that makes it so appealing. The resolution of this will be intimately tied the relationship between yoga and Hinduism in the U.S., and it will be most interesting to watch. It seems even

---

when something (yoga) is defined as not religious, engagement with the state is disconcerting and unappreciated.

Commodification and Yoga

While there is amusement and intrigue in all forms of modern, marketed, multi-religious, and civic yoga, it brings up some serious issues about the relationship between religious and non-religious boundaries and the market. Religion and the market have a historically interdependent relationship. The market uses religion for products, but religion also uses the market for inspiration - Buddhists not only spread the message of Buddha throughout Asia, but they also created new trade routes throughout the continent. Has the advent of a capitalist market, trademarks and all, changed or just simply continued this relationship? Like religion, capitalism is based on some degree of mysteriousness - the commodity, whether it be a coat or yoga, is mystical. Karl Marx reminds us that,

The commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appear, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relations between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into the relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.\textsuperscript{41}

Thus, both religion and capitalism rely on faith; either faith in a higher meaning or in higher profit margin between the production and selling costs. In both systems occurs a

process of fetishization, where products are ‘endowed’ with meaning, which we, either
the believer or consumer, attach. Yoga has entered the market with almost no
production cost, an infinite myriad of supporting and even competing products, and with
a high selling cost. Also built into the modern enterprise of yoga is a mystical and exotic
quality - it historically comes from India, it is ancient and it seems to work miracles on
and with the human body in just 30 minutes a day.

The persistence of yoga as mystical or exotic compels us to look at the historic
relationship between colonialism and capitalism. First, it is important to remember that
capitalism has its roots in the colonial enterprise, and one process they have in common
is their “mining” of colonial/subaltern cultures and spaces for material (to exhibit or sell).
This need for material from colonized spaces to be exhibited or experienced in the
industrial ‘west’ is a trend that started under colonialism (from the time Columbus
brought back ‘Indians’ as souvenirs from Hispaniola) and one that has been continued
via neo-liberal capitalism (which could be seen as a type of colonization separate from
the political nation-state). There is a relationship between colonialism and capitalism
beyond power that seeps into the realm of material. In the colonial period, this material
ranged in type, from raw materials taken via farming and mining, to the many pieces of
art and sculpture plundered from colonized worlds, then exhibited or stored in French,
British and American museums and to texts translated, distributed and read across the
globe. Ensconced in this project of mining colonized India was yoga, and this product
was distributed both by the colonizers and the colonized, which makes this particular
dynamic so interesting and complicated. In many ways, it was colonized actors that
paved the way for future commodification of yoga; in hopes of using yoga to combat one hegemonic force (colonialism), they effectively opened the door for another (capitalism).

While there are laws today prohibiting the taking of antiquities from countries, raw materials are still being taken in similar (mining) and different (patenting of seeds) ways. Further, culture is being packaged from subaltern spaces and sold not only in the ‘west,’ but also globally. Yoga is but one example of this process; whether it is spiritual tourism in Latin America or Africa, Native American material culture, East Asian martial arts practices or yoga, there seems to be a pattern of mining these cultures for material to be packaged and sold globally.\(^{42}\) What has been created is a desire to consume, that which is perceived to be exotic, foreign, mystical and timeless. These four qualities serve to bring the consumer, if only for a moment, out of their everyday mundane life, and allow them to live or experience something different. Practices, such as yoga, were constructed to fulfill part of this desire, but this is just a part of a larger system of cultural commodification, that involves the fetishizing of culture such that it seems exotic, foreign, mystical and timeless, when these auras were historically created. The question of why such an experience is desired is linked to a larger societal alienation that suggests that what is available is not good enough, that there is a lack that needs to be satisfied (desire).\(^{43}\) Yoga is one method of fulfilling this perceived lack of or desire for an

\(^{42}\) On the other side of this is the exportation of sports, such as football, cricket, baseball, basketball and golf to former colonized spaces, and the question that must be further explored is whether this is qualitatively different from the exportation of seemingly ‘spiritual’ or ‘religious’ practices? Both are intertwined with a commodities market, but I would argue that the exportation of sports is more organized and tied to specific organizations (i.e. specific sporting federations and the Olympics), whereas spiritual tourism, subaltern material culture, martial arts and yoga are not as regulated, thus there is less control over their global dissemination.
experience, and what market does is commodify this experience such that it can reach more people.

What makes yoga additionally compelling in a market setting is that it is a type of exotic, foreign, mystical and timeless culture or experience that can be easily exported (unlike exotic material culture), it can be easily integrated into one's everyday life (unlike spiritual tourism), and has tangible bodily benefits (much like East Asian martial arts). In a recent *New York Times* article, a practitioner of yoga commented: "‘Yoga is very portable… All you need is five feet of space and a blanket. It’s cheap, you don’t have to go anywhere and it’s good for you in every way possible.’"44 Nancy Ford-Kohne, the president of Unity in Yoga (the organization that sued Bikram) seeing yoga as very adaptable, thus it “can fit into lots of parameters – from kids to seniors, and triathletes to people with multiple sclerosis.”45 The market is not just a venue for trade, but a means to reach spiritual bliss.

