

Connecting with the Divine Web of Life: An Investigation of the Yogic Milieu as Evidence of the Re-enchantment of the West

Dissertation submitted to University of Wales, Trinity Saint David in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts Religion and Philosophy: Eastern and Western Thought.

September 2020

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Table of Contents

Abstract	4
Acknowledgements	5
Chapter One: Introduction	6
Chapter Two: Making the Case for Re-enchantment	11
2.1 Re-enchantment vs Disenchantment (Partridge & Bruce)	11
2.2 The Spiritual Revolution	16
2.3 Selling Yoga	17
2.4 Selling Spirituality	19
2.5 Recent Contributions	22
2.6 Conclusion	25
Chapter Three: The Development of the Yogic Milieu.....	26
3.1 Delineating the Yogic Milieu.....	26
3.2 Nineteenth Century Interest.....	30
3.3 Twentieth Century Developments	33
3.4 The 1960s Counterculture and Beyond	34
3.5 A Process of Easternization or Westernization?	38
3.6 Conclusion	42
Chapter Four: Accounting for the Appeal of the Yogic Milieu: Kirtan as Case Study	43
4.1 Kirtan as Case Study	43
4.2 Pluralistic Appeal and Accessibility	45
4.3 Social and Community Appeal	49
4.4 Pragmatic Appeal	52
4.5 Conclusion	60
Chapter Five: Conclusion	62
Bibliography	66

Abstract

Yogic activities, from postural yoga to mindfulness to kirtan and mantra recitation are increasingly visible in contemporary society. This dissertation analyses this growing yogic milieu, charting its development and investigating the practice of kirtan in western, non-Hindu settings. The purpose is to ascertain whether or not it can provide evidence for a re-enchantment of the west. If it can be deemed to provide evidence for such a re-enchantment, this would corroborate the claims of scholars such as Partridge (2004) and Heelas and Woodhead (2004) that a spiritual revolution is underway, thus undermining many overly simplistic accounts of secularization. Scholars such as Bruce (2013) and Carrette and King (2005) argue that so called 'spiritual activity' within the holistic milieu is shallow, superficial and meaningless. However, they fail to take account of the effect it has on practitioners' lives and listen to accounts of those within the yogic milieu. They also feel that something that has become commodified and branded cannot also function as genuine religious / spiritual activity, and this dissertation challenges these views. Scholars of postural yoga such as Jain (2015) and De Michelis (2004), feel that yogic activity can be as meaningful as traditional religious activity, and this dissertation provides supporting evidence for their views. Social developments and trends that led to the growth of the yogic milieu will also be analysed to assist in assessing the meaningful nature of the movement. This dissertation will argue that equal amounts of secularization and sacralization have contributed to the growth of the yogic milieu. Additionally, due to its enduring popularity and the meaning it can give to the lives of those involved, it can provide good evidence that a significant re-enchantment of the west is taking place.

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Chapter One: Introduction

More and more people in the United Kingdom, Europe and North America (and beyond) are involved in yogic activities, whether it be postural yoga incorporating pranayama and use of mudras, meditation, or chanting of mantras individually or as part of a group (kirtan).¹ Most major towns and cities have at least one yoga centre and there are plentiful ashrams that offer the chance for in depth study, teacher training or retreats. There are multiple eastern inspired new religious movements that offer yogic teachings, usually under the training of a guru that has opened centres in the West, ranging from Osho International and Transcendental Meditation to Siddha Yoga and Integral Yoga. A 2016 survey conducted by *Yoga Alliance* and *Yoga Journal* found that, in the preceding four years, the number of Americans doing postural yoga had grown by over 50% from 20.4 million in 2012 to 36 million in 2016.²

This yogic milieu is one component of a wider 'alternative spiritual milieu in the contemporary Western world'.³ For Christopher Partridge and others such as Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, such increasing interest in spirituality is evidence that people may have turned away from mainstream religion, yet still crave practices that give life deeper meaning and purpose, without the hindrance of dogmatic beliefs. For such scholars, a rise in postural yoga and mindfulness is symptomatic of a search for opportunities to turn inwards and seek refuge from a fast-paced capitalist society that values profit, materialism, and hedonism

¹ I am defining yogic in a wide sense as anything that takes influence from the various auxiliaries of Yoga as outlined by James Mallinson & Mark Singleton in *Roots of Yoga* (London: Penguin, 2017), pp. 9-10. Further detail will be given on a definition of the yogic milieu in section 3.1.

² M. Wei, 'New Survey Reveals the Rapid Rise of Yoga – and why Some People Still Haven't Tried it' *Harvard Health Blog* 7 March 2016: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/new-survey-reveals-the-rapid-rise-of-yoga-and-why-some-people-still-havent-tried-it-201603079179> (accessed 14 June 2020).

³ C. Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1 Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture*, (London: T&T Clark, 2004), p. 1.

above all. Whilst taken at face value, one might think that postural yoga is primarily a form of exercise performed for fitness benefits, but it is part of a wider eight-limbed system that also emphasises relaxation and meditation, as outlined in Patanjali's fourth century CE *Yoga Sutras* and other sources. Thus, for many participants, the focus on the breath (*prana*) or energy centres (*chakras*) ground it in a wider system which uses spiritual terminology, and thus sets it apart from entirely secular somatic practices such as Pilates or Feldenkrais. Research has found that people may take up yoga to improve their health but often continue to practice as they find a sense of community, purpose, and opportunity for self-actualization. Research also supports the above assertion that it is more than a superficial bodily practice as many yoga teachers incorporate teaching regarding truthfulness, kindness or self-discipline into their lessons as inspired by the *yamas* and *niyamas* (ethical component) of Patanjali's system. Yoga practitioners are also more likely to volunteer, with over 50% reporting that they regularly give time to their community in some way.⁴

The growth of the yogic milieu is also evident in the use of yoga and mindfulness in healthcare, business, and education settings. Most schools, colleges and universities are keen for students to reap the benefits of regular meditation, and companies like Cosy Cloud offer a subscription service whereby teachers can stream guided meditations in Welsh and English in the classroom.⁵ Large companies like Google encourage their employees to be mindful to increase productivity and general well-being.⁶ If someone presents with health problems to

⁴ Wei, 'New Survey Reveals the Rapid Rise of Yoga' (accessed 14 June 2020).

⁵ According to R. Walker, "It Stops the Scary Stuff": Pupils Thrive with Mindfulness Lessons', *The Observer*, 25 November 2018. In 2018 the Mindfulness in Schools Project trained almost 2000 teachers, a 40% increase on the previous year. See <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/nov/25/schools-deprived-areas-embrace-mindfulness> Also see <https://www.cosyclouduk.co.uk/> (both accessed 15 June 2020).

⁶ See J. Confino, 'Google's Head of Mindfulness: "Goodness is good for Business"', *The Guardian*, 14 May 2014: <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/google-meditation-mindfulness-technology> (accessed 15 June 2020).

their general practitioner, they may suggest they try yoga, relaxation or meditation techniques before resorting to a course of medication. Mindfulness based treatments have been created for alleviation of anxiety, depression, and even cancer recovery, pain management and addiction.⁷ Inspired by Integral Yoga, American physician Dean Ornish, founded a programme for reversing heart disease that involves regular practice of yogic asanas, pranayama and meditation. This programme has been covered by Medicare since 2008.⁸ Philip Goldberg notes that the assimilation of these concepts into mainstream society is evidenced by the use of their proper names rather than ‘stretching, breathing and stress management’, as might have been necessary in the past.⁹ The yogic milieu also intersects with psychology and contemporary therapy culture. The International Association of Yoga Therapists (IAYT) was founded in 1989 by two American veteran yoga teachers with the aim of promoting yoga as a recognised and respected therapy. Membership has doubled in the last ten years and IAYT currently has over 5000 members based in fifty countries.¹⁰

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyse the yogic milieu in order to determine if it provides evidence for the enchantment of which Partridge speaks. Like Partridge, I aim to utilise the methods and studies of religious studies, cultural studies, and sociology of religion in order to analyse the yogic milieu. A further aim of this dissertation is to use the yogic milieu,

⁷ See S. J. Eisendrath, ‘How does Mindfulness Help with Depression and Anxiety?’, *Psychology Today*, 10 October 2019: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/when-antidepressants-aren-t-enough/201910/how-does-mindfulness-help-depression-and-anxiety> Also see S. Colino, ‘Study Finds that you can Treat Chronic Pain with Mindfulness instead of Opioids’, *Everyday Health*, 11 July 2019: <https://www.everydayhealth.com/v2/opioid-addiction/study-finds-you-can-treat-chronic-pain-with-mindfulness-instead-addictive-opioids> S. Bauer-Wu, ‘Mindfulness Meditation’, *Cancer Network*, 19 October 2010: <https://www.cancernetwork.com/view/mindfulness-meditation> and R. Alexander ‘Mindfulness Meditation and Addiction’, *Psychology Today*, 16 April 2020: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/the-wise-open-mind/201004/mindfulness-meditation-addiction> (all accessed 15 June 2020).

⁸ P. Goldberg, *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation, How Indian Spirituality Changed the West*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010), p. 294.

⁹ Goldberg, *American Veda*, p. 294.

¹⁰ Goldberg, *American Veda*, p. 296. Membership was 2300 in 2009. See <https://www.iayt.org/page/LearnAbout> for current figure, (accessed 15 June 2020).

if it is deemed to be significant, to challenge secularization paradigms. I will be referring to the work of various scholars from the above fields. Yoga is not practiced in a vacuum and the surrounding cultural and societal context needs to be considered and can tell us about the growth of the yogic milieu and why it has gained ground.

The next chapter will make the case for re-enchantment by analysing the work of scholars on both sides of the debate. This will provide a platform for the analysis in later chapters regarding the significance of the yogic milieu. On one side of the debate there is Partridge's work regarding the growth of alternative spiritualities within a specific occulture. This is further supported by the studies of Heelas and Woodhead who chart the growth of the holistic milieu in the UK. Additionally, Andrea Jain's study of the development and rise of postural yoga also supports their work by showing that yoga may be commodified, but it is still a spiritual (as opposed to a trivial) practice for most people. On the other side of the debate sits secularization theorist, Steve Bruce, who sees the growth of yoga and other alternative spiritualities as insignificant and lacking deeper meaning for those involved. Jeremy Carrette and Richard King also share the view that much contemporary spirituality is lacking and, moreover, that it is indicative of a capitalist takeover of religion. More recent contributions to the debate argue that re-enchantment occurs when there is a blending of secular and sacred values, so in some ways the above scholars are all correct to varying degrees, but perhaps only provide a partial explanation of what the current yogic milieu can tell us about secularization and re-enchantment.

