

# The Development of Modern Yoga: A Survey of the Field

## **Abstract:**

Yoga is now found in urban centres and rural retreats across the world as well as in its historical home in the Indian sub-continent. What is now practiced as yoga across the globe has a long history of transnational intercultural exchange and has been considered by some as an outgrowth of Neo-Hinduism. Although the popularisation of yoga is often cited in theories about 'Easternization' or the 're-enchantment' of the West since the late twentieth century, most of these theories make little reference to the growing number of historical, sociological and anthropological studies of modern yoga. This article will consider how the apparent dichotomy between yoga as a physical fitness activity (often termed 'hatha yoga') and/or as a 'spiritual practice' developed historically and discuss recent trends in the research.

Popular association of the word 'yoga' is now focused around the semi-secular practice of 'postures' (*āsana*). Recent estimates for the number of these kinds of yoga practitioners have been as high as 2.5 million in Britain and 15 million in the United States (Singleton and Byrne 2008, p. 1). Although the first association may be with a largely secular activity, there is also an assumption that yoga is related to Indian religiosity or contemporary spirituality. Yoga enthusiasts often emphasise that the etymological root of yoga is 'yuj' which means 'to join' or 'yoke' (Whitney 1997, p. 132) and many contemporary yoga practitioners would explain that yoga means joining of the self to God, or the finite to the infinite. Yet in both historical and contemporary contexts the word yoga can have a range of meanings including 'skill in work, desireless action, acquisition of true knowledge, indifference to pleasure and pain, addition (in arithmetic), and conjunction (in astronomy)' (Banerji 1995, p. 44). Like the diverse uses for its linguistic signifier, modern transnational yoga consists of a vast range of embodied practices and a diversity of ideas about the meaning of these practices.

Recently scholars have begun to unravel the vast historical and contextual web of yoga in the modern world. What is understood as yoga has changed radically in the modern period and much of the relatively nascent field of 'modern yoga studies' has been working to map and clarify these developments. A growing number of established academics are exploring modern yoga as a reflection of both personal and professional interest. A high number of contributors to a recent edited

volume on modern yoga are openly ‘scholar practitioners’ (Singleton and Byrne 2008). To some extent this follows the lead of a number of scholars who have given rigorous attention to particular aspects of the yoga practice traditions (e.g. Chapple 2005, Hallstrom 1999 and Caldwell 2001). Rigorous academic reflection by ‘Western’ scholar–practitioners is an interesting development for both the future of modern yoga studies and the interdisciplinary development of Religious Studies. This article will attempt to summarise the interdisciplinary literature relevant to the phenomena of modern yoga, drawing attention to recent contributions to the literature.

Although usually thought of as Hindu, historically the techniques of yoga have also been used by Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs while maintaining their own metaphysical beliefs (Bronkhorst 1998, Sarbacker 2005, Eliade 1954 and 1963). Meditation techniques and seated figures on ancient seals aside, the physical postures now associated with yoga are first recorded as practices by the Nātha ascetic tradition and groups of renunciates in northern India between 900-1200 AD (Banerjea 1999, Briggs 2001, Liberman 2008 and Sarbacker 2005). Other important historical referents for modern yoga traditions would include the fifteenth-sixteenth century *Haṭhapradīpikā* and the medieval Siddha traditions (White 1996). In an attempt to trace the history of the postural practice, Gudrun Bühnemann has recently published a book reproducing illustrations of yoga āsana from extant illustrated manuscripts, the earliest dating from 1734 (2007a and 2007b).

However, the philosophical tradition of yoga is understood as being codified in Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras* which were written sometime between 300 and 500 CE (Woods 1914). The *Yoga Sūtra* is a collection of aphorisms, often described as *aṣṭāṅgayoga* (eight-limbed yoga). The objective of the practice outlined in the *Yoga Sūtras* is an experience of complete cessation of the fluctuations of the mind. Commentators defined this goal as consciousness (*puruṣa*) unfettered by matter (*prakṛti*) or the merging of the practitioner’s true self (*ātman*) with the ultimate principle of the universe (*Brahma*).<sup>i</sup> There are eight aspects of Patañjali’s exposition of yoga which are at times considered sequential and at others more a non-linear guide for practice.<sup>ii</sup>

There have certainly been a variety of religious groups using principles related to those outlined in Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras* throughout Indian history. The

*Yoga Sūtras* are frequently cited by modern yoga groups as the foundation of the practice. However Mark Singleton (2008a) has recently argued that the notion of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* as the foundation of yoga can better be understood as a creation of nineteenth-century Orientalist and Indian nationalists discourses. However, Kenneth Liberman (2008) emphasises that there are significant continuities in the objects of yoga practice, as defined in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, from various social-historical permutations through the present day. Other classical texts are also often used as referents for modern yoga practice, particularly the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the *Gheraṇḍa Samhitā*, the *Śiva Samhitā*. A forthcoming work edited by David Gordon White promises to provide new original translations of these texts, as well as others including Buddhist and Jain works which have influenced and inspired the many and varied yoga traditions.