Obviously yoga goes quite well with capitalism, and capitalism seems to be taken, smitten if you will, with yoga. The two are seemingly not at odds, and in fact other religions, Christianity and Judaism, are drawn to this affinity, creating their own versions and alternatives for the market. Yet there is still the factor of alienation to consider, which is the core reason why Marx and later historical-materialists were disillusioned with capitalism. According to Georg Lukács alienation leads to the emergence of a commodities-based economy that transforms “human function into a commodity,” and thus “reveals in all its starkness the dehumanized and dehumanizing function of the

45Kass, “Yoga, A 60’s Survivor, Is Luring Converts.”
commodity relation." This environment does not even allow creativity, thus for Lukács the advent of the commodity and commodification wipes out the possibility of agency, and creates not only a radical alienation from the products of one’s labor, but also from one’s physical body. What we have here is then both a commodification of the body, a process that arises along with the commodification of experience (of the exotic, foreign, mystical and timeless). In this light, then, the market of yoga and its various variations should contribute to this alienation, however, from followers of Iyengar to Willis, it seems that the practice of yoga connects people to their bodies and collapses the alienation between mind and body - in other words this particular economic function might also serve to re-humanize.

Christopher Chapple, a prominent yoga scholar and member of the GYA, writes,

Yoga provides a way for the modern person, unwilling to commit to a fixed ideology, yet in need of solace and meaning in a turbulent world, to engage body and mind in a practice that brings relief from the onslaught of everyday busy-ness and stress. Yoga has a long history on the world stage and interest in Yoga shows no sign of abatement. Yoga offers a felt, visceral experience, simultaneously physical and emotional. Yoga emphasizes movement and breath more than words and urges its practitioners to adopt a comprehensive ethical lifestyle. ‘Yoga has been applied in different ways by different communities, whether Vedantin, Buddhist, Sikh, Muslim, secularist, Jewish, or Christian. In the challenging world of postnationalism and postmodernism, Yoga may provide some practices needed to move one from disequilibrium to personal, social and ecological balance.’

---

47 Here, I draw inspiration and direction from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who argues directly against the Cartesian model for understanding the relationship between mind and body, and instead shows how the body is our anchor in world - that we experience with both mind and body as an organic whole.
Clearly Chapple is holding tightly onto the idea that yoga is not a part of any one particular religion, and that it can solve the issue of alienation in the contemporary world. The key for him is that yoga involves doing – engaging in a practice via the body.

So, even if the market surrounding yoga and yoga alternatives seems to alienate people from themselves, the practice of yoga seems to heighten one's awareness of the connection between mind and body. Further, the massive creativity in the yoga market is a testament to infinite creativity that has emerged due to this relationship. It is hard to ignore that it is the very forces of capitalism – global flows that drives the forces that allows for the massive exposure of modern yoga to people that would not encounter such a practice. The market serves to blur religious boundaries. This is a historical trend, which increases as the strength of capitalism increases. Yet, as the boundaries between religions are increasingly exposed as porous, I believe, we will see an intensified effort to build and fortify more boundaries. The market provides so many options and possibilities, that for some, it can be overwhelming and morally problematic.

As Arjun Appadurai reminds us: “the diversion of commodities from their customary paths always carries a risky and morally ambiguous aura” but that these “diversions are meaningful only in relation to the paths from which they stray... The diversion of commodities from their customary paths brings in the new.”\textsuperscript{49} As more new practices are brought into the fold of the market, there will be more efforts to patent, trademark, authenticate and control the “translation... ample folds.”\textsuperscript{50}


\textsuperscript{50}Walter, “The Task of the Translator,” 69.
This dissertation is on the translation, practice and commodification of yoga at the site of the body, but I have also realized that these three factors of translation, practice and commodification also have an effect on the site or rather sites of yoga. It is not only the body that is alienated in the modern market, but also yoga. The past 150 years of translation, practice and commodification have exposed or perhaps even created the identity problems that seem to plague yoga today. From observing the yoga landscape, it seems that yoga has many roles, personalities, places, meanings, and identities. The market has literally shattered yoga, such that it exists in many places all at once. While it's genealogy is traced to India by some, by others it is intentionally and also not intentionally forgotten. One of the reasons yoga has translated to the modern contexts is because it has always had multiple and contested meanings, which coupled with market forces, allows yoga to continually cross borders. There will always be those that object, and try to construct a definitive genealogy or history of yoga, but that effort, in my opinion will always fail, for there will always be another segment of the population and the market that will contest such fences. The presence and popularity of many yogas attest to the precarious nature of religion and practice, meaning, that we should always be weary of the desire to classify, but aware and perhaps sympathetic to the need for such categorization.