Chapter three will begin with a comprehensive definition of the 'yogic milieu' before explaining how the yogic milieu developed. It will examine prior nineteenth century western interest in yoga, the important role of the 1960s counterculture, and the cultural and societal

changes that needed to take place for yoga to gain prominence in the west. The impact of Indian teachers, such as Vivekananda arriving in the west will be assessed, as will that of Western teachers who travelled east such as Ram Dass. The claims of Jain and Veronique Atglas regarding the factors that enabled the growth of a yogic milieu will also be analysed. Jain especially charts the rise of postural yoga as a trans-national brand available for consumption and this chapter will also consider the extent to which secularization enabled this. Finally, chapter three will assess whether it is correct to say that a process of easternization took place that enabled the adoption of yogic ideas in the west, or whether it is more accurate to report that eastern ideas were instead westernized, allowing them to gain ground in Euro-American societies.

Chapter four will assess some of the factors that contributed to the growth of the yogic milieu with reference to kirtan, a practice which is growing in popularity in Euro-American societies. It will consider some of the reasons why westerners find yogic practices appealing such as their pluralistic and accessible appeal, social and community appeal and pragmatic appeal. This case study will analyse the reasons for involvement to show that yogic practices have deeper meaning for those who participate, but also that twin forces of secularization and sacralization play a part in explaining the increasing uptake in such practices.

Chapter five will bring the dissertation to a close with concluding comments, clarifying the distinctive contribution of the dissertation to the study of contemporary forms of spirituality. It will also bring together the preliminary arguments made to summarise the overarching assertion that due to a combination of secularization and sacralization, the growing yogic milieu can be considered to be good evidence for a re-enchantment process taking place.

Chapter Two: Making the Case for Re-enchantment

This chapter will outline the current debate as to whether secularization is taking place and analyse the views of key scholars on both sides of the debate. It will assess whether or not there is evidence for a renewed interest in spirituality, as part of a re-enchantment process whereby people turn back towards a spiritual element of life and a deeper purpose. It will then begin to focus on the yogic milieu to see if the various yogic activities outlined in chapter one can provide evidence for re-enchantment.

2.1 Re-enchantment vs Disenchantment (Partridge & Bruce)

I wish to contend that the growing yogic milieu, outlined in the introductory chapter, is evidence of 'the re-enchantment of the West' and an emergence of a significant spiritual milieu.¹¹ Partridge discusses the role of a 'popular occulture' that has a 'significant sacralising effect'.¹² This occulture is a new spiritual environment for the West that has become the fertile soil for new eastern and pagan spiritualities.¹³ By re-enchantment, he means that there is a return to a magical culture, accepting of supernatural ideas, which becomes the basis for the occulture that people can draw on.¹⁴ Partridge rejects the claims of other academics that a slide into spiritual superficiality and secularity is taking place.¹⁵ Alternative beliefs and practices are meaningful and significant for those involved, despite being different from the more traditional religion it has replaced.¹⁶ In summary, he states:

¹¹ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1*, p. 3.

¹² Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1*, p. 5.

¹³ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1*, p. 4.

¹⁴ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1*, p. 40.

¹⁵ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1*, p. 1.

¹⁶ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1*, p. 2.

‘Although it cannot be denied that disenchantment has reshaped Western societies, it seems myopic not to recognize the significance of the gradual and uneven emergence of personally and socially consequential alternative spiritualities.’¹⁷

Partridge disagrees with secularization theorists such as Steve Bruce who feel that the significance of alternative spiritualities is limited and that their appearance is a sign of the decline of the appeal of religion.¹⁸ Bruce claims that new age participation is shallow and few are committed adherents. Individual numbers are low and the autonomy at the heart of the new age is the very thing that prevents its growth. For him it represents a shift from religion to diffuse belief, evidencing his secularization thesis.¹⁹ For Bruce, so called cultic religion lacks social significance as it is a superficial, trivial and shallow form of religion.²⁰ The new age emphasis on choice and commodification means power is vested in the consumer rather than a religious organisation, making it well suited to increasingly secularized societies.²¹ Bruce contends that this spiritual individualism has little social impact and little effect on the lives of believers.²² There is little attempt to evangelise as there is no agreement over what to promote and any message becomes vulnerable to dilution and trivialisation, thus this diffuse religion is a symptom of modern capitalism. No re-enchantment is taking place and the new age will die out as it fails to recruit the next generation.²³

¹⁷ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1*, p. 58.

¹⁸ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1*, p. 17.

¹⁹ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1*, pp. 29-31.

²⁰ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1*, p. 31. Bruce uses the term ‘cultic religion’ and ‘cultic milieu’ to differentiate between more established religion and newer forms of religion, and associate newer forms with the term ‘cult’ which has negative connotations. This dissertation uses various terms such as ‘new age’ or ‘holistic religion’ and tends to use the terms associated with the scholar being discussed. These terms are used interchangeably. Different scholars may use them with slightly different definitions / meaning in mind and it is difficult to give a universal definition for these terms associated with alternative spirituality.

²¹ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1*, p. 34.

²² Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1*, p. 35.

²³ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1*, pp.35-37.

I believe, however that Partridge's claims are strong as evidence can be found for re-enchantment in a variety of areas, for example: contemporary paganism, personal development movements like scientology, other esoteric alternative spiritualities such as satanism as well as eastern inspired movements like Transcendental Meditation. Although membership of some of these movements may be relatively small, when put together they make a strong cumulative case for re-enchantment. It also shows he has taken the time to listen to what those within these movements say, namely, that spirituality gives their lives more meaning and has a positive impact on many areas of their lives. This provides a successful challenge to Bruce's claims of diffuse, meaningless, trivial belief. Bruce fails to take account of the growing proportion of the global population who identify as 'spiritual but not religious' (SBNR). A 2017 Pew Research Forum survey found that 27% of adult Americans identify as SBNR. When you add this to the 48% who consider themselves to be religious and spiritual, most of the US population hold spiritual beliefs, which I feel cannot serve as evidence for dis-enchantment and secularization.²⁴ Additionally, Woodhead's research conducted in the UK leads to similar conclusions. She conducted research between 2013 and 2015 on the rise of those who claim to hold 'no religion' (the nones).²⁵ She charts the rise of a new cultural majority, whereby being religious is now the exception rather than the norm. However, she found that 'nones are not straightforwardly secular'.²⁶ In her 2015 You Gov survey, 54% held a religion and the remaining 46% professed to have no religion.²⁷ Only 13% of the nones agree with anti-theist Richard Dawkins (which is less than 5% of the population), and only 45% of

²⁴ M. Lipka & C. Gecewicz, 'More Americans now say they're Spiritual but not Religious', *Pew Research Center*, 6 September 2017: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious/> (accessed 16 June 2020).

²⁵ L. Woodhead, 'The Rise of "No Religion" in Britain: The Emergence of a New Cultural Majority', *Journal of the British Academy*, 4,(2016), pp. 245-261, at p. 246.

²⁶ Woodhead, 'The Rise of "No Religion" in Britain', pp.248-249.

²⁷ Woodhead, 'The Rise of "No Religion" in Britain', p. 247.

nones are convinced atheists. A quarter of nones take part in some kind of religious / spiritual practices, but not with a traditionally religious group, and many believe in some other spirit / energy.²⁸ This could be practices within the yogic milieu and apply to Vedantic / yogic notions of ultimate reality. In a similar way to findings in the USA, the majority of the population hold some kind of religious / spiritual belief or find them meaningful in their lives in some way. Woodhead concludes that her research shows that 'Nones may reject organised religion, but they do not reject all it contains'.²⁹ She believes that the results of her surveys show that simplistic accounts of secularization are incorrect, further supporting my line of argument.³⁰

Although Bruce's secularization thesis may be correct with regards to the gradual decline of traditional religion, this does not mean that people are not crying out for something to take its place. This something needs to be free of the constraints of formal religion that asks you to live a certain way and lacks flexibility in ethical codes and instead offer meaningful, relevant guidance and practices that people can take up if they wish without having to make a solemn commitment. If most people in a society identify as spiritual in some way, then surely this shows a rejection of a purely secular society where there would be no opportunity to look beyond the physical, material realm and receive meaningful answers to questions about the purpose and nature of human life. Bruce's claim that the new age milieu will reduce in size, rather than expand as current adherents die out, is already being proved wrong.³¹ The American Pew survey found that there was a 9% increase since 2012 in the 18-29 age group identifying as SBNR to 29%.³² These recent findings support the work of scholars such as

²⁸ Woodhead, 'The Rise of "No Religion" in Britain', p. 250.

²⁹ Woodhead, 'The Rise of "No Religion" in Britain', p. 258.

³⁰ Woodhead, 'The Rise of "No Religion" in Britain', p. 254.

³¹ S. Bruce, *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 110.

³² Lipka & Gecewicz, 'More Americans now say they're Spiritual but not Religious', (accessed 16 June 2020). The British situation is a little more difficult to assess as the Census conducted every ten years only asks about

Grace Davie whose phrase ‘believing without belonging’ makes the case that widespread belief prevails even if it is not reflected in religious membership or church attendance.³³ Furthermore, this was predicted by earlier scholars like Robert Bellah who argued that religion has been individualised whereby people now take on a personal quest finding their own path to salvation and ultimate meaning in their own way. Thus, religion has not really declined, but has merely changed form.³⁴ This shift from traditional religion to a more personal and individual spirituality supports Partridge’s line of argument and shows that a modern update of his work is needed.