In mapping 'Modern Yoga', Elizabeth de Michelis (2008) has set out a helpful typology which draws attention to what are sometimes vastly different manifestations of phenomena described as 'yoga'. She has outlined five ideal-typical descriptions of Modern Yoga: 1. Early modern **psychosomatic** yoga of Vivekananda (1863-1902), epitomised by his book *Rajah Yoga* (1896), a model which influenced the other ideal types; 2. **Neo-Hindu** yoga which incorporates nationalistic and religious ideals usually with a physically-based practice; 3. **Postural** yoga which puts an emphasis on the orthopraxy of postures (*āsana*) and may have little explicit ideological doctrine; 4. **Meditational** yoga which focuses on a specific set of meditations (usually a practice of *dhāraṇā* or concentration with an object) rather than postural practices. The meditation-focused groups are more likely to have explicit ideological content than the postural forms and may overlap significantly with 5. **Denominational** yoga which focuses more explicitly on doctrine, *bhakti* (a practice of devotion and service towards a manifestation of the divine) and *darśan* (seeing and being seen by a manifestation of divinity). Denominational yoga groups often focus on a particular guru or *avatār* (an incarnation of a divine being in a human form). These ideal-typical distinctions can be helpful in understanding the variety of contemporary manifestations of 'yoga' with the caveat that those teaching and practicing 'yoga' often embody elements of multiple types. Keeping in mind the various aspects of yoga illustrated by this

typology may help orient the reader in the multifaceted traditions of modern globalised yoga.

### **Origins of a 'modern' yoga**

A defining characteristic of the 'modern era' (post-1500) for European-based cultures has been an increasing emphasis on empirical and rational investigation of the world, which has been closely related to a general challenge of institutional religious authority. The unique plausibility structures of established religions, particularly that of Christianity in Europe, was challenged by scientific investigation and the increasing coexistence of mutually exclusive religious worldviews. Part of the appeal of yoga as it was popularised in Western countries (Europe and the Americas in particular) has been a belief in yoga's practical, 'scientific' benefits in terms of health and 'well-being' together with yoga's association with an ancient (i.e. legitimate) spiritual tradition. Elizabeth de Michelis (2008) has characterised 'modern' as opposed to pre-modern yoga as emphasizing the expression of yoga as significantly more privatised, commodified and medicalised than pre-modern manifestations of yoga. An emphasis on 'spiritual' rather than religious roots of yoga has allowed many to use it as a supplement to any existing religious affiliations (Hasselle-Newcombe 2005). Although some Christians have vocally objected in principle to any spiritual practice of Indian origin as being un-Christian (e.g. and Gibson 2005), other evangelical Christians have modified the physical exercises associated with yoga to be in alignment with their beliefs (e.g. Cooke 2008).

Sarah Strauss has argued that yoga offers an unusual example of the movement of an idea from the 'periphery' of an empire to the 'centre' of power (2005, p. 51), an idea also presented in a geographical analysis by Anne-Cécile Hoyez (2005 and 2007). However, as the intellectual and social history of modern yoga practice becomes more disentangled by scholars, it becomes clear that what we now call yoga is a product of a deeply collaboratively and mutually transformative interaction between Indians and Europeans from the beginning of the modern period. The modern period was also characterised by European trade with India and eventually the direct rule of most of India by the British. The educated classes of

India re-examined their religious traditions in response to the new trade and power relationships. Recent scholarship on modern yoga emphasises the ways yoga was reconceptualised and transformed within the Indian subcontinent even before it became a spiritual 'export'.

In the British colonial imagination, yogis were first associated with immoral 'Tantrics', 'Thuggee' gangs and militant wandering ascetics. Mark Singleton (2008b and forthcoming) has explored the travel narratives of Europeans commenting on those termed 'yogi', and notes that up into the early twentieth century these figures were largely objects of morbid fascination for European 'tourists' and shame for upwardly mobile Indians. Forthcoming work by David Gordon White (2009) will also emphasise the disparity between those labeled 'yogis' in Indian history and the practices described as 'yoga' by the classical religious texts. White (2003) has already considered in detail the extant evidence about the perception and practice of tantric practitioners in Indian history. A major transformation of the conceptualisation of the 'yogi' occurred when Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) 'sanitised' the term yoga and popularised it as a positive spiritual export, an area where India had something to teach the 'materialistic West' (De Michelis 2005 and Singleton 2008b and forthcoming). Although Vivekananda's widely discussed appearance at the 1893 Chicago Parliament of Religions was a seminal moment for modern yoga, the promotion of India as idealised spiritual centre had already been promoted by others including the Theosophical Society (founded in 1874) and Max Müller, an Orientalist who became Oxford's first professor of Comparative Theology in 1868 (Müller 1882 and 1898).

The work of Elizabeth de Michelis (2004) has positioned Vivekananda's exposition of yoga as deeply enmeshed in the 'Neo-Vedānta' of the Bengali Hindu Resistance and the ideology of the Brahmo Samaj founded by reformer Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1833). Although Ram Mohun Roy's movement attracted only a small number of Calcutta's elite as formal members, its social reform agenda has been extremely influential. De Michelis has suggested that the defining characteristic of Vivekananda's sanitised 'yoga' was a unique blend of Roy's Neo-Vedānta with mesmeric and New Thought ideas that Vivekananda internalised upon his arrival to the United States (2005). Carl Jackson (1975 and 1981) and Arthur Versluis (1993) have studied the impact of Asian religions on Transcendentalist and New Thought

understandings in the United States both before and after Vivekananda's visit. In the less than ten years between his 1893 arrival in the United States and his death in 1902, Vivekananda lectured prolifically on the subject of yoga. He also established a religious institution in the name of his guru, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission which has had an influential legacy of social service in India (Beckerlegge 2000 and 2006) and a more subtle impact as an institution of Indian religiosity which encouraged non-Indians to affiliate (Beckerlegge 2004, French 1974 and Miller 2005).