It may not be fair to categorize yoga as schizophrenic, as Deleuze and Guattari may do, but it is fair to say it is rhizomal: it has no identity, no location, no belonging, many meanings and inhabits many places across time and space. Yet, there will always be forces that try to define, locate and possess yoga, and this brings us back to the point on alienation. The radical alienation created by the market is the very force
that tries to box up yoga – uncertainty and multiplicity breeds the desire and need for borders, certainty and singularity, and religion, while an uncertain and multiple trope, provides the structures for this fence building, certainty and singularity – it seems an endless cycle or translation and reformulation that shifts in sometimes the most mysterious and also transparent of ways – this is the essence of a commodity and its ability to shape shift from known to unknown is why yoga (and the commodity in general) is so complicated today.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

Here’s what’s strange, though. I haven’t seemed to be able to do any Yoga since getting to Rome. For years I’ve had a steady and serious practice, and I brought my Yoga mat with me, along with my best intentions. But it just isn’t happening here. I mean, when am I going to do my Yoga stretches? Before my Italian speedball breakfast of chocolate pastries and double cappuccino? Or after…The culture of Rome just doesn’t match the culture of Yoga, not as far as I can see. In fact I’ve decided that Rome and Yoga don’t have anything in common at all. Except for the way they both kind of remind you of the word toga.51

This excerpt comes from the phenomenally popular book, *Eat Pray Love*, which is the personal memoir of Elizabeth Gilbert, who goes to Italy for pleasure, to India to find God and to Indonesia to fall in love. Much like the Transcendentalists and Theosophists of the nineteenth century, and the American and Indian Gurus of the twentieth century, Gilbert, of the twenty-first century, feels there is truth in and justification for essentializing the ‘west’ as material and the ‘east’ as spiritual. Gilbert feels it impossible for her to practice yoga while enjoying the carnal pleasures of Rome, which is quite ironic, seeing as Rome has quite the religious and spiritual history as well. Interestingly Gilbert really only mentions the Vatican as a part of her previous Italian travels or in reference to directions around Rome. In one telling passage, Gilbert asks her friend, Giulio, if there was one word that describes Rome, and he says, “SEX.”52 She retorts, “Even over at the Vatican?” and he answers, “That’s different. The Vatican isn’t part of Rome. They have a different word over there. Their word is POWER.”53 Gilbert wonders why the Vatican’s word would not be FAITH, but beyond this, does not give the Vatican much thought or credence. For Gilbert, Italy is not for faith, but for pleasure, and these

two are inherently separate for her. Furthermore, the blind acceptance of power as the word that best describes the Vatican betrays her view of a structured faith (religion) – that spirituality and power cannot exist in the same place, a view that permeates *habitus* of yoga today. Perhaps this is one reason that yoga remains so popular: because it comes wrapped with the mystical aura that is imagined to be the ‘east,’ thus it lends itself as a path to an authentic spiritual experience, one not corrupted by structures of religions (i.e. the Vatican in Rome).

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to examine how yoga has been translated, practiced and commodified in the U.S. It has been brought over from India and been domesticated into the context of the U.S. by myriad of characters. And while many have and still distrust the practice, yoga is vibrant presence because it was transformed such that it made sense to Americans: the focus of this translation was to highlight the pragmatic and practical qualities of yoga. Thus yoga in the U.S. was categorized as scientific, healthy and multi-faith (such that anyone can practice). At the same time, some practitioners have been drawn to the ‘mystical’ and ‘eastern’ associations that yoga possessed; in other words, yoga allowed escapism from the everyday without the serious commitment of leading an ascetic life. This retreat involved the practice of yoga. Whether this meant 20 minutes of *Kriya Yoga* in the morning or 90 minutes of sweating through an *Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga* class, yoga allowed routinized engagement with the body. Yoga could be built into the everyday lives of Americans, and yoga could be done – it was never an abstraction, but rather an actual and embodied practice. That yoga was always presented as a practice accounts for its continual popularity and interest. Something that popular does not stay under the radar,
especially in a capitalist based economy driven by commodity creation; and yoga is a
perfect commodity for it is a utility product that has a high exchange value. To best
benefit from this, one must present a unique (and authentic) product, and thus
variations and yoga-related products emerge in the market, further fueling the process
of translation, the experience of practice and development of commodification.

Along the way, I have discovered that part of this narrative (of translation, practice
and commodification) also involves the setting up of various dichotomies – since a
rhizome has no roots these dichotomies or categories must be built and imposed onto
yoga for purposes of stabilization. As I studied this subject more, these constructed
dichotomies became obvious: yoga is from the ‘east’ not the ‘west;’ yoga is spiritual not
religious; yoga is multi-faith not Hindu; and yoga is a hierophany not a fetish.