Partridge was writing in 2004 and admits that the shelf life of his work is limited.³⁵ In the past sixteen years, occulture has continued to expand with yogic concepts at the forefront. There is, therefore, good reason to update his research. I contend that there is more evidence today for western re-enchantment than when he was writing. Equally, many of Bruce’s claims were made in the early twenty first century with his last major update being *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* published in 2011. The sub-title gives a clear indication of the way his theory has been received and questioned since it was first posited. Nevertheless, support for Bruce’s claims can be found in the work of Bryan Wilson, Karel Dobbelaere and initially Peter Berger who claimed that modernity and the expanse of scientific knowledge would lead people to turn their backs wholesale on belief.³⁶ However, Berger reversed his claim for secularization in 1999, saying that the whole body of work was

religion. A SBNR answer category for 2021 would be welcomed. Woodhead’s aforementioned research found that many ‘nones’ are proportionately younger than the religious group, but as she points out this group has differing beliefs. See Woodhead ‘The Rise of “No Religion” in Britain’, p. 247.

³³ S. J. Hunt, *Religion in Western Society*, (London: Palgrave, 2001), p. 21.

³⁴ Hunt, *Religion in Western Society*, p. 29.

³⁵ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West*, p. 2.

³⁶ K. Schultz, ‘Secularization: A Bibliographic Essay’, *The Hedgehog Review*, Spring & Summer (2016), pp.170-176.

‘essentially mistaken’ as religion has persisted much more than the above theoreticians expected.³⁷ This is echoed in the work of other critics such as Rodney Stark, David Martin and Larry Shiner.³⁸

2.2 The Spiritual Revolution

One of the most relevant critiques of secularization using the lens of alternative spirituality comes from Heelas and Woodhead. They categorise religion using a threefold typology into religions of difference, (where there is a clear separation between God and humanity), religions of humanity (where God, humanity and the natural world are held in balance) and spiritualities of life (incorporating new age, holistic religion which includes the yogic milieu). These categories show that sometimes the boundaries between the sacred and profane are blurred and sometimes they are clearly demarcated.³⁹ This broad definition of religion that accounts for the SBNR population gives support to Partridge’s claim that these more diffuse forms of belief are not inconsequential but are just as important and worthy of study as more established religions. Bruce seems to be using a narrower definition of religion which is clearly outdated, as this is the only way his version of secularization can survive.

Additionally, Heelas and Woodhead published *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is giving way to Spirituality* in 2004 based on their locale study of new age involvement in the English town of Kendal between 2000 and 2002. They found that 7.9% of the population went to church and 1.6% were involved in holistic activities. Of these holistic activities, by far the

³⁷ P. Berger, ‘The De-secularization of the World’ in P. Berger (ed.) *The De-secularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, (Washington DC: The Ethics & Public Policy Center, 2016), pp.1-18, at p. 2.

³⁸ Schultz, ‘Secularization: A Bibliographic Essay’, pp.170-176.

³⁹ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1*, pp. 28-29.

most popular was yoga and tai chi, taking up 45.5% of all activity. They predicted that the number involved in alternative spirituality would grow rapidly and eventually overtake the congregational domain in the following thirty years.⁴⁰ Eighteen years has already passed so further study needs to be conducted to discern if they are correct; this present work aims to show why further research is warranted. Of course, there is also the issue that Kendal is primarily a white, middle class neighbourhood and their study may not be representative of Great Britain generally, which needs to be addressed.⁴¹ Bruce however disparages their findings and contends that most of the surveyed activities are mere relaxation and not really spiritual, when this can only really be judged by the participating individuals.⁴² He sticks steadfastly to his conclusion that 'individualism undermines religion'.⁴³ This of course only applies to his rather old fashioned definition of religion and a modern undertaking of Heelas and Woodhead's study in a more diverse area, would likely support Partridge's claims about re-enchantment.

2.3 Selling Yoga

Jain's 2010 *Selling Yoga* also rebuts Bruce's secularization paradigm and supports the claims of Partridge, Heelas and Woodhead. *Selling Yoga* is an examination of the cultural object of postural yoga, which Jain claims is a product of consumer culture.⁴⁴ Jain describes postural yoga as a commodity which is available for exchange through global corporations, yet she claims, 'that popularized postural yoga systems are not mere "commodifications" or

⁴⁰ Bruce, *Secularization*, pp. 107-109.

⁴¹ S.J.Sutcliffe, 'Re-thinking "New Age" as a Popular Religious "Habitus": A Review Essay on "The Spiritual Revolution"' *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 18:3 (2006), pp. 294-314, at p. 310.

⁴² Bruce, *Secularization*, pp. 107-109.

⁴³ Bruce, *Secularization*, p. 119.

⁴⁴ A. Jain, *Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. xiii.

“borrowings” but idiosyncratic and complex creations all of which insiders call yoga.’⁴⁵ Therefore, yoga may be a brand and a product available for consumption, but it is more than this and insiders are the ones who decide what it means for them. Jain, in a similar manner to James Mallinson, acknowledges the broad nature of yoga’s roots, intertwined with tantra, and its use by Jains and Buddhists.⁴⁶ If postural yoga is not Hindu and does not belong to any one tradition, it can be practiced by anyone anywhere and this is part of the reason why it is the most popular activity within the current yogic milieu. Jain points out that yoga is always contextual so no claim to authenticity or ownership can be made.⁴⁷ This allowance for constant adaptation and diversification is another reason why practices from the yogic milieu have been taken up so readily by westerners.

Jain admits that postural yoga has no particular religious affiliation, but she contends that it still functions as a body of religious practice.⁴⁸ Jain defines religion in a broad way, as anything relating to sacred behaviours, with a shared ontology or worldview and a set of values reinforced through ritual and narrative.⁴⁹ She cites Elizabeth de Michaelis who describes a yoga class as ‘a healing ritual of secular religion.’⁵⁰ It may not be part of any religious tradition and belongs in the secular world, often being held in a school hall or community centre, but there is still a spiritual aspect. Jain also notes that when attempts have been made to regulate yoga, opposition to this is infused with religious discourse as if it is too sacred for regulation.⁵¹ The literature of yogic organisations is also regularly peppered with

⁴⁵ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, pp. xvii-xviii.

⁴⁶ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 15.

⁴⁷ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 126.

⁴⁹ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 98.

⁵⁰ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p.112.

⁵¹ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 97.

spiritual / religious terms.⁵² People of many religions use yoga and only insiders can say what yoga is, so of course it can be deemed religious.⁵³ For Jain, yoga is a spirituality of life, it is not a mere secular fitness regime (as Bruce maintains), and it is not a trivial or insignificant activity. Therefore, her work supports the growth of a yogic milieu as part of Partridge's wider occulture. Jain's study is already ten years old however, and various yogic practices have continued to grow in popularity which can be seen in the growth of festivals with a spiritual theme. California's annual Bhakti Fest, for example, has been running since 2009 and includes yoga, dance and sacred music. The festival's Facebook page currently has 47,000 likes, evidencing its appeal.⁵⁴ I contend that the growth of postural yoga that Jain begins to chart is a symptom of a wider search for spirituality which is evidence of re-enchantment.

2.4 Selling Spirituality

Other scholars do not share Jain's view. Jain responds to the claims of Carrette and King, authors of 2005's *Selling Spirituality* in her 2010 work. They write off yoga as mere commodification and describe the existence of a spiritual marketplace as a capitalist takeover of religion. They fail to see that what is spiritual can function as a legitimate religious practice, according to Jain.⁵⁵ They see postural yoga as too far removed from its ancient origins, where it was paired with an ethical and religio-philosophical dimension. They maintain it is not a 'complete lifestyle'. Jain is rightly critical of their essentialised, homogenous view of both ancient and modern yoga and their failure to take account of the visions or intentions of

⁵² Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 124.

⁵³ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 125.

⁵⁴ See <https://bhaktifest.com/bhaktifest/> (accessed 16 June 2020).

⁵⁵ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 100.

insiders.⁵⁶ Carrette and King believe that neoliberalism has ‘pernicious social effects’ and the silent takeover of religion by capitalist forces is a sign that all areas of life are being commodified.⁵⁷ They admit that spirituality has overtaken religion, but they describe it as, ‘a new cultural addiction and a claimed panacea for the angst of modern living.’⁵⁸ They claim rather negatively that contemporary spirituality does little to challenge the status quo of an unequal society and encourages a lifestyle of consumption and self-interest.⁵⁹

These claims astound me when so much yogic activity is centred around ending identification with the egoic self and realising inter-connection with all beings. Mass yoga events nearly always have some element of charity fundraising. Yoga and meditation rooted in Asian traditions encourage equality of all beings which often means that those involved in the yogic milieu are more likely to campaign for better treatment of the environment or an end to discrimination, alongside inner work. Jain points to the Prison Yoga Project set up in 2002, which aims to ease the trauma that led to a life of crime and to show that yoga can have rehabilitational, transformative value.⁶⁰ Additionally, Anne Koch’s 2018 study of charity yoga events such as Yoga Aid World Challenge concludes that these events turns the focus of yoga from self-perfection to other-regarding behaviour, opening up moral communities.⁶¹ The community and social aspect of the yogic milieu and how these have effected its growth, will be assessed further in section 4.3. In the past, fundraising activities or social outreach might have been co-ordinated by religious communities, but the fact that spiritualities of life

⁵⁶ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 101.

⁵⁷ J. Carrette & R. King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*, (London: Routledge, 2005), p. ix-x.

⁵⁸ Carrette & King, *Selling Spirituality*, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Carrette & King, *Selling Spirituality*, p. 5.

⁶⁰ Jain *Selling Yoga*, pp. 106-107.

⁶¹ A. Koch, ‘Living4giving: Politics of Affect and Emotional Regimes in Global Yoga’ in Baier, Maas & Preisendans (eds.) *Yoga in Transformation: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Vienna: Vienna University Press, 2018), pp. 530-548, at p. 546.

now take on this role, shows that Bruce, Carrette and King underestimate the power of more diffuse belief and fail to see that it is significant and is replacing more traditional ways of believing.

