

Article

Beyond Cultural Boundaries: A Critical Study of Yoga's Global Adaptation, Decontextualization, and Root Reclamation

Vikas Patel^{1*}, Medha Singh²

1. Centre for the Study of Social Inclusion, Jawaharlal Nehru University
2. Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Article History

Received: 17-03-2026
Revised: 01-05-2026
Accepted: 15-05-2026
Published: 01-06-2026



Abstract:

Globalization has significantly expanded the reach of yoga, facilitating the widespread dissemination of the Bharatiya Knowledge System and yielding numerous benefits including enhanced accessibility, inclusivity, and scientific recognition of yoga's health benefits. However, this global expansion has also precipitated critical challenges—decontextualization, cultural appropriation, commodification, and pop-culturalization—that fundamentally distance the practice from its philosophical and spiritual foundations. Despite these obstacles, contemporary movements in India and worldwide are advocating for culturally conscious and ethically grounded approaches while actively working to reclaim yoga's traditional roots. This research article critically examines this dual narrative of adaptation and reclamation, offering a nuanced understanding of yoga as a global knowledge system. Through historical and cultural analysis, the paper investigates three key dimensions: the processes of yoga's adaptation in non-Indian contexts, the mechanisms of its decontextualization and commodification, and the ongoing initiatives aimed at restoring its philosophical integrity. By analyzing the transformation of yoga from a holistic spiritual discipline to a primarily fitness-oriented practice, this study illuminates the tensions between accessibility and authenticity, globalization and cultural preservation. The findings underscore the importance of decolonization efforts, amplification of South Asian voices, and ethical engagement in ensuring that yoga's future remains connected to its ancient roots while accommodating cross-cultural dialogue. Ultimately, this paper contributes to broader scholarly discussions on cultural appropriation, knowledge systems, and the challenges of preserving traditional practices in an increasingly globalized world.

DOI: 10.63960/sp.2026.sijmnds.3.2.42

Keywords: Globalization of Yoga, Cultural Decontextualization, Indian Knowledge Systems, Cultural Reappropriation

1. INTRODUCTION

Many people consider yoga to be India's greatest gift to humanity. Yoga's popularity has skyrocketed worldwide in the twenty-first century, and those who wish to attain both physical and mental well-being increasingly acknowledge it as an essential aspect of life. Images of people in form-fitting clothing executing various gymnastic-like poses with various equipment and props come to mind when we think about yoga today, particularly in the West. This visual representation raises a critical question: how and at what expense did yoga become so popular?

Yoga began as a spiritual and intellectual practice in Bharat and has since spread throughout the world, where

Synergy: International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies is a peer-reviewed open-access journal. © 2026 The Author(s). This is an open-access article published by Synergy Publication under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). This license permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and source are credited. The Author(s) retain copyright of their work. Synergy Publication is granted a non-exclusive right to publish the article and to identify itself as the original publisher. For more information, See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

millions of people practice it in different forms. With deep roots in Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism, yoga has been more than just an exercise. Moksha, or self-realization and emancipation, is the goal of yoga as a spiritual journey (Bryant, 2009). The goal of this spiritual discipline is to bring one's body and mind into harmony. Yoga techniques help practitioners achieve inner calm, self-discovery, and an exploration of the subtle and spiritual awakening by balancing the body, mind, and spirit.

Yoga, which comes from the Sanskrit word "yuj," meaning to combine, join, or connect. Continuous yoga practice combines the individual's consciousness with the universal consciousness in addition to integrating the individual with the environment and nature. Its ability to unite the soul with the divine, the tamasic propensity with the sattvika, and the diverse cultures into a single thread is unparalleled. Thus, it can be claimed that yoga is an all-encompassing system of exercises that creates balance in the physical (body), mental (thought), and spiritual (soul) facets of life and produces joy. According to academics, yoga is an activity that includes breath control, meditation, self-discipline, ethical behavior, and physical postures (asanas) (Feuerstein, 2008). However, the practice of yoga has changed significantly as it has expanded outside of India, especially to Western countries. Its existence and significance are frequently taken for granted, whether it is performed by well-known celebrities, offered in yoga studios and health clubs, or taught in classrooms and online by fitness instructors. Contemporary understanding of yoga has been separated from its philosophical and cultural origins, and it is commonly linked to methods for stress alleviation, relaxation, and physical fitness (Singleton, 2010).