Perhaps the most pervasive influence of Vivekananda's thought on the understanding of what it means to practice yoga is his characterizations of 'types' or 'paths' (*marg*) of yoga. Vivekananda subsumed the multiplicity of yoga paths and traditions into four main groups suitable for people of different inclination and temperament. The first of these is *Karma Yoga*, 'the manner in which a man realises his own divinity through works and duty'. The second is *Bhakti Yoga*, 'the realization of a divinity through devotion to and love of a personal God' (from De Michelis 2005, p. 123). The third is called, *Rajah Yoga*, described as 'the realization of divinity through control of the mind' and Vivekananda considered that this had been outlined by Patañjali in the *Yoga Sūtras* (De Michelis 2005, p. 151). The fourth is *Gnana Yoga* (*Jñāna Yoga*) or the realization of man's own divinity through knowledge. Vivekananda's tract *Rajah Yoga* (1896) circulated widely; until the 1980s, Vivekananda's lectures on yoga were reprinted in Britain at least once a decade.<sup>iii</sup> Vivekananda was first Indian whose English texts were widely read outside India as an invitation for the reader to become aligned with Indian spirituality.

### **An imagined community of modern yoga**

Texts on yoga, particularly those produced by the Theosophical Society and Swami Sivananda (1887-1963) were printed in India and circulated globally in the early twentieth century. The Theosophical Society, although it had its own theological agenda, printed over 750 esoteric titles between 1890 and 1920 from its headquarters in Adyar, then a suburb of Madras. While the majority of these books discussed Theosophical theology, quite a few of these books were nominally related to yoga, including reprints of Vivekananda's lectures, while others were sponsored translations of Indian texts.<sup>iv</sup> Swami Sivananda (1887-1963) and his *Divine Light*

Society's voluminous publishing house also churned out cheaply produced pamphlets and books on yoga that were distributed globally. Sarah Strauss argues that Sivananda picked up Vivekananda's categories of yoga, paralleling Sivananda's injunctions to 'Serve, Love, Meditate, Realise' with Vivekananda's paths of yoga (Strauss, 2005, p. 9). Sivananda encouraged those who came across his prolific publications to write to him directly for advice, creating a guru-by-post service (Strauss, 2005, p. 45). Although Sivananda himself rarely left Rishikesh, from the 1960s onwards he sent out a number of disciples to teach throughout India and abroad and encouraged aspiring yogis word-wide to attend his Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy for personal instruction in Rishikesh. One of the most well-known students of Sivananda was the religious studies scholar Mircea Eliade, a complex figure whose opinions on yoga are touched upon in both his academic and fictional writings (Urban 2003 197-186).

These early yoga books and pamphlets were largely distributed by specialist mail-order lists run by esoteric bookstores, particularly Watkins Bookstore in London (from 1893) and Weiser Antiquarian in New York City (from 1926) whose locations also served as a hub for networking between textual and personal sources of knowledge about yoga (Newcombe 2008b). The overlap of readership in esoteric titles and spiritual seekers in the West, supports De Michelis' intuition that modern yoga is intimately related to Western esotericism. As Sarah Strauss has pointed out, those reading such texts became a kind of 'imagined community' of people linked by the printed word (2005, pp. 40-41). Srinivas Aravamudan (2007) has taken this concept further, expanding upon the development of what he terms 'Guru English', a 'linguistic registrar' that is 'the offspring of English education [in India] and religious rediscovery [both in India and the Anglophone world]' (p. 66). He traces the continuity and development of this transnational language of religiosity from the late eighteenth century Asiatic translation societies to the Brahma Samaj, Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Deepak Chopra (1946- ), exploring connections with authors Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), James Joyce (1882-1941), and Salman Rushdie (1947- ) as well as the nuclear scientist Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967) along the way.

Although printed material was an extremely influential form of regularising and defining the subject of modern yoga before the advent of the television and

affordable air travel, there were a number of Indian teachers of yoga in Europe and the Americas in the early twentieth century. One of the first resident teachers of Vedanta in London was Hari Prasad Shastri (1882-1956) who first found an audience for his lectures on yoga in 1929 through the Theosophical Society (Newcombe 2008). Yogendra (1897-1989) perhaps taught one of the first ‘modern yoga’ classes emphasizing the health benefits of physical postures to middle-class Indians in the Bombay suburb of Versova in 1919 (Goldberg forthcoming). Between 1920-1922, Yoegendra was teaching yoga in Harrison, New York and having discussions with western health-promoters including Benedict Lust, Bernarr Macfadden and John Harvey Kellogg (Rodrigues 1982). As Catherine Albanise has noted, Yogendra was a ‘blended product of East and West’ (Albanese 2005, p. 66). Yogendra’s publications *Yoga Āsanas Simplified* (1928) and *Yoga Personal Hygiene* (1931) were significant in how they carved ‘out the kind of public health and fitness regimen that today dominates the transnational yoga industry—often in explicit opposition to the secretive, mystical *haṭha yogi*’ (Singleton 2008b). Paramhansa Yogananda (1893-1952) also arrived in the United States in 1920 and taught a system of ‘Body Perfection through Will’ originally called ‘Yogoda’, but later evolving into ‘Kriya Yoga’ and the Self Realization Fellowship (Aravamudan 2007, 59-62 and Singleton forthcoming).