Recent critics of mindfulness agree with Carrette and King, however. Robert Purser, for example, who labels the practice 'McMindfulness' as it has become so widespread that it is now a form of capitalist spirituality. It no longer has the power for transformation as it is so bound up with neoliberalism.⁶² This may be correct in some contexts, but the practice is still life changing for many people and societal change has to start with individuals. Although practices like mindfulness or postural yoga may be taken up initially to calm the mind, people usually stick with them and learn more about the philosophy behind them. Peter Van Ness, like Jain argues that yoga is a spiritual discipline that is part of a wider spiritual quest. Those who practice yoga 'aim for universal community by undertaking lives of compassionate disengagement.'⁶³ Yogic practice is part of a wider spirituality of life that encourages those involved to let go of attachment and seek peace and justice in all areas of life.⁶⁴ Van Ness sums it up nicely:

'Yoga, like other spiritual practices, has the potential to subvert and redirect the materialistic values of contemporary consumerism toward an understanding of self and society that elevates personal and social equanimity over competition and dominance. By doing so it attains a deeply spiritual goal even when it occurs outside the purview of an historical religion.'⁶⁵

⁶² R.Purser, *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality*, (London: Repeater Books, 2019).

⁶³ P. H. Van Ness, 'Yoga as Spiritual but not Religious: A Pragmatic Perspective', *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy*, 20: 1 (1999), pp.15-30, at pp. 24-29.

⁶⁴ Van Ness, 'Yoga as Spiritual but not Religious: A Pragmatic Perspective', pp. 24-29.

⁶⁵ Van Ness, 'Yoga as Spiritual but not Religious: A Pragmatic Perspective', p. 30.

Of course, it could be cynically argued that Google wants its employees to practice mindfulness to increase output and staff health which decreases need to take sick leave. In this sense it is a commodity but, like Jain, I believe that practices from the yogic milieu transcend this and are genuinely spiritual. They are, therefore good evidence against secularization and in favour of re-enchantment.

2.5 Recent Contributions

Recent contributions have argued that the debate is not so simple as to present disenchantment or re-enchantment as binary oppositions. They claim that aspects of both play a part in the development of contemporary spirituality and their viewpoints are apt for the development of the growing yogic milieu. Marianna Ruah-Midbar Shapiro, in 2018, argued that magical views are rationalised and secularized views end up dissolving into mystical ones. Within the new age milieu, religious ideas are psychologised, so that psychology is sanctified. The growth of contemporary spiritualities involves the blurring of boundaries like secularization and spiritualization. Although they seem to contrast, they are mutually empowering and validating.⁶⁶ Current generations have grown up in a scientific era, mistrusting what cannot be explained empirically, yet miss an essence of magic and the supernatural in their lives.

Evidence can be found for Ruah-Midbar Shapiro's claims in Altglas' 2014 study of yoga as one element of spiritual bricolage. Altglas describes bricolage in this context as 'the making

⁶⁶ M. Ruah-Midbar Shapiro, 'It's a Game Everybody's Already Playing: The Creating-our-Reality Motif Between Secularization and Spiritualization in Contemporary Western Popular Spirituality', *Journal for the Study of Religions & Ideologies*, 17:51 (2018) pp. 115-133, at p. 124.

of eclectic and personal religiosities with modern individualism.’⁶⁷ She charts how, ‘exotic religious resources are, indeed, constructed and disseminated on the terms of those who appropriate them-that is, as universal and flexible techniques for the realization of the self.’⁶⁸ Yogic practices are taken from their original context and made suitable for the current secular age, which gives them widespread appeal. Without this process that uproots them from their religious setting, they might seem irrelevant or be passed off as belonging to an older time, which most people today would find off-putting. Altglas describes how the resources she speaks of are de-ethnicized and psychologized and Hindu-ness is downplayed.⁶⁹ Relating back to Shapiro, in order for re-enchantment to occur against a background of secularization (where many have turned their backs on religion), people need to see that within the yogic milieu, one can appreciate the benefits of a religious practice without the need for full commitment, providing a middle ground between living a completely secular life where spirituality has no role and a recognisably religious one. As the benefits of the practice are scientifically observable and grounded in psychology, they can be practiced even by those initially suspicious of the mystical. Rather than being at loggerheads, Partridge and Bruce are both making some accurate observations about trends in society that need not be incompatible. Ruah-Midbar Shapiro believes that the fact that spiritual practices have entered the mainstream is due to their widespread appeal. There is no exclusive obligation to accept the supernatural and when ideas and practices are couched as secular and conventional, they are more likely to succeed.⁷⁰ One can easily keep one foot on solid, rational ground, whilst dipping into metaphysical elements of life with the other foot, it seems.

⁶⁷ V. Atglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah: Religious Exoticism and the Logics of Bricolage*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 3.

⁶⁸ Altglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, p. 13.

⁶⁹ Altglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, pp. 14-17.

⁷⁰ Ruah-Midbar Shapiro, ‘The Creating-our-Reality Motif’, p. 130.

This is further supported by the 2018 work of Linda Ceriello who agrees that mystical experience is increasingly normalized in western secular culture. She believes that the SBNR generation embraces the new that is neither traditionally secular nor spiritual. Millennials and plurals have an egalitarian stance towards other worldviews so it cannot be judged that one is better than another.⁷¹ She admits there is a certain circularity in that a universalist philosophy is accepted, inclusive of scientific perspectives that still arrives at a monist position that all is God. There is a suspicion of religious ideas, yet religious ideas are readily borrowed. The SBNR represents a simultaneous opening (which is spiritual) and closing (which is secular). This upholds a right to eclecticism as the individual gets to decide what is spiritual.⁷² Therefore, it seems as if Bruce is correct to an extent: without secularization and the decline of traditional religion, the perfect conditions for re-enchantment would not have been enabled. If people found their thirst for spirituality was quenched by existing religious structures, then an occulture and a yogic milieu may not have developed. As secularization has already occurred, any new spiritual ideas need to be relevant in this context. However, Partridge has a superior understanding of the contemporary situation, as Bruce fails to accept that any significant re-enchantment is taking place and disregards contemporary spirituality as diffuse, meaningless, and trivial. Nonetheless, this re-enchantment has not led to mass conversion to new religions or even new religious movements within the occulture. Instead, many prefer to incorporate multiple ideas into their lives in a way that works for them (the bricolage that Atglas describes), which is why the concepts of SNBR or spiritualities of life are apt descriptions. As Jain has pointed out, just because something is popular or commodified does not mean it is insignificant in the lives of believers and is still worthy of study as a

⁷¹ L. Ceriello, 'Toward a Metamodern Reading of Spiritual but not Religious' in W.B. Parsons (ed.) *Being Spiritual but not Religious: Past, Present, Future(s)*, (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 200-218, at pp. 200-201.

⁷² L. Ceriello, 'Toward a Metamodern Reading', p. 203.

religious / spiritual practice. It is simply that the meaning of religious/spiritual has changed over time and Bruce fails to recognise this. Ceriello points out that the SBNR generation will inherit a sense of social responsibility as traditions like Vedanta and Buddhism present global issues as directly reflective of inner spiritual issues and vice versa.⁷³ Therefore, those involved cannot be said to be self-absorbed and inward looking as critics such as Carrette and King assume, and contemporary spiritualities can be said to have many characteristics we associate with traditional religion. Other scholars share my perspective. Lola Williamson describes Hindu inspired meditation movements as new religion in her 2010 work and points out that they contain all of Smart's dimensions of religion, although the experiential is usually prioritised.⁷⁴ Stephen Hunt also contends that 'spirituality has depth'. Just because something is diffuse, does not mean it is individually and socially insignificant.⁷⁵

2.6 Conclusion

There is a much stronger case for sacralization and re-enchantment than there is for widespread dis-interest in the spiritual/religious.⁷⁶ Some scholars are willing to accept a fluid definition of 'religion' that allows for change over time and for contemporary forms of alternative spirituality to be defined as a new form of religion. If this is so, then secularization

⁷³ Ceriello, 'Toward a Metamodern Reading', p. 213.

⁷⁴ L. Williamson, *Transcendent in America: Hindu Inspired Meditation Movements as New Religion*, (New York: New York University Press, 2010), p. 12.

⁷⁵ S. J. Hunt cited in Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Volume 1*, p. 50.

⁷⁶ There are also further scholars that could be discussed in this chapter to support my conclusion, but the current word count does not permit this. These include Tacey and Crosson. Tacey has outlined that a spiritual revolution is taking place evidenced by new interest in the reality of spirit and healing. Crosson admits that religion is not going away as a public, political force and this is partially due to the rise of the new age. See D. Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality*, (Hove, East Sussex: Brunner-Routledge, 2004); J.B. Crosson, 'The Politics of Spirituality and Secularization in Western Modernity', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.222>. (accessed 20 June 2020).

is only correct in so far that church attendance is declining, and membership of traditional religions is waning. Yet, this gives fuel to the re-enchantment thesis as something is needed to take its place. Thus, it seems in some way they are complementary rather than competing lines of argument. The key matter for debate though is how meaningful and significant new spiritualities of life are. I believe that activity within the yogic milieu will prove Partridge's claims about the effects on the lives of believers and disprove Bruce's claims of triviality and insignificance. Chapter three will develop this argument further by showing how the yogic milieu developed historically to become available for bricolage alongside other forms of contemporary spirituality. Chapter four will then show how the growing popularity of the yogic milieu enabled the sacralization process that scholars such as Jain and Partridge describe, which is clearly taking place.

Chapter Three: The Development of the Yogic Milieu

This chapter will examine the historical development of the contemporary yogic milieu. It will analyse how yogic practices have come to occupy a position of popularity within present day western culture. By analysing the historical development, it will be possible to see that the yogic milieu is not trivial or insubstantial, but instead is evidence of an enduring spirituality. It will therefore provide further evidence for the claims made in the previous chapter, namely, that a re-enchantment process is taking place, rather than a slide into secular superficiality, as some scholars claim.

3.1 Delineating the Yogic Milieu

Elizabeth de Michelis in her 2004 study divides ‘modern yoga’ into three categories: Modern Postural Yoga (with a focus on asana e.g. Iyengar Yoga), Modern Meditational Yoga (with a focus on meditation e.g. Transcendental Meditation or Buddhist groups) and Modern Denominational Yoga (movements with neo-gurus such as Osho International or ISKCON).⁷⁷ This typology is useful insofar as it encapsulates some of the diversity outlined at the beginning of this dissertation. However, it is limited. The categories fail to capture some of the activity that I convey with the phrase ‘yogic milieu’, activity often undertaken on an individual basis or outside of a denominational context, e.g. Ayurveda or yogic philosophy regarding *chakras* or *yamas*, congregational hymn singing (*kirtan*), and mantra recitation. De Michelis’ typology has also been criticised by Singleton who astutely points out that the subdivisions she suggests are ‘conceptual entities that did not exist prior to De Michelis’

⁷⁷ E. De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 187-188.

work.⁷⁸ This is another good reason for a broad conceptual definition of the 'yogic milieu' as I would not want to create new categories that are nothing more than arbitrary constructs.