What is the difference between ‘east’ and ‘west?’ People in India are not just
praying and practicing yoga all day; power, politic and the material are just as important
in India as they are anywhere else. So why the need to essentialize and differentiate,
and why did Indians (like Vivekananda and Yogananada) participate in this process?
Obviously cultures are different for they arise and form in through different experiences,
terrains and histories, however, I do not believe these difference are essential, but
rather circumstantial. One of these circumstances is colonialization and the loss of
power: those in power needed to differentiate themselves in order to justify their power
(and tyranny), and colonized people, such as Vivekananda and Yogananada used yoga
and essentialized themselves as a means of attempting to regain some power. The
constant fight and quest for power, in essence, shows people, despite their origins, are
not so different. Nonetheless this dichotomy is maintained, because the subaltern space
of the ‘east’ safe for non-subalterns. They can transgress and escape the ‘west’ by practicing yoga, but do not have to remain in that space. They have the privilege and ability to move in and out of subaltern space comfortable when it’s an optional space, and this is comfortable because it is optional. Discomfort arises when the two seemingly distinct and separate spaces of ‘east’ and ‘west’ mix or are exposed as not so separate (i.e. when ‘eastern’ people live in the ‘west’ and do not fit the stereotype). Further, in her book, *New Age Capitalism*, Kimberly J. Lau, argues that the labeling of something as ‘eastern’ rather than ‘western’ may give the consumer the impression of subverting or rejecting ‘western’ modernity, but really “the discourses of these bodily practices reinforce it [capitalism] by invoking the impression of critique as a marketing device and selling point.”54 In other words, participating in something ‘eastern’ may make the practitioner think that they are participating in something exotic or pure, but really they are just falling prey to a system that has an economic interest in upholding the dichotomy of this construct. Another complication beyond ‘east’/’west’ constructions, is the relationship between the traditional colonial enterprise of mining subaltern/colonized cultures and spaces (‘east’) and these rampant market forces that continue to mine (‘west’). Colonial forces and the colonized benefited from the exportation of yoga from India.

Another dichotomy that arose from this research is the continuing insistence that yoga is spiritual not religious. Which begs, how is something spiritual but not religious and is the converse also possible? Noted Americanist Robert Wuthnow writes,

“*At its core, spirituality consists of all the beliefs and activities by which some individuals attempt to relate their lives to God or to a divine being or

some other conception of transcendent reality… But spirituality is not just the creation of individuals; it is shaped by larger social circumstances and by the beliefs and values present in the wider culture.”

The two keys in this analysis are the “individuals attempt” and “shaped by larger social circumstances… beliefs… values… wider culture.” First it seems that when indicates a preference for spirituality over religion or labels something as spiritual, then this indicates a desire to let the individual create the meaning the she is seeking: yoga is one tool for such a creation. The idea of spirituality over religion also might fuel the individuals feeling of agency and freedom. Living in this *laizze faire* spiritual market where everyone is right and no one is wrong has its problems and the constant focus on “me” feeds into the very corporate, commodified and capitalist culture that many, who eschew religion in favor of spirituality, are trying to fight. Slavoj Zizek argues that the reason there is a shift from “religious institution to the intimacy of spiritual experience” is because this “is the ideological form that best fits today’s global capitalism.” Zizek may be suggesting that capitalism is destroying the foundations of religions, which is interesting given that both operate with the foundation of the fetish. Also it is quite ironic that that while we live under the veil or aura of individual experience, if one takes a minute to look behind the curtain, our choices are not so individual – this is why the “larger social circumstances” and “today’s global capitalism” are imperative to remember and analyze. While we can trace the “split” between spirituality and religion to the Transcendentalists, Theosophy and the New Thought Movement of the 19th century, the radical turn to individuality in regards to the spiritual occurred most

---

obviously after the failure of the communal justice movements of the 1960s. Starting in
the 1970s, I would argue, we see focus turning away from groups whose mission it is to
change the world and towards groups that instead wish to focus on changing the inside
of the self (and then hopefully personal transformation will lead to societal
transformation, but if not at least the self was changed). While some scholars might
trace this to the growing popularity of psychotherapy, I also trace this to the despair of
the 1960s, as well as the triumph of capitalism as the dominant economic system of the
20th century. Perhaps this was one reason that the yoga practitioners and the Yoga
Journal were able to create a habitus around the practice, nonetheless, it is a habitus
(and by extension, spirituality) affected, influenced and, in some ways, controlled by the
market. This really makes it no different than an ‘oppressive’ religious organization that
also affects, influences and controls their members.57 Yet, the aura of spirituality and its
difference from religion is one way to root the rhizome of yoga in such a way that any
individual can have access to it. And while the practice of yoga may allow the
practitioner to reconnect with the body and even (temporarily) escape from the
alienation of living in a capitalist world, the commodification of yoga makes it part of the
market, and thus it does not combat, but rather feeds the engines of capitalism.

A third dichotomy that emerged from this research is the premise that while yoga is
‘eastern’ and spiritual, it is not Hindu, rather multi-faith. Many, if not most, yoga studios
and practitioners still use Sanskrit words (or translation of) to describe what they are
doing – perhaps the use of foreign words fulfills a desire and experience for the

57While religion has been blamed for much war, we also have the Benevolent Empire, the Social
Gospel Movement, Civil Rights as well as Liberation Theology to thank organized and oppressive religion
for – and these movements have done just as much, if not more, to transform society and self than any
cafeteria or consumerist approach to spirituality has.
authentic and exotic. And while yoga was never just one thing in ancient India, modern yoga practice, globally, mainly traces itself back to Patanjali, which is a Hindu text. Further, many of the tangential yoga products I found somehow incorporate the symbol, \textit{om}, which is a historically Hindu symbol. Throughout my research of modern yoga I also found references to Buddhist yoga, Jain yoga, Jewish yoga, Christian yoga and Muslim yoga. But I never found a class or book or reference to Hindu yoga. Why is it never Hindu yoga, but other religions are placed in front of the word? More often than not (with the exception of Ramdev and some Hindu Indo-Americans), I found references and insistences that yoga was not Hindu. Personally, I’m not interested in whether yoga is Hindu or not. As a historian, I understand that the history of yoga in ancient India is varied and unknowable. What I am highly interested in, however, is the construction of yoga as not Hindu. When Vivekananda and Yogananda came to the U.S. to ‘sell’ yoga, they were selling to a primarily Christian (Liberal Protestant) population – highlighting that yoga was a supplemental practice to Christianity was part of their strategy of raising money for their organizations in the U.S. and India. The question is, why did this trend continue, such that the American Yoga Association disassociates itself completely from the label ‘Hindu?’ It seems that the construction of yoga as multi-faith, rather than as Hindu, makes it easier to appropriate – it’s wholly pragmatic, and I think it worked for a while. The new problem emerging is that Hindus of South Asian descent are now immigrating and contesting this construction. 