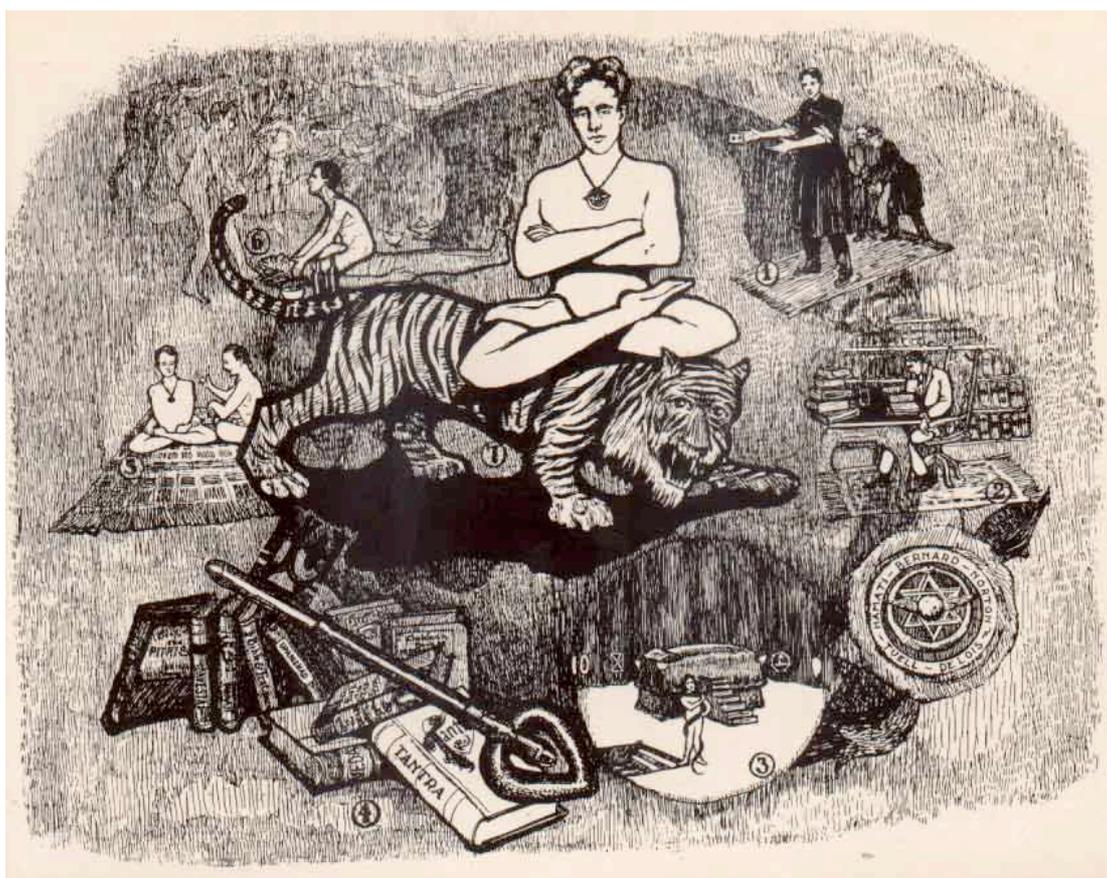
**Figure 1: Paramhansa Yogananda is pictured with his first Afro-American Yogoda Study Group in Washington D.C. 1927. Photo courtesy of Ram Smith. Retrieved on 27 April 2008 from <http://www.yoganandaafrikan-american.com/>.**

While some creating these books on yoga were Indian nationals referencing a personal guru-śiṣya relationship, others were autodidacts claiming such a

relationship. For example, one of the best-selling authors on yoga in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, 'Yogi Ramacharaka', was actually the Chicago-based William Walter Atkinson (1892-1932), with significant involvement in New Thought philosophy. Yoga Ramacharaka's books were very popular in Britain through the 1960s and 1970s and remain in print to this day (Albanese 2006 and Singleton 2007a). Suzanne Newcombe has argued that the writings of Paul Brunton (1898-1981), born Ralph Hurst, did much to popularise 'the Quest' for spiritual meaning through Indian spirituality, with his *A Search in Secret India* (1934) becoming a kind of twentieth century *Pilgrim's Progress* for middle-class seekers (2008b). Brunton's writings contributed greatly to the global fame of the reclusive Indian ascetic Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) who resided on a hill near the south Indian city of Tiruvannamalai (see also Forsthoefel 2005).

### **Tantric Yoga and Sex Magick**

Yogis have often had associations with the social margins of society and the majority of those who popularised modern yoga worked hard to present yoga as a respectable, middle-class activity. However, there were also a minority of those involved in the creation of modern yoga which reveled in its scandalous associations. As early as 1913, Alistair Crowley was mining Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* for his experiments in obtaining magical power (Urban 2003). There was also an overlap between an Indian teacher of tantra (still unidentified) and those participating in western ritual magic in the 1940s (Bogdan 2006). A significant inspiration for these 'magicians' were the translations of tantric texts by 'Arthur Avalon', a name Kathleen Taylor (2001) has argued persuasively was a joint persona of Sir John Woodroffe (who knew some Sanskrit) and several Bengali collaborators. Woodroffe was an English barrister and later judge in Calcutta between 1890 and 1922, who likely became an initiate of Tantric guru named Śiva Candra Vidyārṇava Baṭṭacāryā, popular amongst middle-class Bengalis. Although he kept his personal life largely private, returning to England as a Reader in Indian Law at All Soul's College, Oxford, Woodroffe's translations of Tantric texts influenced understandings of yoga throughout the twentieth century (Newcombe 2008b, 42 and Urban 2003, 136-147).