When Indian spiritual leaders like Swami Vivekananda introduced yoga to the West in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it became incredibly popular all over the world. Vivekananda's address at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago introduced the Yogic philosophy to the modern Western world (Saraf, 2020). In the decades that followed, a number of yoga masters, including Paramahansa Yogananda, B.K.S. Iyengar, and Pattabhi Jois, contributed to the practice's globalization. In the middle to late 20th century, yoga became more and more popular in North America and Europe, particularly in the fitness and wellness industries. A growing body of research highlighting the health benefits of yoga further solidified its place in secular, non-spiritual contexts, which is one of the main reasons it became popular in the West (De Michelis, 2004).

While the popularity of the Bharatiya Knowledge System has grown significantly, worries about decontextualization and cultural (mis)appropriation have grown as a result of its global development. By focusing solely on physical postures at the expense of significant philosophical and spiritual components, many contemporary yoga practitioners have reduced yoga to a straightforward exercise regimen (Newcombe, 2019). Due to its commercialization, particularly in the West, yoga has been rebranded, often forgetting its South Asian roots (Jain, 2014). Western academicians like Mark Singleton have proposed drastically different perspectives on yoga in the modern day, separating it from its Bharatiya origins. As a result, scholars, practitioners, and cultural critics have contested the legitimacy of yoga, the ethics of its adaptation, and efforts to recover its ancient roots. This critical discourse reflects broader debates on cultural appropriation and knowledge systems that have been examined in contemporary scholarship (Bisht, 2025).

1.1 Research Questions

Through this research paper we aim to examine the complex journey of Yoga beyond its Bharatiya origins, analyzing its adaptation in non-Indian contexts, the processes of gradual decontextualization, and the ongoing efforts to reclaim its cultural and philosophical foundations. The study is guided by and aims to explore the following questions:

1. How has Yoga been adapted in the non-Indian contexts over time?
2. In what ways has Yoga been decontextualized and commodified in global settings?
3. What are the ongoing movements or initiatives aimed at reclaiming Yoga's traditional roots?

This paper will employ a historical and cultural analysis of yoga's global spread, examining both its advantages and disadvantages, to address these questions. It will look at how commercial organizations, internet media, and western fitness trends have changed yoga while highlighting the renewed efforts to preserve and recover its traditional roots.

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF YOGA

Yoga's origins can be found in the Indus Valley Civilization, which dates back more than 5000 years in Bharat.

From the locations where this civilization flourished, numerous seals and fossils depicting people performing Yoga Sadhna have been discovered. Lord Shiva is considered to be the first yogi, or the Adiyogi—who disseminated the knowledge and learning of the 112 ways through which humans can attain their ultimate nature to the Saptarishis, or the seven sages. The Rig Veda, which dates to approximately 1500 BC, contains the earliest known reference to yoga, which is linked to India's spiritual legacy. The Atharva Veda, written between 1200 and 1000 BC, mentions the significance of breath control. Twenty of the 108 Upanishads from the Pre-Classical era, which is associated with the early stages of Indian philosophy, discuss breathing, sound, and meditation techniques including pratyahara (withdrawal of senses) and pranayam (breathing exercise).

Yoga's life-giving technique has endured for eons because the sages and ascetics of ancient India are credited with creating it as a way to discover one's true nature and cultivate a closer relationship with the divine. Yoga encompasses a variety of activities, such as physical postures or asanas, breath control or pranayama, meditation, and the ethical precepts included in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras.

Yoga is founded on the fundamental idea of unity, which holds that the union of mind and spirit in the physical body creates a harmonic balance between the various facets of human existence and gives significance to the practice of yoga. More than merely physical exercises, yoga poses and asanas prepare the body for meditation and spiritual development. Asanas increase the body's strength, flexibility, and virility while also promoting physical wellness. In pranayama yoga, breath control is crucial for controlling the body's flow of prana, or life force. In today's demanding world, pranayama practices enhance mental clarity, promote respiratory health, and lessen anxiety, despair, tension, and terror. The foundation of yoga is meditation, which transcends outside distractions and delves into one's own depths, leading to inner serenity, mental clarity, and self-realization. The first spiritual reference to breathing meditation can be found in the Shrimad Bhagwat Gita, which was written 5000 years ago. About 2500 years ago, Lord Buddha introduced Vipassana and Anapanasati meditation to the globe and benefited the populace. In his foundational book, Patanjali, who is frequently dated to between the second and fourth centuries BCE and CE, codified the philosophical philosophy of Yoga. The ancient book known as the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali describes the Eight Limbs of Yoga, or "Ashtanga Yoga." The Eight Limbs offer a practical guide toward spiritual development and self-realization. The Eight Limbs are as follows (Patanjali, Yoga Sutras, Book II):