Despite it not having any religious affiliation, yoga is imagined to be a hierophany, “a manifestation of the sacred,” some thing that simply just came to be without human
involvement. A historical analysis exposes that humans created yoga, while attributed that creation to someone or something else. Ludwig Feuerbach writes that human have a tendency to imagine “things are something other an they really are, and make them into fantastic beings, fetishes,” objects that are given more meaning than its pragmatic use; so much more that the object is thought to have power over its creator, such that the creator forgets that she created the object and in turn imagines the object to have creative powers over her. For example, the history of Surya Namaskara has secular and human roots, and really was not even associated with yoga till the 1930s/1940s, however, Jois and many other yoga teachers and practitioners insist on its mystical origins and ‘forget’ or deny its nationalist ones. Why not claim yoga’s humanity? Would that not be a step to reclaiming the agency that is sought by the same people that are searching for agency in their individual spiritual quests? Why surrender creative powers especially with a practice that is not ‘western,’ religious, or Hindu, but rather ‘eastern,’ spiritual and multi-faith? The answer is shallow, but obvious: if creative power is claim then the ‘eastern’ and spiritual selling point/aspect may cease to exist. Thus the dichotomy that yoga is hierophany rather than a practice created by humans is erected with the purpose of further ‘stabilizing’ the rhizome of yoga.

What is ironic about insisting on the sacred quality of modern yoga is that the market still got to it and turned yoga into a fetish. Categorization is an attempt to root the rhizomal quality of culture – capitalism (and historical excavation) exposes and takes advantage of this attempt. Continuing to perpetuate yoga as ‘eastern,’ spiritual,

multi-faith with a sacred quality is in the market’s best interest for it is easier to sell than ‘western,’ religious, Hindu and human. That these are all somewhat contradictory is not of concern to the market – selling the commodity created out of yoga is of concern, and it is this that will assure the continued success of this six billion dollar market.

At the beginning of this dissertation process, I asked myself some questions that I thought could, would and should be answered by this research: yoga allows access to some of the larger foundational questions in religious studies today: What is religion? How does religion and culture move or migrate, and how does this movement change religion and culture? And finally, what is the relationship between religion and capitalism?

It has become obvious, to me, that religion and capitalism operate on the same premise – that of the fetish. The continued success of both depends on being able to sustain the mystical aura of the fetish. Given that they use the same mechanisms for continued success and operation, the relationship between religion and capitalism has become somewhat symbiotic, despite their competition with each other. The market makes money from religious objects and religions are able to reach more people through the market. Capitalism helps religions (and their followers) migrate and move; yet this movement does not allow things to stay the same. Practices, beliefs, ideas, goals, hopes, and material cultures – they all change when contexts and environments change. Does movement into a different location (or time), however, cause a religious practice cease being religious?

This question brings me to my final question and this one is much trickier. What is religion and based on this answer, is yoga a definition? To be honest, I do not think I
fully know the answer to this question, though I do have some ideas. Religion, at its base, is communal, based within a *habitus*. Often for one religion there are many *habiti*, which is why people of the same religion often worship and think about religious ideas in different ways. Even when an individual is spiritual and not religious, she is operating in the context of a community that informs many of her decisions. Yet it is important to note, that not all communities are religious. There needs to more to a religion beyond the communal: a set of rituals, a set of values, boundaries and an orientation towards something held in high regard. Given this, I am not sure that all the practices that make up yoga today could be categorized as religion, however, perhaps a strong case could be made for its ‘religious nature.’ In many ways, the practice of yoga defies categorization, despite the many attempts to do so, which makes it difficult to categorize it as a religion or not. Add in, its recent and extensive contact with capitalism, and the question becomes more complex and multifaceted. This is the nature of a rhizome; it refuses to settle and just stay in one pose. Yet, it is important to remember, that despite the flux, change, instability and deterritorialization of capitalism, many people crave constant meaning, tradition, stability and comfort of territory (boundaries). Perhaps this is one means of dealing with alienation, and while meaning, tradition and boundaries may be constructions for academics to explore and deconstruct, they are easy and comforting, and this point should not be underestimated or treated with disdain. Rather this is an explanation for why same characters and groups in this narrative have been adamant in defining yoga as religious or not religious – they are trying to exert some agency and control in a system that is not kind to human agency.
I think it is easy to lose sight of human agency and creativity, especially when examining anything that relates to the mechanisms of capitalism. While I am certainly most taken with the idea of yoga (and culture at large) as having a rhizomal quality, I also have come to understand that yoga is something that is done, practiced and lived (as is culture). From the research I have done so far, it is clear that there is a segment of the American population that has built yoga into their everyday lives – this is reinforced through practice, classes, products (bought in the market), values and community. A welcoming environment for the practice of yoga has been created over the last 150 years via a series of cultural and religious translations that has involved the introduction of various texts, practices and yogis of all varieties to the U.S. I think that the primary sources of this dissertation (translated Hindu texts, texts written for practice, media sources about practice and reception) support that yoga is not just about the translation of ideas, but about a practice that has been embraced and adapted to an American context. Obviously part of this translation involves capitalism and the commodification of yoga. The trick, I believe, is to investigate both hegemony and agency when examining yoga in the U.S. This means one has to map out the effects of capitalism on yoga and to trace the ways in which modern practices of yoga (that may be imagined as ancient) are really governed by transnational and economic flows. This mapping exposes the attempts to control and define yoga, despite its rhizomal quality. It is precisely because no system is static or rooted, that agency exists, even in capitalism.