In outlining the yogic milieu, it is worth delineating what is meant by 'yogic'. The term 'yoga' - from the root *yuj* meaning 'to join/yoke/unite' - is often used to refer to a religious system or philosophy based around physical exercises (*hatha yoga*) or a system of meditation (*raja yoga*). As a broad concept, however, 'yoga' is contextual, its meaning and goal defined differently in different texts and by different schools of thought. The third century BCE *Katha Upanishad* describes the goal of yoga thus: 'When all desires that cling to the heart are surrendered, then a mortal becomes immortal, and even in this world he is one with Brahman.'⁷⁹ Selfish motives are given up when realization that there is only ultimate reality, is gained. Meanwhile, the well-loved first century BCE *Bhagavad Gita* asserts that, 'yogic discipline is skill in actions' (2.50).⁸⁰ This suggests that the term can be used for a variety of skilful spiritual practices that includes *jnana yoga* (the yoga of knowledge), *karma yoga* (the yoga of action), and *bhakti yoga* (the yoga of devotion) all of which are discussed in the *Gita*.⁸¹ Furthermore, Patanjali's system of *raja yoga*, based on his fourth century CE *Yoga Sutras*, places emphasis on ethical preparation and a process of internalization in order to lead the spirit towards its true identification, as free from association with matter.⁸² Patanjali states that 'yoga is the suppression of the activities of the mind' (*Yoga Sutras* 1.2);⁸³ one no longer identifies with thoughts or ego but is aware that these things are insubstantial in comparison

⁷⁸ M. Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 18.

⁷⁹ J. Mascaro, (trans.) *The Upanishads* (London: Penguin Classics, 1965), p. 66.

⁸⁰ W.J. Johnson, (trans.) *The Bhagavad Gita* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 11.

⁸¹ See Mallinson & Singleton, *Roots of Yoga*, pp. 23-25 for a summary of references to these forms of yoga in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

⁸² K.K. Klostermaier, *A Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (Oxford: One World, 1998), p. 213.

⁸³ Mallinson & Singleton, *Roots of Yoga*, p. 18.

with the true nature of reality. Practices within the yogic milieu are based on these key concepts and underlying beliefs, even if current participants are not always aware of the vast history and background of classical yoga.

I intend to define the growing yogic milieu as widely as possible in order to incorporate practices such as kirtan as well as the more popular, postural yoga.⁸⁴ The work of Mallinson and Singleton has shown that yogic concepts originate not only from a range of Hindu sources including the *Upanishads* and the *Mahabharata*, but also Jain, Buddhist and Tantric sources, and it is out of this melting pot that I believe many of those currently involved in alternative spirituality look for inspiration.⁸⁵ I also wish to point out that this yogic milieu often intersects with other milieus within the wider contemporary spiritual milieu (often termed ‘new age’ milieu). Many of those who regularly practice yoga are also involved in crystal healing, shamanism, and reiki for example. They influence each other and are often difficult to separate.

De Michelis defines ‘modern yoga’ as something that has evolved in developed countries through interaction between western individuals and westernized Indians over the last 150 years.⁸⁶ Singleton has criticised this for the reason that it can lead to ‘modern yoga’ being negatively contrasted with an older more authentic form of yoga, when modern forms of yoga should be considered on their own terms.⁸⁷ Singleton prefers the term Transnational Anglophone Yoga, which conveys the flow of ideas across national boundaries well.⁸⁸ Like De Michelis and Singleton, I am dealing with a western context only and looking at how the yogic

⁸⁴ Kirtan will be defined fully in the next chapter where it serves as a case study.

⁸⁵ Mallinson & Singleton, *Roots of Yoga*.

⁸⁶ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, pp. 13-15.

⁸⁸ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, pp. 9-10.

milieu has developed primarily in North America and Europe, including the United Kingdom, as many of the studies undertaken to date have focused on this context. This dissertation is an argument for further study and more detailed research needs to be done in specific areas to further corroborate the claims made here.

3.2 Nineteenth Century Interest

Western interest in yoga, as broadly defined, is usually traced back to the nineteenth century. It is then that the first English translations of Hindu sacred texts became available and were read by influential American philosophers and writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman.⁸⁹ European Romanticist and Idealist philosophers and poets such as Friedrich Hegel and Arthur Schopenhauer in Germany and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth and William Blake in the UK, were also attracted to eastern ideas.⁹⁰ In 1836, Emerson founded the Transcendental Club in Concord, near Harvard, to share eastern ideas.⁹¹ As well as The Transcendentalists and Romanticists, the other western movement credited with introducing eastern ideas in the nineteenth century is New Thought. By 1902, the movement had an estimated one million followers, but it started in New England around the time of the Civil War and was influenced by Emerson's work. Their outlook displays many key yogic concepts such as the belief that each individual soul should awaken to its true identity with the source of all being – God itself, and that all religions point to the same ultimate reality.⁹² Another nineteenth century movement that

⁸⁹ Goldberg, *American Veda*, p. 8. Charles Wilkins' translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* was available from 1785.

⁹⁰ Goldberg, *American Veda*, pp. 29-30.

⁹¹ Goldberg, *American Veda*, p. 32.

⁹² Goldberg, *American Veda*, p. 48.

brought eastern ideas west is the Theosophical Society, founded by Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott in New York in 1873. Blavatsky wrote books including *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* and claimed to receive knowledge telepathically from Himalayan spiritual masters.⁹³

The beginning of yoga in the west can be dated to 1849 when Thoreau declared, 'To some extent, and at rare intervals, even I am a yogi.'⁹⁴ This was a landmark moment. Whereas yoga had previously been seen as 'other', from this point, it became something that westerners could engage in.⁹⁵ This is not to say that yogic ideas gained widespread acceptance at this time. Examples from the early twentieth century can be found that demonstrate that modern yoga was feared and deemed to be a threat to the existing religious and social order. One especially notable example is the case of American Ida Craddock who established the Church of Yoga in 1899. Craddock was interested in the esoteric tantric teachings of *hatha yoga* and, on the basis of the *Shiva Samhita*, she recommended seminal retention to her followers during heterosexual intercourse and discussed God as the third partner in the union of married partners. However, this promotion of mystic-erotic religion led her to be charged with blasphemy and obscenity. After three months imprisonment, and faced with a federal trial, threatening additional jail time, Craddock took her own life.⁹⁶ This demonstrates that yogic ideas were still regarded with suspicion at this time and therefore social changes in the twentieth century were necessary to enable popularization of these ideas. Attitudes to yoga changed significantly in the twentieth century and they gradually become assimilated into

⁹³ Goldberg, *American Veda*, pp. 50-51.

⁹⁴ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, pp. 2-3.

⁹⁵ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, pp. 22-24.

popular culture (or the occutural pool that Partridge speaks of), making them easily accessible for spiritual bricolage.

Another pivotal moment in the development of the yogic milieu was the arrival of Swami Vivekananda (born Narendranath Datta in 1863 in Calcutta) in the United States. He was involved in the founding of the Ramakrishna Mission, which sought to spread the Vedantic message of his teacher, Ramakrishna.⁹⁷ Vivekananda travelled to Chicago for the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions and spoke about a modernized Vedanta that emphasised realization above dogma. A practical Vedanta and Yoga was prioritised over theology.⁹⁸ De Michelis describes this as 'the first fully fledged formulation of modern yoga', marking a seminal moment in the transmission of eastern ideas to the west.⁹⁹ Jain agrees that, in the nineteenth century, yoga began to be deconstructed and reconstructed in South Asia and beyond so that a new transnational tradition emerged. For Jain, modern yoga is a group of heterogenous systems that resulted from Indian yoga reformers engaging with modern thought.¹⁰⁰ Vivekananda became a media celebrity and lectured in many American cities.¹⁰¹ He then went on to ordain the first American *sannyasis* and set up Vedanta Society centres in many American cities. Vivekananda deliberately kept to the background any aspects of Hinduism that might be 'off-putting' and considered 'cultist' or 'idolatrous'.¹⁰² A history of yoga in the west would undoubtedly be incomplete without mention of Vivekananda, but scholars such as De Michelis have been criticised for putting too much emphasis on the importance of his message. Vivekananda taught Raja Yoga with meditation,

⁹⁷ Goldberg, *American Veda* p. 69.

⁹⁸ Goldberg, *American Veda*, pp. 70-79.

⁹⁹ Goldberg, *American Veda*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁰ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 21.

¹⁰¹ De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, p. 112-113.

¹⁰² Goldberg, *American Veda*, p. 80.

philosophy, and ethics at the forefront. In his time, *hatha yoga* was seen as extreme, barbaric, and anti-social in India, which led to the meditational components of yoga being emphasised. This was in line with the views of Emerson and the Theosophists.¹⁰³ Nowadays, when someone hears the word 'yoga', they would be more likely to think of the *asanas* of *hatha yoga*. This proves the point that a key shift in thinking took place mid-twentieth century. Although earlier thinkers may have laid some of the groundwork for the popularization of yoga, it was post 1960s counterculture that it really began to enter the mainstream.

3.3 Twentieth Century Developments

De Michelis has been criticised for omitting a seventy year period in the history of yoga, namely the years between the publication of Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* in 1896 and Iyengar's *Light on Yoga* in 1966.¹⁰⁴ Singleton's *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* aims to bridge this gap. Singleton argues that modern postural practice is new and separate from pre-modern yoga as it was much influenced by the physical culture movement that grew in popularity in India from the mid nineteenth century. This synthesis of western gymnastics and body building and Indian forms of physical culture (the stretch and relax movement) was completed by the 1940s with the appearance of key teacher Krishnamacharya who led the Mysore *asana* revival. His teachings were disseminated in the west by his students: Jois, Iyengar, Devi and Desikachar.¹⁰⁵ After this, English language yoga manuals emerged which put *asana* at the forefront for the first time.¹⁰⁶ Most popular perhaps

¹⁰³ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, pp. 27-29.