1. Yama: Ethical restraints or moral disciplines (e.g., non-violence, truth)
2. Niyama: Personal observances (e.g., self-discipline, contentment)
3. Asana: Physical postures, originally intended to prepare the body for meditation
4. Pranayama: Breath control, regulating energy through the breath
5. Pratyahara: Withdrawal of the senses, turning inward
6. Dharana: Concentration, focusing the mind on a single point
7. Dhyana: Meditation or sustained awareness
8. Samadhi: The ultimate state of meditative absorption, leading to self-realization or union with the divine

3. ADAPTATION OF YOGA IN NON-INDIAN CONTEXTS

As a result of yoga's spread outside of India and its absorption by non-Indians, its basic theory and practice have undergone significant modifications to better align with a variety of cultural values and modern lives. Globalization has made yoga more widely available, but it has also caused its meanings to change, particularly through commercialization, hybridization, and secularization. This section looks at how yoga has changed in non-Indian contexts, including how it has become a fitness-focused practice, how it has blended with Western wellness trends, and how it has been affected by its commercialization in the worldwide market.

3.1 Yoga as Health Wellness and Secular Practice

The transition from a spiritual practice to a mostly physical and health-focused exercise regimen has been one of the biggest modifications to yoga in non-Indian contexts. Traditional yoga emphasizes an eightfold path that includes meditation (dhyana), breath control (pranayama), spiritual emancipation (moksha), and ethical precepts (yamas and niyamas), according to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (Bryant, 2009). But in today's globalized

yoga, particularly in Western countries, asanas, or physical postures, have gotten a lot of attention and are often separated from their philosophical and spiritual roots (Singleton, 2010). The increasing amount of scientific research on yoga is one of the main causes of this evolution. According to numerous studies, experts, medical professionals, and others, yoga and meditation are beneficial for healthcare and wellness programs because they improve flexibility, lower stress, improve focus, and improve general mental well-being (Cramer et al., 2013). As a result, yoga is now frequently included in physical therapy, exercise plans, and workplace health and wellness initiatives, which primarily market it as a secular and therapeutic practice rather than a spiritual one. This change has made yoga more accessible and popular, but it has also led to a reductionist mentality that prioritizes physical health over the holistic aspects of yoga.

The growing popularity of “yoga therapy” and medically-endorsed yoga, which has been approved by medical specialists, is another indication of this shift. Yogic concepts are integrated into programs such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which eliminates their cultural or religious implications and modifies their use through a psychological and neuroscientific perspective (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Critics contend that this secularization has diluted Yoga’s traditional-cultural ethos, despite the fact that it has helped the practice gain validity and appeal in clinical settings (Jain, 2014).

3.2 Hybridization of Yoga and Cultural Integration

Cross-cultural connections have increased as a result of globalization, and many nations have not only embraced but also modified yoga and meditation practices. Yoga’s form and practice have undergone significant hybridization as a result of its fusion with modernity; it frequently blends with other fitness and spiritual activities in an effort to appeal to a western-modern audience. Meditation is extensively used as a stress-relieving technique, and yoga has become a popular fitness regimen in many Western nations. This merging is evident in many contemporary yoga styles, which often modify traditional poses to accommodate Western athletic and physical tastes while also incorporating aspects of Pilates, strength training, western dance, etc. For example, Bikram Choudhury’s “Hot Yoga” or “Bikram Yoga” gained popularity in the West by introducing a series of poses carried out in heated rooms—a concept that is uncommon in Indian yoga practices (Broad, 2012). Similarly, “Power Yoga”, a rigorous, fitness-focused form that was adapted for Western gym culture and popularized by Beryl Bender Birch and Bryan Kest in the 1990s, was influenced by Ashtanga Yoga (Singleton, 2010). Other examples include Goat Yoga, Aerial Yoga, AcroYoga, Couple Yoga, and Prenatal Yoga which use unusual components to make yoga more approachable and interesting.