While yoga has been commodified and manipulated to be many things to many people, perhaps these manipulations are a sign of market creativity (or a sign that
people are buying into a system). Whether it is creativity or control, practitioners of yoga are increasing everyday; there is something compelling about the practice. While it can be argued that yoga is a system of bodily movement that aims to control the body in a different way, at the same time, it is important to regard the ways people practice yoga. It is important to explore the ways in which they build yoga into their everyday lives (or any rhizome) and understand their desires for the exotic (the ‘eastern’ and spiritual hierophany that fits into any faith). I have tried to balance the analysis of lived practice (agency), while paying attention to colonial and capitalist forces (hegemony) and seeing where the two intersect, which is at the site of the practitioner who negotiates practice and market in unique and telling ways (i.e. doga, the creation of the Yoga Journal, the attempt to ‘reclaim’ yoga, the use of yoga as drug detox, etc…). Many of us live our lives at the mercy of the market (stock market, housing index, job losses, etc…), but what the practice of yoga shows is that creativity and agency (even when perpetuated, manipulated and prompted by this very market system at the expense, often time, of previously colonized cultures) can still exist if one has the resources to participate. Given that yoga is primarily practiced by upper class, educated women, it would not be appropriate to assume that all may enjoy this creativity in the market.

Beyond the conundrum of agency and hegemony, I indicated in my literature review that I see my scholarship positioned at the intersection of three fields: the historical construction of spiritual traditions in the U.S., histories of modern yoga and the manifestation of Hindu traditions in the U.S. I would like to think that this study will contribute to each of this fields, and at the same time, I need to acknowledge, that without this previous scholarship, my work would not possible. This dissertation is a
systematic study of the existence of yoga in U.S. from the mid-nineteenth century through the contemporary period. The bulk of the scholarship on Hindu traditions in the U.S. has focused on Indian-Hindu immigrants and the ways in which they create their devotional lives in their new American environments – this scholarship has best been put forth by Dempsey, Narayanan and Waghorne. What is unique about Hindu traditions in the U.S., however, is that the tradition (specifically of yoga) came over before the immigrants did, which makes the case of Hinduism different from that of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. Prashad explores this pre-immigrant history in The Karma of Brown Folk, but does not give much, if any, credence to practice because that is not his concern. Focusing on yoga allows one to pay attention to the practice of a Hindu tradition before and after 1965. Though many deny that yoga is of the Hindu tradition, the first books that introduced yoga to the U.S. were and still are classified as Hindu and the first Indian gurus that came to the U.S. as missionaries were also raised Hindu. Studying yoga, then, is essential to understanding Hindu traditions in the U.S. As I found from my examination of India Abroad, once Indians were allowed to immigrate to the U.S. they turned to their devotional and material practices, and built the practice of yoga into their temple and communal lives. This shows where the base of their religious lives lays, however, it also shows that they were compelled to incorporate practices that had a longer history in the U.S. than their pujas and holiday celebrations

While I see myself as adding a chapter to manifestations of Hindu traditions in the U.S., I also understand that my research is part of another trend of examining the emergence of modern yoga. The three definitive books on the formation and history of modern yoga by Alter, De Michelis and Strauss have all examined how contemporary
forms of yoga have emerged among the global flows of modernity, colonialism and science. Like Alter who examines the emergence of modern yoga in India while paying attention to transnational and colonial influences, I am geographically focused, but on the U.S., where there are also transnational influences. The differences between India and the U.S., however, are great enough that I felt it merited that the development of yoga in the U.S. deserved historical examination. Strauss and De Michelis both focus on specific transnational yoga movements in a global context (Strauss on the Divine Life Society, and De Michelis on Vivekananda and Iyengar), however, since they have already taken that approach and since there have been many yoga gurus, of Indian, European and Euro-American descent, that have left their mark on the practice of yoga in the U.S., I chose to take a broader look with a more focused context. Each of these excellent pieces of scholarship also turned attention to the connections that have developed between yoga, science and health. Their analysis has helped me recognize that these trends also arise in the context of the U.S. I believe my contribution lies in my emphasis on the relationship that yoga has with capitalism, and how concerns about yoga's scientific and health benefits have helped fuel that economic relationship.