**Figure 2: Pierre Bernard's illustration of the stages of the tantric path  
From Beranard's one-issue *International Journal of the Tantrik Order*, 1906.**

In the United States, one of the first public teachers of 'yoga' was a Pierre Arnold Bernard (c.1875-1955) who founded a 'Tantrik Order' in the United States in 1906 and taught posture-focused yoga in the vacation area of Nyack, in upstate New York (Urban 2001). Pierre Bernard's significance, besides being one of the first to teach a variant modern yoga in the United States, was that he taught two other individuals who had significant influences on the popularisation of modern yoga in the mid-twentieth century: Sir Paul Dukes (1889-1967) and Theos Bernard (1908-1947), reportedly a nephew of Pierre Bernard (Newcombe 2008b). Theos Bernard's book *Hatha Yoga* (1944) was perhaps the first in which a Western man published photographs demonstrating his ability to achieve the physical postures listed in medieval Sanskrit texts, and to make public claims about the ritual awakening of Kundalini after a secret initiation in India. (Hackett 2004). Associations of sex-magic and the occult continue into the present as a 'darker' side of mainstream 'yoga'

classes. Although largely purged from the mainstream modern yoga, overlaps between western esotericism and ‘tantric yoga’ continue (Urban 2003, pp. 203-281 and Urban 2006) – with a notably tenuous link to Indian tantric traditions for which there is textual and architectural evidence (White 2006).

### **‘Medicalisation’ and the development of modern yoga**

Although colonialists interested in India’s historical religions have emphasised the mythological aspect of the gods and goddess, many Indians tend to view Indian foundational religious texts as embodying proto-scientific truths and metaphorical keys to understanding the physical world (White 2003 and Nanda 2003). Therefore, using western biomedical science to verify and explore the traditional techniques of Indian culture is simultaneously modern and traditional. Mark Singleton has highlighted work that attempts to map esoteric yogic anatomy onto the western medical understanding of the human body in as early as 1888 (Singleton 2008). Joseph Alter has detailed some of the ways early proponents of modern yoga, particularly Swami Kuvalayananda (1883-1966) chronicled the results of experimental research on the physiological effects of āsana, prāṇāyāma and meditation techniques. In his attempt to explaining the significance of classical concepts like prāṇa in western biomedical terms, Kuvalayananda imbued yoga practice with both a scientific gravitas and nationalistic importance. Alter argues that Kuvalayananda’s project exemplifies the ‘harmonic hybridity that has enabled Yoga to colonise the West, so to speak’ (Alter 2004, p. 106). But Kuvalayananda’s influence on modern globalised yoga was perhaps most significant in an indirect way. Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888-1989), teacher of many of the most popular transnational posture-focused yoga teachers, visited Lonavala in 1934, the year that B.K.S. Iyengar (1918- ) moved to Krishnamacharya’s home in Mysore (Iyengar 1988). B.K.S. Iyengar and Krishnamacharya’s son T.K.V. Desikachar (1938- ), both popular yoga teachers with transnational followings, have emphasised the potential health benefits of yoga, benefits seen as compatible with biomedical science, in their influential presentations of yoga to students in Europe and the Anglophone world (Cecomori 2001, Desponds 2007, Fuchs 1990 and Newcombe 2008b).

The project of exploring the effects of yoga and meditation with biomedical techniques is one that was also taken up in Europe, North America and elsewhere in the developed world. Yoga as a therapeutic technique can be understood as part of a greater movement for 'holistic health' that was gaining popular currency in the 1970s and 80s (Power 1991). In the first half of the twentieth century, biomedical science experienced a huge boost in public perception of its efficacy, particularly with the mass production of penicillin during World War II. However, from the early 1960s, this public trust was undermined, especially for women, when severely deformed children were born to expectant mothers prescribed thalidomide for morning sickness during pregnancy (Lock 1997, pp. 137-8). There was increasing popular opinion that doctors might not always know best, a critical view that dovetailed with other re-evaluations of power relations inherent in the civil rights and second wave feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s (Newcombe 2007). Particularly after Robert Benson's work at Harvard in the 1970s on the 'Relaxation Response', a variety of 'yoga' and 'meditation techniques' have been subjected to medical trials. Elizabeth De Michelis has recently considered and summarised some of the biomedical studies addressing the clinical efficacy of yoga as therapy (De Michelis 2007).

Although much of the popularization of modern yoga has been characterised by accommodation and incorporation of western biomedical thought, modern yoga has also had a significant relationship to a revivalist movement for 'traditional' Indian medicine, Ayurveda. Although perhaps most yoga practitioners have little contact with Ayurvedic medicine, most of those popularizing Ayurveda have a familiarity with modern yoga. Similar to ideas of a 'Modern Yoga', 'Neo-Hinduism' or 'Neo-Vedanta', some scholars have written about the emergence of 'New Age Ayurveda' as something distinct from the complex and not always gentle 'traditional' Ayurveda (Reddy 2002, Zimmerman 1992 and Zysk 2001). More generally, the complex relationship of Ayurveda with biomedicine, extends and complicates the relationship between yoga and biomedicine (Langford 1999 and 2002, Reddy 2004, Wujastyk and Smith 2008, and Warriar forthcoming). Perhaps the most explicit overlap of popularising yoga and Ayurveda has been the presentation by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (c.1917-2008), simultaneously claiming his initiatives as being scientific and not religious in nature (Newcombe 2008a, Jennotat 2008 and

Humes 2005 and 2008). More generally, an increasing interest in a pro-active way of thinking about maintaining health and ‘well-being’ through the practice of yoga has encouraged the development of transnational ‘therapeutic landscapes’ associated with modern yoga (Hoyez 2007).