Yoga’s hybridization has spread to the spiritual sphere in addition to the fitness realm. Yogic concepts are combined with frameworks for psychological well-being, self-help ideologies, and New Age spirituality in many Western variants of yoga (Jain, 2014). Thanks in part to this synthesis; yoga is now regarded as a universal practice that can be applied to other belief systems. The oversimplification and misinterpretation of Sanskrit phrases and concepts that have been repackaged by Western authors, departing from their original meanings, has been a counterbalance to this universalization. The institutionalization of yoga in secular settings, like as businesses and educational institutions, is another example of this adaptation. Yoga is today frequently incorporated into school curricula as a stress-reduction and physical activity in nations such as the US, UK, and Australia, often been criticized as leading to cultural appropriation and violating the principle of maintain religious neutrality in public institutions (Cook-Cottone, 2017).

3.3 Commercialisation of Yoga

With clothing companies, yoga studios, retreats, online yoga classes, and professional training programs making up a profitable commercial ecosystem, the yoga business has grown to be a multibillion-dollar global market (Jain, 2014). Although the commercialization of yoga has contributed to its widespread appeal, it has also led to its rebranding as a consumer good that is often cut off from its ancient foundations and guiding ideals.

The branding of yoga gear and accessories, such as kits, mats, and props, is a prime example of how yoga has become commercialized. Numerous well-known national and international businesses have profited from the popularity of yoga by promoting pricey yoga apparel, which has excluded practitioners who cannot afford these items and reinforced a consumerist society. Influencers and celebrities frequently promote a highly aestheticized and performative version of yoga on social media, prioritizing physical beauty and toned body shape over inner transformation and tranquility. This is another significant extension of the commercialization of yoga. Yoga tourism is a significant aspect of this commodification. Major yoga hubs like Costa Rica, Bali, Indonesia, and

Rishikesh, India, attract international practitioners seeking immersive yoga experiences. Yoga tourism helps local economies, but it has also raised concerns about cultural exploitation, in which Western yoga practitioners profit from teaching yoga in their home country without fully comprehending its philosophical or cultural roots (Jain, 2014).

With the rise of online platforms and online lessons, yoga has become even more of a digital commodity. While streaming services, smartphone apps, and online teacher training programs have made yoga more accessible (Wadhawan, 2021), they have also resulted in a depersonalized and often superficial engagement with the practice. Some scholars claim that this digitization has resulted in the “McDonaldization” of yoga because short, standardized classes prioritize convenience over in-depth training (Ritzer, 2018).

4. DECONTEXTUALIZATION AND CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

Yoga’s original practices have undergone substantial changes as a result of its global expansion, frequently resulting in decontextualization and cultural appropriation. Decontextualization is the process of removing yoga from its intellectual, spiritual, and historical foundations and turning it into a wellness fad or physical activity (Jain, 2014). Yoga’s incorporation into the Western health and wellness sectors is one of the main forces for its decontextualization. Yoga’s spiritual and philosophical lessons are frequently disregarded in favor of its physical advantages, which include strength, flexibility, and stress reduction (Newcombe, 2019).

Commercial yoga programs, which frequently emphasize postures (asanas) while excluding traditional practices like meditation (dhyana), ethical principles (yamas and niyamas), and breath control (pranayama), are a prime example of this reductionist approach (Jain, 2014). The rebranding of yoga to conform to contemporary scientific language is another element that contributes to decontextualization. Yoga therapy programs and clinical yoga research have grown as a result of the widespread promotion of yoga as a therapeutic intervention for mental and physical wellness.

When components of a historically marginalized culture are incorporated into a dominant culture in ways that obscure or distort their original meaning, this is known as cultural appropriation. It involves dominant cultures appropriating yoga-related symbols, language, and rituals in ways that frequently commercialize and misrepresent their original meanings. Cultural appropriation has been a contentious problem in the context of yoga, bringing up everything from Orientalism and the exploitation of Dharmic symbols and deities to the commercialization of the practice and the underrepresentation and lessening of the Indian cultural origin. The frequent usage of Sanskrit words and Hindu symbols in commercial yoga contexts without due recognition or comprehension is an example of appropriation. In yoga studios, terms like “Om” and “Namaste” are often employed in ways that lessen their original meaning (Jain, 2014). In a similar vein, sacred pictures of Hindu deities like Shiva and Ganesha are frequently employed as decorative components in yoga settings without taking into account their religious significance.

The debates surrounding cultural appropriation in yoga parallel broader discussions on cultural ownership and representation in contemporary society (Bisht, 2025). These discussions highlight the need for more inclusive and ethically responsible approaches to cultural exchange.