My focus on yoga in the context of the U.S. places me firmly in the large field of American religious history, and I hope that this dissertation will add to the multi-faceted, vast and rich narratives of this field. Many Americanists in the field of religious studies have paid attention to the encounter between American Christianity and Asian religions, have analyzed how Americans construct their spiritual and religious lives with creativity, and have looked at the ways that this encounter and creativity has been a response to the alienation of the modern condition. I firmly follow in the footsteps of these scholars,
but with a specific focus on just the translation, practice and commodification of yoga. Like Lears, Moore, Schmidt and Albanese, I am interested in how Americans have built their religious and spiritual worlds and how they have used various encounters to build multiple forms of habitus, that makes the U.S. religious landscape above average in its religious diversity, but the focus on just yoga has allowed me to see both the agency and hegemony that plays a role in this religious creativity. Lears and Moore do look at capitalism and its effects on American religions, but in many ways, they can be seen as scholars on opposite sides of the spectrum when looking at the effects of capitalism with Lears on the side of hegemony and Moore on the side of agency. While I admit I have become more disillusioned with the possibilities of agency while conducting this research, I still see my position between Moore and Lear. There is a dialectic between human agency and economic hegemony. While it may seem that agency looses more ground as we move deeper into the depths of late-capitalism, studying yoga has shown that agency is still a possibility (depending on your resources). The searches for meaning may be dictated by larger structures, but what people do with these dictations are largely uncontrollable; in other words they continue to be creative, which is evident via the histories of Albanese and Schmidt, and is demonstrated in this dissertation.

Finally, simply examining the history of yoga in the U.S., allowed me to see the ways the American embrace of yoga both shows and heartily disproves the doctrine of American exceptionalism. The U.S. is unique in its long possession of the 'separation of church and state,' and this famed clause has allowed yoga to flourish without state interference. At the same time the U.S. has not been immune from the growing, global popularity of yoga, and in the advent of late-capitalism, yoga is an example of how
religious worlds and practices are not immune from market influences and
deterritorialization despite the particular territory of these worlds and practices.
Suggesting that U.S. religious history might not be completely exceptional may not be a
popular position to take, but when looking at a transnational rhizome (yoga), total
exceptionalism no longer makes much sense. Rather, it makes more sense to examine
how the transnational manifests itself within the constrains of a specific context (i.e. the
First Amendment, Liberal Protestant hegemony and a thriving print culture), and
perhaps letting go the notions of American exceptionalism (and all the political and
imperial baggage that comes with this concept).

Lastly, while researching and writing this dissertation I have been attentive to
where the primary sources have led me, and have let these sources tell me about the
history of yoga in the U.S. This meant searching for primary sources beyond just the
writings of the yogis in this narrative, and searching for clues about how they were
received (good and bad) by the public. Newspapers and magazines have been most
helpful in this search, because print culture not only reflects and reports upon society at
large, but also is consumed by society. Looking for yoga in the media has given me
insight into how yoga was practiced and received at various points along its American
encounters. Michael Gomez learned a lot about how slaves were identified using the
ads for runaway slaves, and following his methods, along with those of David Hall and
David Morgan, I have tried to uncover the history of yoga in the U.S. by searching the
culture from which people read, consume and learn in their everyday lives.\textsuperscript{60} I have

\textsuperscript{60}For more information on these methods, see Michael Gomez, \textit{Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South} (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); David Hall, \textit{Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); and David
benefited from the modern technology of microfilm and the internet, but some of my research entailed just leafing through stacks of magazines and newspapers. This showed me that yoga was not always tucked away in the back sections of newspapers, but often front-page news. It also gave me a feel for the other issues and stories news outlets covered. Looking at newspaper articles and advertisements, magazine covers, articles and advertisements, websites, court documents and how-to-yoga books, I believe, has allowed me to uncover a history that was never neat and tidy, though many construct it to be as such. I also did not always find what I was looking for, which reminded me that sometimes parts of history are just lost. I started out this research just reading Thoreau, Vivekananda, Ramacharaka, Yogananda, Hittleman and Iyengar, but I honestly found the research on the media more interesting because it showed me a history that is not often looked at and up till now, not fully explored.

While the outlining of these contributions has been helpful to me, they have also pointed out where my narrative is lacking. First, more attention has to be paid to why the majority of yoga practitioners in the U.S. are women, educated and of above-average wealth. Part of this is because yoga has been successfully marketed to women, the educated and the wealthier – disposable income, learning about other cultures and concerns with beauty make this demographic a perfect market for the selling of yoga. But there is more to this part of the story that I think will reveal more about the mechanisms of culture in the market, and I would like to investigate these mechanisms that target certain cultural products to certain groups. Second, I would also like to try to examine how the practice of yoga fits into and out of the larger habitus of the New Age