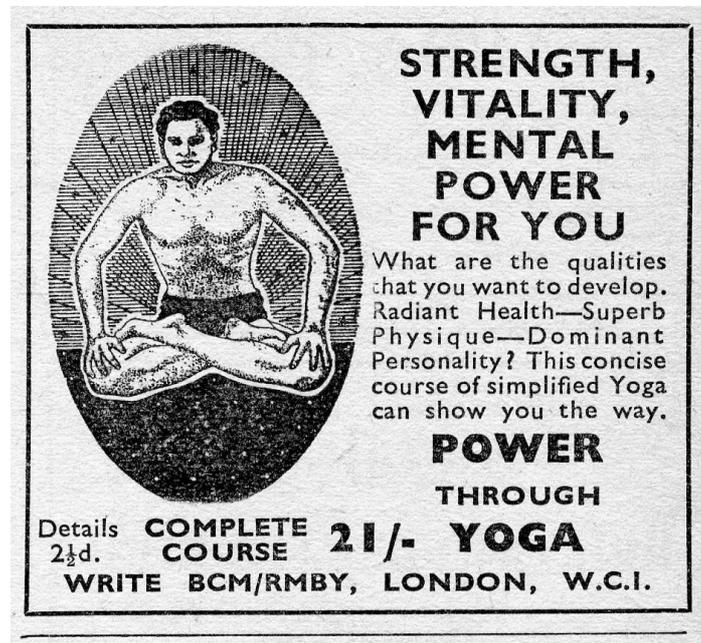
### **‘Physical Culture’ and Modern Yoga**

Although the term ‘physical culture’ is now antiquated, it is essential to understanding the development of modern yoga. The nineteenth century was full of movements towards improving human health and glorifying God through the improvement of the human physique. Sometimes these took the form of explicitly religious works, such as muscular Christianity and the development of the YMCA (Alter 2004a and van der Veer 2001). Norman Sjoman (1996) was the first to draw attention to the cotemporaneous gymnastics and yoga traditions being sponsored at the Mysore Palace under the patronage of Krishnaraja Wodeyar (1884-1940), a theme continued by the work of Mark Singleton and Elliott Goldberg.

Cartesian dualism was not a feature of modern physical culture movements. However, nationalism, martialism (Alter 1994, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2004a, 2006 and 2007) and eugenic improvement (Singleton 2007b) became features of physical culture and some manifestations of modern yoga. By World War II, physical culture had become closely linked with Fascism through association with mass displays of physical ‘drills’ in the Stalinist Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, but also through personal associations with Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini and Oswald Mosley in Britain (Wilk 2006). After the Second World War yoga, popularly associated with Gandhi’s successful non-violent independence movement, perhaps became an appropriate replacement for ‘physical culture’ while maintaining many nearly identical physical practices (Singleton forthcoming and Goldberg forthcoming).

British pamphlets and magazines promoting health and physical fitness were widely circulating in India, particularly amongst the army regiments. The pages of European physical culture journals were also one of the first forums in which articles exploring āsana techniques could be found as regular features from 1933 onward in the pages of *Health and Strength*; advertisements for yoga correspondence courses quickly followed. Although yoga techniques were of

interest to physical culturists in general, the style of exercise presented as 'yoga' was more typical of the type of exercise expected of women than men in Europe and the Americas (Newcombe 2007 and Singleton 2008b).



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**Figure 3: Advert for a postal yoga course from *Health & Strength* 25 October 1956, p. 52. Photograph courtesy of *Health & Strength*.**

A neo-classical Grecian ideal of physical culture undoubtedly influenced Peter McIntosh, one of the first English historians of sport, to make the decision to allow yoga as taught by the students of B.K.S. Iyengar to be part of the Physical Education department in the Inner London Educational Authority in 1969. Despite issuing a requirement that yoga 'instruction is confined to 'āsanas' and 'prāṇāyāmas' (postures and breathing disciplines) and not extended to the philosophy of Yoga as a whole', McIntosh understood the somatic experience of yoga as relating to the wider experience of being human (Newcombe 2008b). This decision to keep the 'philosophy of Yoga as a whole' out of state-sponsored courses in a physical education department was also an explicit attempt to professionalise and institutionalise a subject that had some rather unprofessional associations.