4.1 Ethical Concerns and Debates

Significant discussions of authenticity, respect, and inclusivity have been triggered by the problems of decontextualization and cultural appropriation in yoga communities. Some contend that cultural interchange is a necessary and advantageous part of globalization, enabling yoga to reach a variety of demographics and develop in novel ways (De Michelis, 2004). However, some argue that the selective appropriation of yoga by dominant cultures frequently results in the isolation of its original practitioners and the erasure of its origins (Jain, 2014).

The underrepresentation of South Asian and Indian voices in popular yoga settings is one of the fundamental ethical issues. Despite yoga’s Indian roots, there is a skewed perception of its history and significance because many prominent yoga instructors, writers, and influencers in Western nations are not Indian (Newcombe, 2019). Initiatives like the #DecolonizeYoga movement, which aims to reclaim yoga’s cultural history and magnify South Asian voices, are the result of efforts to redress this imbalance.

Consent and acknowledgment are at the center of another ethical controversy. Although anyone can practice

yoga, some contend that non-Indian practitioners and companies should do more to recognize the origins of yoga and give credit to the Indian traditions from whence it originated (Jain, 2014). In response, some yoga organizations have included cultural awareness training to their teacher certification programs, highlighting the moral need of yoga instructors to respect the practice's roots (Newcombe, 2019).

Lastly, conversations concerning cultural appropriation frequently touch on more general concerns about colonialism and historical injustice. Some academics such as Jain (2014), contend that the Western commercialization of yoga is similar to the dynamics of the colonial era, when Indian knowledge systems were taken, repackaged, and resold without helping Indian populations. This has prompted demands for reparative justice, such as monetary donations to Indian yoga schools and the active participation of South Asian instructors in leadership roles in yoga around the world (Jain, 2014).

5. RECLAIMING YOGA'S ROOTS

Efforts to recover yoga's origins have accelerated as it has been modified, decontextualized, and commercialized in international settings. In addition to promoting decolonization, more representation of Indian perspectives, and a resurgence of yoga's intellectual and spiritual aspects, many academics, practitioners, and activists stress the need for a more respectful and genuine interaction with yoga. The decolonization of yoga, the promotion of genuine teachings, and the contribution of South Asian voices to the restoration of yoga's traditional essence are some of the major initiatives and tactics that are examined in this section in an effort to reclaim yoga's origins.

5.1 Decolonizing Yoga

The process of identifying and resolving the colonial legacies that have impacted yoga practice worldwide is known as "decolonizing yoga." Indian knowledge systems, including yoga, were frequently suppressed or reframed through a Eurocentric lens during British colonial control (Singleton, 2010). Yoga's current commercialization and distortion can be viewed as a continuation of these colonial dynamics, in which Indian traditions are appropriated, turned into commodities, and rebranded without giving their original practitioners proper credit or benefits.

The decolonization movement aims to disrupt these trends by reestablishing the philosophical and historical integrity of yoga. Scholars and activists contend that yoga should be taught with an awareness of its cultural background, highlighting its origins in Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism (Jain, 2014). This method demands a change from a Western fitness-focused model to one that emphasizes the ethical, spiritual, and contemplative aspects of yoga.

Increased knowledge of the historical and cultural roots of yoga is promoted by groups like the Decolonizing Yoga movement and South Asian American Perspectives on Yoga in America (SAAPYA). These programs support a more inclusive yoga community that recognizes its South Asian roots, educate people about the philosophical writings of yoga, and criticize the commercialization of yoga.

5.2 Promoting Authentic Teachings and Traditional Lineages

Promoting historic teachings and lineages is one of the main strategies to recover Yoga's origins. Many modern forms of yoga have undergone substantial changes, frequently eliminating important philosophical elements like samadhi (spiritual liberation), dhyana (concentration), and pranayama (breath control) (Feuerstein, 2008). To maintain the holistic aspect of yoga, these components must be restored.

The Bihar School of Yoga and the teachings of Swami Sivananda and B.K.S. Iyengar are examples of traditional yoga schools that promote a more integrated approach that combines physical postures with ethical and contemplative activities (Eliade, 2009). Teachers can promote a deeper understanding of yoga beyond its physical features by encouraging students to study classical literature like the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, and the Bhagavad Gita (Bryant, 2009).