¹⁰⁴ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁵ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, p. 175.

¹⁰⁶ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, p. 6.

was *Light On Yoga* with its thoroughly individualistic approach and step by step instructions that can be followed easily.¹⁰⁷ This assertion that present forms of yoga are new demonstrates that a novel milieu has developed in line with demand for an enchanted life. It may take influence and ideas from earlier thinkers such as Vivekananda or the Theosophists, but it is a new movement that presents eastern ideas in a way that appeals to westerners. This contention is further strengthened by the support of other scholars such as Jain who underlines that yoga has always been context-sensitive as there is no legitimate or true tradition.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, we cannot compare the current yogic milieu with classical yoga. This helps to challenge the claims of Carrette & King who argue (as was seen in section 2.4) that recent forms of yoga are inauthentic as they are bound up with consumer culture. It needs to be considered on its own terms. Thus, the history of its development does not reveal it to be trivial or superficial in any way, but quite the opposite.

3.4 The 1960s Counterculture and Beyond

By 1961, postural yoga was prominent on American television with the series *Yoga for Health*. By this point, there was no need to encounter Indian gurus, one could practice postural yoga in the comfort of their own home.¹⁰⁹ In effect it had become a product that people could choose.¹¹⁰ The 1960s counterculture was a pivotal period for the rise of the yogic milieu. At this time, the peace movement began as a reaction to US involvement in Vietnam and Cuba, and in 1960 the contraceptive pill became available, bringing reproductive

¹⁰⁷ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, pp. 69-70.

¹⁰⁸ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. xvi.

¹⁰⁹ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 42.

¹¹⁰ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 68.

freedom. A subculture gradually emerged, that was different from conventional society in terms of values and behaviour. The Beat generation authors and poets such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac with their interest in Zen, included Indian concepts in their writings. Ginsberg travelled to India and became accustomed to the chanting of mantras and continued on his return and helped set up ISKCON in the USA.¹¹¹ A new spirituality began to emerge, as young people wanted the freedom to pick what suited them from a range of religious practices, and they were attracted to the mystical elements of Hinduism and Buddhism.¹¹² In 1969, Woodstock was opened by Swami Satchitananda who asked the audience to chant *Hari Om and Ram* followed by a minute's silence. In 1966 Satchitananda had established the Yogaville ashram in Virginia to spread the pluralistic message of Integral Yoga.¹¹³

Prior to the 1960s, Transnational Anglophone Yoga was not a pop cultural product.¹¹⁴ Thus, the above events were vitally important for the development and popularization of the yogic milieu into its present form. The involvement of the Beatles in Transcendental Meditation and their visit to India, as well as the Maharishi's trip to the UK, all brought awareness to the fact that yogic concepts were available to westerners for consumption. Therefore, this decade represents a key turning point. This is further supported by many of Atglas' claims that spiritual bricolage is a result of liberation from collective norms and values.¹¹⁵ The individualization and detraditionalization that arose out of the counterculture are key to the ability to be able to take religious ideas out of their original context and use them in another, and this is what we see with the chanting of mantras at Woodstock.¹¹⁶ The

¹¹¹ P. Oliver, *Hinduism and the 1960s: The Rise of a Counter-Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 3-13.

¹¹² Oliver, *Hinduism and the 1960s*, p. 32.

¹¹³ Oliver, *Hinduism and the 1960s*, pp. 39-40.

¹¹⁴ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 21.

¹¹⁵ Atglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, pp. 3-4.

¹¹⁶ Atglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, pp. 3-4.

de-contextualization process that the Vedanta Society began was accelerated during the counter-culture whereby Hinduism was made exportable.¹¹⁷ This shows a steady historical development in the west. This, in turn, shows that there will be scope for alternative spiritualities whenever traditional religion wanes, so the yogic milieu is significant. The cultural shifts of the 1960s made new ideas more accessible and put them in the spotlight, and this led to an explosion of interest which continues to this day. It is not a fad that has declined since this time; in the last twenty years, yogic involvement continues to increase, as reported at the outset.

Jain outlines three developments that enabled Transnational Anglophone Yoga to become popularized post-counterculture and become part of consumer culture. The first development was the freedom to travel.¹¹⁸ This was vitally important for the spread of ideas enabling Indian teachers such as the aforementioned Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Swami Satitchananda to come west and enabling Ginsberg and Dr Richard Alpert (later known as Ram Dass) to travel to India. Without the advent of affordable air travel and western flight routes to India, this would have been much more difficult. Jain gives the example of the teacher Muktananda who left India in 1970 to promote Siddha Yoga in the west. This school of yoga asserts that meditation and chanting leads to self-realisation.¹¹⁹ By 1982, three hundred centres were set up globally and many celebrities endorsed the tradition such as Diana Ross and Melanie Griffith.¹²⁰ Jain attributes this rapid growth to the creation of the 'intensive' in 1974 which made initiation quick and accessible, and did not require permanent renunciation. Selected disciples were also given the power to conduct training programmes

¹¹⁷ Atglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, pp. 35-36.

¹¹⁸ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 43.

¹¹⁹ Atglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, pp.38-39.

¹²⁰ Atglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, pp. 39-40.

and publish books which enabled long term survival of this brand of yoga, which was all enabled by the initial arrival of the teacher.¹²¹ The pioneering ability to travel freely made the growth of the movement possible. Thus, the commencement of ease of travel was clearly an important factor in the growth of the yogic milieu.

Secondly, Jain believes that widespread disillusionment with established religion allowed gurus with solutions to break into a competitive market.¹²² This significant development has already been dealt with in some detail in the last two chapters and is also crucially important for the development of the yogic milieu. If most people were content with the religion of their ancestors, then de-contextualization of ideas from existing religions, would have been unlikely to occur, as these ideas were meeting people's needs in their original context, and few people would be seeking alternatives.

Thirdly, Jain argues that postural yoga has become increasingly intersected with emerging global consumer culture. Postural yoga, the most popular form that yoga takes within the contemporary yogic milieu, is marketed as one choice among many. Modern yoga is now easily accessible, rather than a countercultural technique. Positive media attention and mass marketed books with a focus on self-development contribute to its success.¹²³ Following in the footsteps of *Yoga for Health*, and serving the needs of twenty first century society, in 2015, *Yoga Anytime*, a subscription based online yoga resource was launched- with multiple channels for every type of yoga including *kundalini yoga*, *bhakti yoga* and *vinyasa* - which currently gives access to 2600 videos.¹²⁴ Additionally, there are multiple YouTube

¹²¹ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, pp. 54-55.

¹²² Jain, *Selling Yoga* p. 43.

¹²³ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 43.

¹²⁴ See <https://www.yogaanytime.com> (accessed 16 April 2020).

channels devoted to yoga, which can be accessed free of charge. Developments such as these make yoga accessible to everyone, without the need to leave their front door. This makes yoga constantly visible and perpetuates its growth. For Carrette and King, this would be evidence of its superficiality, that it has become watered down and bears no resemblance to older, more authentic forms of yoga. However, as previously mentioned, these attitudes need to be rejected, as present forms of yoga should not be compared with anything else, but accepted as they are. The fact that they have grown to become part of consumer culture is testament to the meaning it gives to individuals.¹²⁵ In the past, new forms of religion, may have avoided becoming brands, but just because they now take on different forms, whereby spirituality intersects with consumer culture, it does not make them meaningless and trivial. Instead, scholars need to consider why this level of growth has occurred and accept that alternative spirituality no longer sits within the realm of 'religion'. Religion is not fixed or static; it needs to change and evolve to remain relevant. Thus, yoga can still be a form of religious practice as Jain and De Michelis contend.

3.5 A Process of Easternization or Westernization?

Some scholars, such as Colin Campbell, argue that, given the above historical factors, a process of easternization has taken place in the west whereby an eastern cultural paradigm has taken over the west.¹²⁶ Harvey Cox agrees that people turn east because they are looking for an immediacy and inner peace that they cannot find elsewhere. Existing religious

¹²⁵ Courtney Bender and Wendy Cage regard western involvement in Asian religious ideas to be serious and sustainable, and remind that fascination dates back at least two centuries. See C. Bender and W. Cage, 'Yoga and Re-birth in America: Asian Religions are Here to Stay', *Contexts*, (3:1), 2004, pp. 45-51, at pp. 45-46.

¹²⁶ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West*, p. 89.

traditions such as Christianity are viewed as patriarchal, tired, authoritarian, and sermonising. Therefore, people in the west start using eastern practices.¹²⁷ Partridge, however, believes this easternization thesis to be overly simplistic. He claims that an emergence of neo-Romanticism is taking place, an aspect of which is mysticization, particularly characterised by the east, which can be understood in terms of occulture. He points out that movements like Theosophy may have brought eastern ideas to the west, but being a fundamentally western movement, a more accurate description is western thought with an eastern flavour. Even eastern thinkers like Vivekananda appreciated western science and technology, showing that both east and west have strengths to offer. The combining of western technology with eastern spirituality is based on an essentialist myth, when in reality the west has a spiritual history and the east is quite materialistic.¹²⁸ Partridge makes an important point that we cannot essentialise 'east' and 'west', using stereotypes that suit our arguments. Rather, it seems that, in this case, easternization and westernization should both be recognised as contributing factors to the development of the contemporary yogic milieu.

Eastern ideas have clearly been accessible in the west since the nineteenth century, but it was their adaptation by westerners that allowed them to be widely accepted and eventually become a product of popular culture. Partridge claims that a widespread and eclectic acceptance of older beliefs that were previously considered exotic is a better explanation than a linear and gradual easternization process. Popular culture allowed de-exotification to take place.¹²⁹ This is supported by Jain's research (explored earlier in section 3.2) about the initial persecution of westerners who were involved in yoga and tantra. It also

¹²⁷ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West*, p. 87.

¹²⁸ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West*, pp. 89-91.