in the U.S. – this means further examining the dialectic between Euro-Americans who embrace the various ideologies New Age and Indo-Americans who are able to recognize these ideologies in their own practices. I have tried to excavate this dialectic but I believe more can be done via visits to temples where yoga is taught, some conversations with Euro-Americans who practice yoga, Hindu Indo-Americans who follow Ramdev and through these methods further dialogue with those that wish to define yoga as not Hindu and those that want reclaim yoga as Hindu. How do these groups effect, influence, embrace and even madden each other, specific to the practice of yoga, and how are these interactions emblematic of the larger forces of globalization, colonialism and capitalism? Third, it is has recently come to my attention that yoga has also become quite popular in China and Iran, which is interesting since both China and Iran have governmental prohibitions of certain types of religious practice. Given that attention to capitalism is a large part of my analysis, I may in the future have to veer outside of the boundaries of the U.S. to get a better handle on how the mechanisms of the market and the commodification of yoga has allowed the practice of yoga to thrive in unexpected places, thus giving me a fuller picture of how capitalism allows certain practices (that have religious histories) to translate into a myriad of contexts.

It is this translation of practice across time, place and economies that fuels this dissertation. Tracing yoga, from the time it enthralled the imagination of Thoreau through its current entanglements with the First Amendment has led me to believe that the examination of religion must taken into account economic forces, especially after the dawn of industrialization and the advent of alienation. There is an elective affinity
between these two forces, and this affinity has effected and continues to influence the translation and practice of yoga in the U.S.
APPENDIX

LIST OF YOGIS THAT INFLUENCED PRACTICE IN THE U.S.

Patanjali: 3rd Century, B.C.E.
Yogi Swatmarama: 15th or 16th Century, C.E.
Ralph Waldo Emerson: 1803 – 1882
Henry David Thoreau: 1817 – 1862
Helena Blavatsky: 1831 – 1891
Henry Steel Olcott: 1832 – 1907
William Quan Judge: 1851 – 1896
Swami Vivekananda: 1863 – 1902
Pierre Bernard (a.k.a. Oom the Omnipotent): 1875 – 1955
Swami Yogananada: 1893 – 1952
Sri Tirumala Krishnamacharya: 1888 – 1989
Eugenie Peterson (a.k.a. Indra Devi): 1889 – 2002
Bellur Krishnamacharya Sundararaja Iyengar: 1918 – present
Pattabhi Jois: 1915 – 2009
Yogi Bhajan: 1929 – 2004
Swami Satchidananda: 1914 – 2002
Baba Ram Dev: unknown – present
Bikram Choudhury: 1946 - present
LIST OF REFERENCES


The Bhagvat-Geeta or Dialogues of Kreeshna and Arjoon In Eighteen Lectures, trans. Charles Wilson (Calcutta, India: Bengal Superior Press, 1845).


Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994).


“Court Gets Plea from Yogananda: Swami in Miami Seeks to Stay in Town Despite Ire of 200 Husbands,” The Los Angeles Times, 5 February 1928.


“Don Yellow Robe?” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 11 July 1897.

“DR. STONE LOST LIFE AS WIFE LOOKED ON; Purdue University Head Fell Down Canadian Precipice When a Rock Gave Way. SHE TRIED TO REACH HIM But was Marooned on Ledge and Remained There Foodless Eight Days Until Rescued,” *The New York Times*, 28 July 1921


Aziz Haniffa. “Swami Ramdev aims to train instructors to spread authentic yoga,” India Abroad, 8 August 2008.


Martha Hodes, White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the 19th-Century South (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

E. Brooks Holifield, Theology in America – Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).


“Hundreds Pay Tribute at Rites for Yogananda,” The Los Angeles Times, 12 March 1952.


Carl T. Jackson, Vedanta for the West (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994)


“JOINS YOGA COLONY: Educator’s Wife Goes to Follow Strange God. Purdue’s University Head Divorced After Philosophy Is Said to Have Taken Wife to South Sea Islands,” The Chicago Defender (Big Weekend Edition), 29 July 1911.


Ida Jean Kain, “Your Figure Madam,” The Atlanta Constitution, 15 October 1937.


Elizabeth Katedsky, First There Is a Mountain: A Yoga Romance (Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company, 2004).


233


“Mother vs. Mrs. Tingley In Suit For Child,” The Los Angeles Times, 9 January 1903.


Leslie Murray, Liberal Protestantism and Science (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007).


Malini Johar Schueller, US Orientalisms: Race, Nation and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890 (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press).


“Swamis Accuse Each Other in Legal Battle,” The Los Angeles Times, 12 May 1935.


“UNDER YOGA SPELL; Wife of a College President Leaves Home and Children. HER HUSBAND IS CRUSHED Offers to Resign, but Is Urged by Trustees to Serve,” The Washington Post, 3 May 1908.


“Young Fugitive Says He Is Son of Mrs. Tingley,” Chicago Daily Tribune 18 November 1903.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Prior to attending the University of Florida for her doctoral studies, Shreena Niketa Divyakant Gandhi completed her Masters of Theological Studies at Harvard Divinity School, where her areas of focus were 'Christianity and Culture,' and 'World Religions.' Gandhi received her bachelor's degree at Swarthmore College, where her major was religious studies. Since high school, she has been fascinated with U.S. history and religious history – this dissertation is the product of this fifteen-year fascination.