Traditional teachings have also been disseminated through educational efforts and online channels. For individuals looking for a more genuine experience with yoga, websites, podcasts, and classes taught by South Asian academics and yoga instructors are helping to close the knowledge gap and offer easily available information (Jain, 2014). In order to provide a more thorough approach to studying yoga, some yoga studios have started integrating Sanskrit chanting, scriptural study, and talks on yoga philosophy into their curricula.

5.3 Amplifying South Asian Voices in Yoga

The underrepresentation of South Asian instructors, researchers, and practitioners in international yoga discourse is one of the main accusations leveled at the contemporary yoga industry (Newcombe, 2019). Despite yoga's Indian roots, a large number of well-known yoga influencers and business executives are from Western nations, and they frequently profit monetarily from yoga without giving due credit to its cultural roots (Jain, 2014).

By giving Indian and South Asian educators greater chances to instruct yoga courses, workshops, and teacher training programs, initiatives to elevate South Asian voices aim to correct this disparity. Initiatives like the #ReclaimYoga movement and the Yoga and Body Image coalition highlight the value of representation and demand more diversity in yoga settings.

Restoring the validity of yoga also depends on acknowledging South Asian and Indian yoga masters. Yoga teacher training programs should recognize the contributions of individuals like T. Krishnamacharya, Pattabhi Jois, and Swami Vivekananda, who were instrumental in the development of modern yoga (Singleton, 2010). By highlighting these individuals, we can make sure that Yoga's transmission stays rooted in its historical origins rather than being exclusively influenced by Western ideas.

5.4 Ethical Considerations for Practitioners and Teachers

Reclaiming Yoga's roots also requires ethical responsibility from Yoga practitioners and teachers. Many scholars advocate for a practice of cultural appreciation rather than appropriation, which involves engaging with Yoga in a way that honors its history and traditions (Jain, 2014). Some ethical guidelines for Yoga practitioners include:

1. **Acknowledging Yoga's Origins:** Recognizing that Yoga is an ancient Indian practice rooted in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions helps ensure that its history is not erased (Feuerstein, 2008).
2. **Studying Traditional Texts:** Reading foundational texts such as the Yoga Sutras, Bhagavad Gita, and Upanishads can deepen one's understanding of Yoga beyond its physical aspects (Bryant, 2009).
3. **Supporting South Asian Teachers:** Attending classes, workshops, and retreats led by Indian and South Asian teachers helps to amplify their voices and ensure that Yoga's transmission remains connected to its roots (Newcombe, 2019).
4. **Avoiding Commercial Exploitation:** Being mindful of how Yoga is marketed and consumed, including rejecting exploitative Yoga trends that commodify sacred practices.
5. **Incorporating the Ethical and Spiritual Dimensions:** Integrating ethical principles (yamas and niyamas), meditation, and breathwork into Yoga practice fosters a more holistic approach (Jain, 2014).
6. **Promoting Respect for Hindu Traditions:** As yoga and meditation become more mainstream, it's crucial to promote respect for the Hindu traditions that gave birth to these practices. This can be done through discussions, workshops, and cultural exchanges that highlight the history, philosophy, and spiritual significance of yoga in the context of Hinduism.

6. CONCLUSION

Decolonization, the restoration of historic teachings, the amplification of South Asian voices, and the encouragement of ethical involvement with the practice are the main goals of efforts to reclaim the roots of yoga. These movements aim to maintain the spiritual and intellectual depth of yoga while making it accessible to a worldwide audience by opposing its commercialization and misrepresentation in the West. Yoga's future hinges on a well-rounded strategy that respects its Indian roots while permitting civil intercultural dialogue.

This study has examined the complex trajectory of yoga's global journey, revealing how processes of adaptation, decontextualization, and reclamation have shaped its contemporary manifestations. The findings suggest that while globalization has democratized access to yoga, it has also created conditions for cultural erasure and commodification that threaten the integrity of this ancient practice. The ongoing efforts to reclaim yoga's roots represent a significant counter-movement that seeks to restore the philosophical and spiritual dimensions that have been marginalized in mainstream Western interpretations.

Ultimately, the purpose of yoga and meditation is not only to enhance physical well-being but also to establish a connection with something bigger, be it the universe, the divine, or our own higher awareness. By accepting the spiritual insight underlying these activities and supporting decolonization efforts, we can contribute to the creation of a more conscious, compassionate, and peaceful world that respects cultural diversity and knowledge systems. Future research should examine the effectiveness of decolonization initiatives, the role of digital platforms in shaping yoga's global image, and the potential for cross-cultural dialogue that respects both traditional authenticity and contemporary relevance.

7. IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study carry significant implications for multiple stakeholders involved in the practice, teaching, and dissemination of yoga globally.

For Yoga Practitioners and Teachers: This research underscores the ethical responsibility of practitioners to engage with yoga in a culturally sensitive manner. Yoga instructors and studios should incorporate educational components that acknowledge yoga's South Asian origins, integrate philosophical teachings alongside physical postures, and actively support South Asian voices in leadership roles within the yoga community. Practitioners are encouraged to move beyond performative engagement and develop a deeper understanding of yoga's spiritual and ethical dimensions, including the yamas and niyamas.

For Policymakers and Educational Institutions: The study highlights the need for policies that protect traditional knowledge systems from commercial exploitation while promoting cross-cultural exchange. Educational curricula incorporating yoga should include historical and philosophical contexts to prevent decontextualization. Government bodies and UNESCO could develop frameworks for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, ensuring that traditional practices like yoga are preserved authentically while remaining accessible globally.

For the Wellness and Fitness Industry: The commercialization of yoga, while contributing to its popularity, has also led to its dilution. Industry stakeholders—including fitness chains, apparel brands, and wellness retreats—should adopt ethical marketing practices that respect yoga's cultural heritage. This includes transparent acknowledgment of yoga's origins, fair compensation for South Asian teachers, and avoiding the appropriation of sacred symbols and terminology for commercial gain.

For Academic Scholarship: This study contributes to ongoing scholarly discourse on cultural appropriation, globalization of knowledge systems, and postcolonial studies. It provides a framework for analyzing how traditional practices adapt, transform, and sometimes lose their essence when transplanted into new cultural contexts. The research also contributes to the growing field of decolonial studies, offering insights into how marginalized knowledge systems can be reclaimed and valued.

For the Bharatiya Knowledge System (IKS): The reclamation movements discussed in this paper represent a vital resurgence of indigenous knowledge systems. This study validates the importance of preserving and promoting IKS within India and globally, aligning with contemporary efforts to decolonize education and knowledge production.

8. LIMITATIONS

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged.

First, the research relies primarily on secondary sources, including academic literature, historical texts, and media analyses. While these sources provide a comprehensive overview of yoga's globalization, the absence of primary empirical data—such as interviews with yoga practitioners, teachers, or cultural critics, limits the study's ability to capture lived experiences and contemporary perspectives. Future research could benefit from qualitative methodologies, including ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews.

Second, the study adopts a predominantly Western-centric perspective in its analysis of globalization and decontextualization, despite its critical stance toward Western appropriation. While this approach allows for a critique of dominant narratives, it may inadvertently overlook the diverse ways yoga has been adapted and understood within various non-Western contexts, including other Asian, African, and Latin American societies. A more globally comparative analysis would enrich the findings.

Third, the study's scope is limited to the cultural and philosophical dimensions of yoga's globalization. It does not extensively examine the economic, political, or legal aspects, such as intellectual property rights, trademark disputes, or the political economy of the global yoga industry. These dimensions warrant separate investigation.

Fourth, the paper's analysis of reclamation movements, while informative, does not provide detailed case studies of specific initiatives such as #DecolonizeYoga, SAAPYA, or traditional yoga schools. A deeper examination of these movements' strategies, successes, and challenges would strengthen the practical implications of the study.

Fifth, the historical analysis, while extensive, may reflect the limitations of available historical records and the interpretive biases of the sources consulted. The ancient and medieval history of yoga, in particular, relies on textual interpretations that may vary across scholarly traditions.

Finally, the paper does not engage with the perspectives of Western yoga practitioners who may genuinely appreciate yoga's spiritual dimensions. While critical of appropriation, the study could benefit from a more nuanced exploration of how Western practitioners negotiate their engagement with yoga's cultural heritage.

9. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Building on the findings and acknowledging the limitations of this study, several avenues for future research emerge.

First, empirical research is needed to examine the effectiveness of decolonization initiatives within the global yoga community. Studies could investigate whether movements like #DecolonizeYoga have influenced practitioner behavior, studio practices, or teacher training curricula. Mixed-methods approaches combining surveys, interviews, and content analysis of yoga marketing materials would provide robust evidence.

Second, the role of digital platforms in shaping yoga's global image warrants investigation. With the proliferation of online yoga classes, social media influencers, and streaming services, digital spaces have become primary sites of cultural transmission. Future research should examine how digital platforms either perpetuate or challenge decontextualization, and how they can be leveraged for authentic cultural education.