¹²⁹ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West*, p. 99.

supports Jain's claims about the importance of twentieth century developments for yoga to be made available as a marketable brand in the twenty first century. If a process of easternization had taken place, then there would be no need to alter eastern ideas significantly for use by westerners. Yet, Partridge points out that eastern ideas in western contexts are 'inhistorized, incultured, contextualised.'¹³⁰ If we look at modern postural yoga or western forms of secular Buddhism, the forms they take are often different to those that exist in the east, even though it is eastern concepts (such as *asana*, *prana* or mindfulness) that are being employed. This would be further supported by the assertion of leading scholars of yoga such as Jain and Singleton that contemporary yoga is new and contextual and only vaguely connected to pre-modern forms of yoga. When the eastern teacher Muktananda first arrived in the west, his lectures were set up and introduced by Ram Dass (a westerner).¹³¹ This clearly shows that a certain amount of westernization has to occur, rather than simple easternization occurring in the west.

Partridge's claim about the need for contextualisation is also supported by the work of Atglas and her focus on the importance of individualization and detraditionalization that allow exotic religious resources to become available for bricolage by westerners.¹³² It is indeed western teachers such as Stephen Batchelor, Sharon Salzberg and Ram Dass who have travelled east and returned to write books and set up ways of accessing the knowledge and practices they share in ways that westerners can access and understand. Therefore, it seems sensible to conclude that as much westernization has occurred as easternization. People turning east is only one part of western re-enchantment and Partridge reminds us that,

¹³⁰ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West*, p. 106.

¹³¹ Williamson, *Transcendent in America*, p. 50.

¹³² Atglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, p. 3.

‘Easternization needs to be understood as part of a broader neo-Romantic, mysticizing religio-cultural stream in the west, which feeds into and drinks from the occultural pool.’¹³³ Partridge is correct to acknowledge a range of influences in the re-enchantment process, and the decline of traditional religion has led people to look back nostalgically to a pre-enlightenment age when life was interpreted in a magical way and not just through the lens of rationalism and empiricism.

Yet, without new means of travel to the east and teachers returning with new ideas, there would not have been adequate resources available for adaptation. Therefore, I believe Jain is correct to assert that this is one of the most important factors for the development of a yogic milieu that intersects with consumer culture. Partridge also rightfully reminds that eastern resources currently being used for spiritual bricolage should not be written off as pseudo-spirituality or quasi-religion. There is a level of commitment required that goes beyond the secular.¹³⁴ This supports my claims made in the previous chapter that the way the yogic milieu has developed shows us that this is a new form of religion that deserves serious study and is not something trivial or superficial. Partridge also predicts that ‘some form of spirituality will continue to inform the lives of Western individuals.’¹³⁵ This prediction was made sixteen years ago and I believe that Partridge is right that spiritual concepts within the yogic milieu and wider occulture continue to give meaning to people’s lives. As the statistics given in chapters one and section 2.1 show, the number of people who use yoga and identify as SBNR is on the rise and this phenomenon is worthy of further study as the twenty first century progresses.

¹³³ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West*, p. 117.

¹³⁴ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West*, p. 117.

¹³⁵ Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West*, p. 187.

3.6 Conclusion

The events outlined in this chapter provide support for the claims made in earlier chapters. The seeds were sown for the yogic milieu in the nineteenth century with the first western interest in eastern ideas, including yoga (in a broad sense). However, social changes in the twentieth century were pivotal for its exponential growth, where it moved from the background to take centre stage in people's imaginations as one possible option for spiritual experimentation. The ability to travel freely and cheaply to exotic locations allows for the spread of ideas which are readily accepted as many people have become disillusioned with traditional religious ideas that seem staid and patriarchal, lacking colour and relevance in a more liberal age. This demonstrates the dual processes of secularization and re-enchantment and sacralization that the yogic milieu embodies. It also shows that this new yogic milieu has not sprung up overnight. Even though it has intersected with consumer culture, it is not throwaway and trivial, but significant and meaningful to the SBNR generation that participate in its practices.

Chapter Four: Accounting for the Appeal of the Yogic Milieu: Kirtan as Case Study

This chapter will take one practice within the yogic milieu, namely kirtan, as an example and analyse the reasons for its growing popularity. This case study will show that practices such as this are meaningful to those who engage in them. They supply a spiritual element to life that the SBNR are seeking. This, then, gives weight to the claims made in earlier chapters, that a spiritual revolution is taking place, rather than a slide into superficial secularity. Yet, as this dissertation has already demonstrated, the appeal of such practices may be attributed to a combination or convergence of secularization and sacralization. The growth in participation in yogic practices, such as kirtan and postural yoga, provides further support for the re-enchantment thesis. A growing number of westerners look back to ‘ancient’, ‘eastern’ practices to reintroduce a mystical element into their lives, an element that was lost post-enlightenment, alongside the decline of traditional religion.

4.1 Kirtan as Case Study

Kirtan may be defined as a ‘song of praise’, and is akin to the western terms ‘hymn’ or ‘psalm’.¹³⁶ This eastern form of congregational hymn singing originated in the Indian *bhakti* tradition (sixth century CE onwards) that favoured devotion over priestly rituals.¹³⁷ It became especially popular in the Hindu Vaishnava tradition and was elevated in the *Bhagavata Purana* (sixth to ninth century CE) when it was given Brahmanical sanction. *Nam kirtan* (the repetition

¹³⁶ G. Beck, ‘Sacred Music and Hindu Religious Experience: From Ancient Roots to the Modern Classical Tradition’, *Religions*, 10:85, (2019), pp. 1-15, at p. 6.

¹³⁷ G. Beck, ‘Kirtan and Bhajan in Bhakti Traditions’, in Jacobsen, Basu, Malinar & Narayanan (eds) *Brill Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012) pp.585-598, at p. 589.

of Vishnu's name/s) became popular as it was seen as a simple practice, leading to liberation in the difficult *Kali Yuga*.¹³⁸ Major popularization of *nam kirtan* in the west occurred once it was brought to the USA by Prabhupada (founder of ISKCON) in the 1960s, although the practice had been emphasised in the west by earlier teachers such as Yogananda. Since then it has become a major feature of many Yoga and Vedanta movements in the west, being recommended by gurus such as Swami Satchitananda, Muktananda and Satya Sai Baba.¹³⁹ In the twenty first century, it is now performed by best-selling non-Hindu western artists such as Krishna Das, Jai Uttal and Deva Premal who also add new age, Celtic, middle eastern, blues, jazz or African elements, and perform concerts all over the world.¹⁴⁰

While the importance of sacred music and sound has been recognised by scholars like Otto and Van der Leeuw, there is a paucity of scholarship on this topic, let alone the transition of religious musical practices to a western, secular context.¹⁴¹ There is very little academic writing on kirtan. This may be due to the tenacity of outmoded definitions of religion that overlook the experiential/emotional aspects.¹⁴² Therefore, there is good reason to choose a case study from the little studied arena of sacred sound, to show that further study of kirtan in all contexts is warranted. It also demonstrates that the yogic milieu has much more to offer than its most popular product, postural yoga, and that a range of practices within the wider occulture are sought. In what follows, the reasons for the increasing popularity of kirtan

¹³⁸ Beck, 'Kirtan and Bhajan in Bhakti Traditions', p. 589.

¹³⁹ Beck, 'Kirtan and Bhajan in Bhakti Traditions', p. 597.

¹⁴⁰ Beck, 'Kirtan and Bhajan in Bhakti Traditions', p. 597.

¹⁴¹ G. Beck, *Sonic Liturgy: Ritual and Music in Hindu Tradition*, (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2012) pp. 3-5.

¹⁴² Beck, *Sonic Liturgy*, p. 5. However, it is worth noting that Ninian Smart recognised the multi-dimensional nature of religion by including the experiential, ritual and social, alongside the mythological, doctrinal and ethical in his well-known taxonomy. See N. Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, (London: Fount, 1982) pp.15-25.

among the SBNR are examined in detail. These include its pluralistic appeal and accessibility, its social and community appeal, and its pragmatic appeal.

4.2 Pluralistic Appeal and Accessibility

One of the reasons for the increasing popularity of kirtan among the SBNR is its pluralistic appeal. That is to say, in spite of its Hindu origins, kirtan is now presented in a universalised, secular way by the majority of neo-Hindu movements and kirtan leaders, meaning that it can be practiced by people of all faiths and none. American artists like Krishna Das (who often do not identify as Hindu), inspired by the pluralistic approach of their spiritual teachers, can be said to have secularized kirtan.¹⁴³ Krishna Das regularly points out that although chants may include the names of deities (e.g. *Om Namah Shivaya*), the practice requires no allegiance to any god or set of beliefs.¹⁴⁴ The practice was separated from its Indian context when brought to the west by Indian teachers such as Prabhupada and Swami Satchitananda, but it has been further de-contextualised by those such as Krishna Das in order to cater to a wider audience.¹⁴⁵ Exotic religious resources are popularised through processes of universalization and de-ethnicization.¹⁴⁶ The message is thus that anyone can get involved, and that the practices no longer belong to a certain time or culture, making them available for adoption by westerners from a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds.

¹⁴³ V. Kannan, 'The Mahamantra, Kirtan Performance and the Embodied Circulation of Cultural Rhetoric', *Enculturation: A Journal of Rhetoric, Writing and Culture*, <http://enculturation.net/the-mahamantra-kirtan-performance> (accessed 21 May 2020). Neem Karoli Baba (affectionately known as Maharaj-ji), who inspired kirtan artists such as Krishna Das and Jai Uttal often spoke of the benefits of taking a pluralistic approach, which is then often echoed in their words and explanation of kirtan. See P. Markus, *Love Everyone: The Transcendent Wisdom of Neem Karoli Baba Told Through the Stories of the Westerners Whose Lives he Transformed*, (New York: Harper One, 2015) pp. 92-93.

¹⁴⁴ Nonetheless, it can still serve as a spiritual, religious or devotional practice for practitioners, in the same way that Jain and De Michelis regards postural yoga to be a body of religious practice, but it is up to the individual to ascribe the meaning that resonates with them and interpret the practice in a way that may be personal to them.

¹⁴⁵ Kannan, 'The Mahamantra, Kirtan Performance and the Embodied Circulation of Cultural Rhetoric'

¹⁴⁶ Altglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, p. 17.