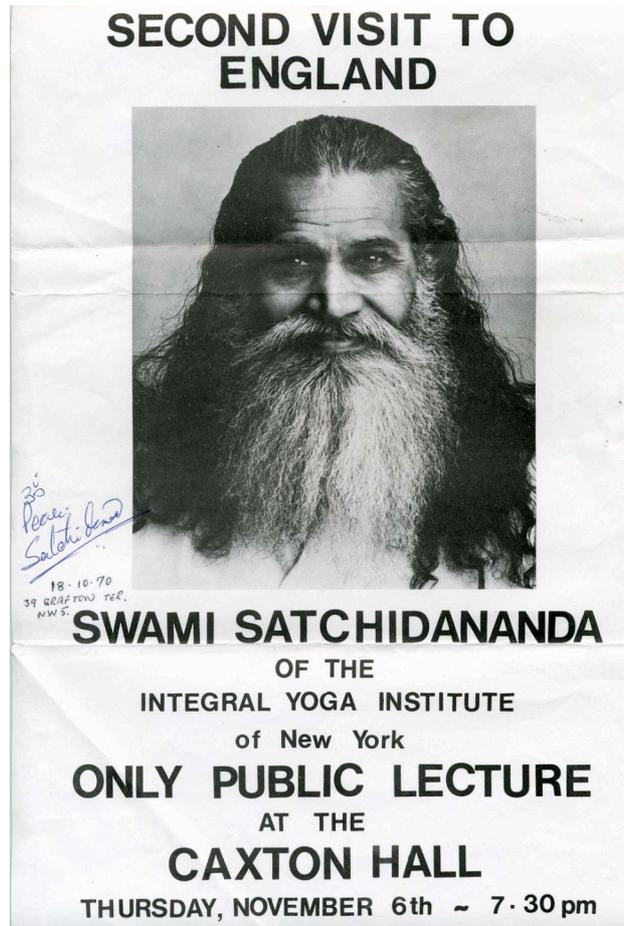
## Gurus outside India

In the United States, immigration of people of Asian origin was severely limited by the terms of the Immigration Act of 1925, only rescinded in 1965. Conventional wisdom holds this to be a significant limiting factor in the popularization of yoga in the Americas. However Indian nationals, as citizens of the Commonwealth, had a right to a British passport upon application until 1962. It was only after this date that Indian immigration into Britain became much more restrictive. Significantly several Indian spiritual teachers, notably Meher Baba (1894-1969), the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (c.1917-2008) and various members of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Mission traveled to both Europe and the United States attracting small numbers of disciples before 1965. Richard Hittleman (1927-1991) and Indra Devi (1899-2002) are known to have popularised forms of āsana-focused modern yoga in 1950s America with some success. The influential Esalen Institute was founded in 1962, its co-founder Michael Murphy having been significantly inspired by the work of Aurobindo (Kripal 2005). The historical record therefore suggests that immigration legislation was not the primary reason why Indian guru figures only became increasingly popular to the European and North American public from the late 1960s.

The more immediate causal reason for the explosion of interest in Indian spirituality in the late 1960s may have been the media attention given to the interests of music celebrities, particularly The Beatles. The Beatles' celebrity status in 1960s Britain was unprecedented; their lives and interests were avidly followed in the press like 'some all-embracing strip cartoon' (Sandbrook 2006, p. 201). They had reached the pinnacle of 'success' for their generation, but still were looking for something 'more'. At first the exploration into India may have been primarily for musical inspiration, like a generation of Jazz musicians before them (Porter 1998 and Cole 1976). But it was also a search for personal meaning: on a popular UK television show in 1967, George Harrison affirmed that his life goal was 'to manifest divinity and become one with the creator' while Lennon affirmed that both Christianity and Transcendental Meditation were the answer ("Beatles 'believe in rebirth'" 1967).

For the general population, the Beatles' interest in the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation – extensively covered in the press at the end of 1967 and the beginning of 1968 – defined a moment when interest in yoga and meditation were normalised. Several Indian spiritual teachers illustrated in *The Autobiography of a Yogi* (namely Paramahansa Yogananda, Śri Yukteswar Giri, Śri Lahiri Mahasaya and Mahavatar Babaji) can be found among the crowd on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967). As music journalist Ian MacDonald has suggested, 'when The Beatles visually name-checked their cultural icons on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper*, they meant to encourage popular curiosity' (from Partridge 2005, p. 152). While the most immediate precedent for popular musicians interest in Indian spirituality may have been the inspirational journeys of The Beat poets (Baker 2008) and Jazz musicians, we have seen that religious exchange between India and 'the West' already had a complex and tangled history. Most of the traffic between India and the 'West', the so-called 'hippie trail' had been established by the early 1960s; The Beatles 'widened the road' rather than blazed the trail (Newcombe 2008b, p. 153).

Although he did not leave India, Sivananda encouraged several of his students to propagate yoga and its postural forms abroad. One of the most widely known 'missionaries' to Europe and the Americas is Vishnudevananda (1927-1993) who left Rishikesh in 1957 to teach abroad, going on to establish the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres (headquartered in Quebec). Considering this development as 'Neo-Hinduism', Véronique Altglas has recently produced a comparative study of Sivananda and Siddha Yoga centres in France and Britain arguing that both groups appeal to a self-improvement ethic of the middle classes (2005, 2007a and 2007b). Sivananda's legacy was also popularised by Swami Satyananda (1923- ), who founded the Bihar Schools of Yoga, and Swami Satchidananda's (1914-2002), who appeared on stage at the 1969 Woodstock Music Festival and went on to found Integral Yoga Centres and Yogaville ashram in Virginia (Newcombe 2008b).