Third, comparative studies across different traditional practices such as Ayurveda, meditation, and martial arts could illuminate common patterns of globalization, appropriation, and reclamation. A cross-cultural framework would deepen understanding of how indigenous knowledge systems navigate global markets while preserving authenticity.

Fourth, the economic dimensions of the yoga industry including revenue flows, intellectual property disputes, and the exploitation of South Asian teachers, require critical examination. Researchers could investigate issues of economic justice within the yoga industry, exploring how financial benefits are distributed and how equitable models might be developed.

Fifth, longitudinal studies tracking changes in yoga practice over time would provide valuable insights into the long-term effects of globalization. Scholars could examine generational shifts in how yoga is understood, taught, and practiced in both India and Western countries.

Sixth, the intersection of yoga with other social justice movements—including feminism, environmentalism, and anti-racism presents rich opportunities for interdisciplinary research. Exploring how yoga communities engage with these movements could reveal new pathways for ethical and transformative practice.

Seventh, research on the reclamation of yoga within India itself is needed. While much attention focuses on Western appropriation, the commercialization and dilution of yoga within India through urban fitness centers, celebrity endorsements, and tourism also merit critical analysis.

Finally, the development of ethical frameworks and guidelines for cross-cultural engagement with traditional knowledge systems would be a significant contribution. Drawing on the insights of this study, scholars and practitioners could collaboratively develop resources for culturally responsible practice and teaching.

This study opens multiple pathways for future inquiry. By addressing these research gaps, scholars can contribute to a more just, respectful, and authentic global engagement with yoga—one that honors its ancient roots while embracing its contemporary relevance.

DECLARATIONS

Author(s) Contribution

All the Author(s) work equally to prepare the manuscript.

Uses of AI Acknowledgement

The authors used Grammarly for grammar and spelling correction. All content was reviewed, verified, and edited by the authors. No AI tools were used for generating substantive content, arguments, or data analysis.

Funding Information

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Availability of Data and Materials

The data supporting this study are available upon request. The sources cited in this manuscript are publicly accessible through academic databases and institutional libraries.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Clinical Trial Registration (if applicable)

Not Applicable

Human Ethics and Consent to Participate

The study did not involve any clinical interventions or experiments requiring formal ethical approval.

REFERENCES

- Bisht, D. (2025). Who owns the myths? An enquiry into cultural appropriation and proprietorship. *Synergy: International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 2(2), 25–31. <https://doi.org/10.63960/SIJMDS-2025-2257>
- Broad, W. J. (2012). *The science of yoga: The risks and the rewards*. Simon & Schuster.
- Bryant, E. F. (2009). *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali: A new edition, translation, and commentary with insights from the traditional commentators*. Henry Holt.
- Cook-Cottone, C. P. (2017). *Mindfulness and yoga in schools: A guide for teachers and practitioners* (1st ed.). Springer Publishing Company.
- Cramer, H., Lauche, R., Haller, H., & Dobos, G. (2013). A systematic review and meta-analysis of yoga for low back pain. *Clinical Journal of Pain*, 29(5), 450–460. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ajp.0b013e31825e1492>
- De Michelis, E. (2004). *A history of modern yoga: Patañjali and Western esotericism*. Continuum.
- Eliade, M. (2009). *Yoga: Immortality and freedom*. Princeton University Press.
- Feuerstein, G. (2008). *The yoga tradition: Its history, literature, philosophy, and practice*. Hohm Press.
- Jain, A. (2014). *Selling yoga: From counterculture to pop culture*. Oxford University Press.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). *Full catastrophe living (Revised edition): Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. Bantam.
- Newcombe, S. (2019). *Yoga in Britain: Stretching spirituality and educating yogis*. Equinox Publishing.
- Ritzer, G. (2018). *The McDonaldization of society: Into the digital age*. SAGE Publications.

Saraf, N. (2020). *The life and times of Swami Vivekananda*. Prabhat Prakashan.

Singleton, M. (2010). *Yoga body: The origins of modern posture practice*. Oxford University Press.

Wadhawan, S. (2021). Insights from an online yoga class. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, 11(2), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.35248/2157-7595.21.11.331>

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions, and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of Synergy Publication or the editor(s) of the journal. While reasonable editorial and peer-review procedures are followed, Synergy Publication and the editor(s) do not endorse any products, methods, or claims described in the content.