**Figure 4: Flier for a public talk by Swami Satchidananda in London, England on 18 October 1970. Photograph courtesy of Ken Thompson.**

These groups which De Michelis would characterise as ‘Modern Denominational Yoga’ have an established body of literature in the discipline of Sociology as New Religious Movements. While ‘yoga’ became associated with an activity perhaps previously described as physical culture, these Indian gurus attracted intense loyalty and inspired sometimes extreme lifestyle changes on the part of their followers, often young men and women disillusioned with traditional sources of authority in ‘Western’ culture. After 1968, Indian spirituality had a very visible presence in Western popular culture and many more people explored this ‘milieu’ than committed themselves to any single teacher (Campbell 1972 and 1978). The intensity of commitment to these groups and the interesting social effects have inspired significant studies on a number of individual movements including Osho/Rajneesh (e.g. Fox 2000, Goldman 1999, Palmer 1994, Urban 2005), the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness (ISKCON, but more popularly known

as the 'Hare Krishnas') (e.g. Rochford 2007, Dwyer and Cole 2007 and Bryant and Ekstrand 2004), Siddha Yoga (Altglas 2007a and 2007b, Caldwell 2001, Williamson 2005), Sathya Sai Baba (see Newcombe 2006) and Sahaja Yoga (Coney 1999) amongst other 'yoga' groups. Many of these groups self-describe their teachings as 'Bhakti Yoga', or living a life of service and devotion to an embodiment of the divine. The complexities of the overlap between these movements and the modern 'postural' yoga traditions is an area that has yet to be seriously explored.

### **Embodiment and Directions in Modern Yoga Studies**

Some recent work has emphasised the significance of the personal somatic experience in yoga, underlying a trend noticed more generally in the landscape of contemporary religiosity (e.g. Heelas 2008). Sociological and historical research suggests that forms of religiosity which emphasise the personal, experiential aspects of religious experience appear to be more popular than other forms of religiosity, a state of affairs which perhaps could be best conceptualised in the case of yoga as a continuation of Troeltsch's prediction of the rise of 'mystical religion' (Hasselle-Newcombe 2005). Klas Nevrin has emphasised the role contemporary yoga practice can have on increasing practitioners feelings of 'empowerment' and self-confidence (Nevrin 2008). Much of this discussion of empowerment in the contemporary practice of yoga has been in the context of the recently popular of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga as taught by Pattabhi Jois (1915- ) (Burger 2006, Nevrin 2005, and Smith 2004, 2007 and 2008). Meanwhile Aspasia Leledaki and David Brown have begun to explore contemporary practitioners' understanding of yoga as a qualitative experience of 'liberation' from the perspective of the Sociology of Sport (Brown and Leledaki 2005 and Leledaki and Brown 2006).

Modern yoga, as popularly practiced in 'the West', may be growing in influence in India. For example, a 2005 *Time Out Mumbai* carried a feature on yoga centres in its 'Health and Fitness Special' as might be found in *Time Out London*. Agehananda Bharati's the concept of a 'pizza effect' (1970) might appear to be relevant when considering the growing practice of modern yoga in India, but with the crisscrossing networks of transnational cultural exchange, the situation is likely to be much more complex. Maya Warriar's study on the Mata Amritanandamayi

Mission in the context of Indian secularization and middle class religiosity in India form provides an important balance to the preponderance of work on manifestations of modern yoga in Europe, North American and the Commonwealth (Warrier 2005, and 2006). Joseph Alter (2008) and Raphaël Voix (2008) have also addressed recent research on forms of modern yoga popular in contemporary India. Allison Fish's research on the international copyright law and Bikram Chowdrey's attempt to copyright sequences of āsana also has interesting implications for the transmission of yoga in the modern world (2006). From considering the perspective of the consumer, Tara Brabazon has considered the 'anti-brand' marketing of a yoga fashion house as part of a 'post/neo/colonial fashion and movement' (2007). The way in which local communities interpret and change modern, transnationalised yoga movements is an area which is only beginning to be considered in modern yoga studies, but has had some attention by those looking at Sathya Sai Baba as a global movement (Kent 2005, Pereira 2008, Sangha and Sahoo 2006) and Sivananda Yoga Centres (Strauss 2005 and Altglas 2005, 2007a and 2007b).

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<sup>i</sup> The first metaphysical position is that provided by Sāṃkhya soteriology and the second is that of Advaita Vedānta. Sāṃkhya is one of the six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy and its classic ‘foundational text’, the *Sāṃkhyā-kārikās*, dates from the second or third century CE. Sāṃkhya posits two essential components to the universe, consciousness (*puruṣa*) and matter (*prakṛti*). When an individual can experience *puruṣa* independent from *prakṛti*, liberation (*kaivalya*) occurs, thus the worldview is dualistic in nature. Advaita Vedānta is an Indian soteriology codified by Ādi Śaṅkara (traditionally 788-820 CE) which holds that salvation from suffering and reincarnation (*mokṣa*) can only be obtained by a correct perception of the non-dual nature of reality.

<sup>ii</sup> Books for teaching the historical text and context of the Patañjali yoga tradition at the undergraduate level would include Chapple, C. (2008). *Yoga and the Luminous: With a Translation and Grammatical Analysis of Patanjali's Yoga Sutra*, SUNY Press; Connolly, P. (2007). *A Student's Guide to the History And Philosophy of Yoga*. London: Equinox; Flood, G. (1996). Chapter 4: Yoga & Renunciation. In: *An Introduction to Hinduism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Miller, B. (1996). *Yoga: Discipline of Freedom, The Yoga Sutra Attributed to Patanjali*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; and Samuel, G. (2008) *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>iii</sup> This generalisation is made through a search of [www.copac.uk](http://www.copac.uk), the merged library catalogue of the UK depository libraries on 10 April 2009.

<sup>iv</sup> This generalisation is made through a search of [www.copac.uk](http://www.copac.uk), the merged library catalogue of the UK depository libraries on 10 April 2009.

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