In spite of such secularizing elements, there is nevertheless a tendency to retain a spiritual dimension and kirtan has been called ‘the prayer of the spiritual-but-not-religious, American’s fastest growing faith group.’¹⁴⁷ Practitioners say that it feels like a spiritual practice, and is ‘the most accessible way to get into the spiritual aspect of yoga.’¹⁴⁸ As explored in chapters one and two of this dissertation, having turned their back on traditional religion, many people still desire practices that bring a spiritual element to life, without the need for conversion or religious adherence and kirtan fulfils this. This makes seemingly novel yogic practices attractive when compared to ‘staid’, traditional forms of Judeo-Christian worship. As an all-encompassing experience, the audience is fully involved and the people in the room make the meaning of what is going on. Audience members co-construct the chant with their voices and bodies by singing, dancing, clapping etc.¹⁴⁹ This allows for the same mantra to be interpreted in a spiritual or secular way, depending on the intentions and beliefs of those in the room on the basis of their interaction and any accompanying explanation from the kirtan leaders / artists. If someone thinks of it as a meditational experience where the mantras calm the mind, bringing mental health benefits, this is fine. Alternatively, for others it is an opportunity to pay homage to the divinity within or embodied in the universe, symbolised by the deities invoked, and this is equally correct for them. There is a great deal of freedom and flexibility, which the SBNR generation values. No one is being preached at or sermonised, simply involved experientially.

¹⁴⁷ M. Boorstein, ‘Kirtan’s Call and Response Chanting Draws a Growing Number of Washingtonians’, *Washington Post*, 8 January 2013: https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/kirtans-call-and-response-chanting-draws-a-growing-number-of-washingtonians/2013/01/08/ef2cc87a-59a9-11e2-88d0-c4cf65c3ad15_story.html (accessed 22 April 2020).

¹⁴⁸ Boorstein, ‘Kirtan’s Call and Response Chanting’.

¹⁴⁹ Kannan, ‘The Mahamantra’.

This, then, demonstrates the dual processes of secularization and sacralization when considering the growth in popularity of yogic practices. Kirtan is described as a spiritual practice, yet is also branded as universal and often led by ethnically caucasian non-Hindu westerners. It seems to have transcended its traditional context within Hindu and Sikh worship and is often carried out in secular environments (yoga studios, community centres or even concert arenas for the bigger artists). Thus, it is also gaining in popularity due to secularization. Less people are brought up in a religious way. Subsequently, they look for ways to fill the gap created in their lives by the decline of traditional religion. This helps to explain why initially religious practices are now found in secular settings. Beck agrees that, 'Kirtan and bhajan have...overflowed beyond the Hindu temple and meeting hall, and continue to aspire towards goals of world peace through global and commercial spheres of expression.'¹⁵⁰

In a similar way to postural yoga, kirtan has become commodified, whereby people often pay to participate - especially when held in yoga centres or concert arenas - but this does not make it a trivial practice. It is merely a new way to take part in religious / spiritual activity. As Vanni Kannan points out this new ethos is one of 'multicultural, pluralistic, spiritual transcendence', as opposed to the usual devotional Vaishnava goal.¹⁵¹ In this hybrid of the sacred and secular, he claims two rhetorics emerge, one of spirituality and the other of multicultural pluralism.¹⁵² In the Washington Post, *bhakti* is described as meeting a universal need that all audiences share. One can experience the divine as an intense, personal God, rather than an aloof, remote one (sacred, spiritual agenda), yet is also described as providing a sense of community (secular goal, but one that religion traditionally met, i.e. Smart's social

¹⁵⁰ Beck, 'Kirtan and Bhajan in Bhakti Traditions' p. 597.

¹⁵¹ Kannan, 'The Mahamantra'.

¹⁵² Kannan, 'The Mahamantra'.

dimension).¹⁵³ People admit to not knowing the meaning of mantras, but still see them as having 'holy power'.¹⁵⁴ The sense that one can become immediately involved without the need for in depth understanding means little time and effort is required as people can learn as much or as little about the background, history and meaning of the practice as they want to, whilst still participating and gaining the benefits. This is similar to the way mindfulness has become detached from its original, Buddhist setting and is now often sought purely for health benefits, as discussed in chapter one.¹⁵⁵

In addition to its pluralistic and secular appeal, kirtan is also an inclusive practice, due to its accessibility. It requires no special clothing, products, or accessories unlike postural yoga. In Iyengar yoga, the body is described as the pure vehicle of attainment.¹⁵⁶ In kirtan, however, it is the voice that is the vehicle of attainment, making it accessible even for those with physical limitations. In both cases, it is something we already have; nothing new needs to be gained. Despite an element of de-contextualization, radical adaptation for the west – in terms of content and the way the practice is carried out at least - has not been required. Thus, language is not a barrier. Many artists continue to use centuries old Sanskrit mantras such as the *Mahamantra* or *Om Namah Shivaya*, due to their relative simplicity. *Bhakti* traditions have always been inclusive, arising outside the hierarchical Brahmanical system, meaning participants of all castes and religions would sit, stand, sing and eat together.¹⁵⁷ Popular poet

¹⁵³ Boorstein, 'Kirtan's Call and Response Chanting'.

¹⁵⁴ Boorstein, 'Kirtan's Call and Response Chanting'.

¹⁵⁵ Despite the growing popularity of kirtan in the west, the secularization and de-contextualization of the practice has not been wholly well-received. The Hindu American Foundation are aggrieved that more reference is not made to the practice's Hindu roots. See S. Shukla quoted in Kannan, 'The Mahamantra'. There were also protests at an American university, where charges of cultural appropriation were brought against a non-Hindu kirtan artist. See Anon. 'Appropriating Hinduism? Students Protest Kirtan Singing by White Woman in US' *First Post*, 25 April 2016: <https://www.firstpost.com/world/appropriating-hinduism-students-protest-kirtan-singing-by-white-woman-in-us-2747648.html> (accessed 22 July 2020).

¹⁵⁶ Jain, *Selling Yoga*, p. 82.

¹⁵⁷ Beck, 'Kirtan and Bhajan in Bhakti Traditions', p. 597.

saints such as Namdev (1270-1350) and Tukaram (1608-1649) accompanied Sanskrit chants with hymns sung in vernacular languages so that everyone could understand.¹⁵⁸ Western artists may choose to write their own western chants in English, but this is in some way no different to the usual practice of composing in the local dialect.

Today, mainstream artists have taken the practice out of the context of Modern Denominational Yoga. It is usually done communally in a live setting, but kirtan CDs are readily available, as well as live streamed music and You Tube videos, making the practice accessible from home, if one does not live in an area with regular kirtan sessions. Like postural yoga, kirtan music has become a readily available product that can be selected for bricolage from the yogic milieu and used alongside other new age techniques. It is flexible enough that, it can be done by anyone, anywhere and this holds appeal, and feels welcoming. Krishna Das emphasises the simplicity by saying, 'We're just singing. We feel happy when we sing. It feels natural.'¹⁵⁹ In this way, it is easy and familiar, it is something we have all done before, even if some of the words are new.

4.3 Social and Community Appeal

In addition to its pluralistic and inclusive appeal, modern yogic activity often involves a community aspect that could be lacking in people's lives since the decline of conventional religion. Being a group activity, kirtan involvement can bring a sense of belonging. Beatrix Hauser in her study of mantra use applies Appadurai's fields of global circulation. These are

¹⁵⁸ Beck, 'Kirtan and Bhajan in Bhakti Traditions', p. 591.

¹⁵⁹ Krishna Das, *Chants of a Lifetime* (New York: Hay House, 2010), p. 56.

‘imaginary constructs’ or ‘globally defined fields of possibility.’¹⁶⁰ One of these is the ethnoscape, which in this case refers to ‘an imagined transnational community of yoga practitioners’.¹⁶¹ This sphere which interacts with others such as the financescape and mediascape can help explain how global flows occur.¹⁶² As with postural yoga, a participant feels part of a group of wider yogis and those who engage in kirtan alone or in small groups feel connected to the wider global group who share the same passion for singing mantras.

Strong emotional ties can result from charity events entwined with postural yoga. Events such as the twenty-four hour Yoga Aid World Challenge enables all who participate to feel connected, creating a familiar in-group, whilst raising money for charities such as the Africa Yoga Project.¹⁶³ Even though postural yoga tends to attract urban middle class younger women as a majority, there are many initiatives such as this that aim to bring postural yoga to disadvantaged groups in society.¹⁶⁴ The same applies to kirtan. Jai Uttal has taken kirtan to American prisons and Nikki Slade has worked with prisoners and addicts in England at Wandsworth Prison and The Priory Hospital in London.¹⁶⁵ Prisoners at San Quentin have said that kirtan makes them feel empowered to be free. In the documentary film, *Mantra: Sounds into Silence*, prisoners of different races and religions dance and sing together.¹⁶⁶ There is appeal in a practice that is not just lining the pockets of kirtan artists but also having an important social function in empowering vulnerable groups in society. This can help challenge

¹⁶⁰ B. Hauser, ‘Following the Transcultural Circulation of Bodily Practices: Modern Yoga and the Corporeality of Mantras’ in Baier, Maas & Preisendans (eds.) *Yoga in Transformation: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Vienna: Vienna University Press, 2018), pp. 505-528, at p.513.

¹⁶¹ Hauser, ‘Following the Transcultural Circulation of Bodily Practices’, p. 514.

¹⁶² Hauser, ‘Following the Transcultural Circulation of Bodily Practices’, pp. 513-514.

¹⁶³ Koch, ‘Living4giving’, pp.532-534.

¹⁶⁴ Koch, ‘Living4giving’, p. 535.

¹⁶⁵ See G. Wyss, (Director) *Mantra: Sounds into Silence* (2018 film) & N. Slade, *The Healing Power of Chanting* (London: Free the Inner Voice, 2016).

¹⁶⁶ Wyss, (Director) *Mantra: Sounds into Silence* (2018 film).

the claims of Carrette, King and Bruce that yogic involvement is primarily selfish and inward looking. It shows that yogic practices may be replacing more traditional ways of believing and belonging, and therefore, these modern spiritual practices, as part of a wider occulture, are deserving of serious study and analysis by scholars and cannot simply be derogatorily explained away as 'faddy' or 'insubstantial'.

Bhakti festivals also include a charity aspect. California's annual Bhakti Fest was set up by the non-profit organisation Center for Spiritual Studies (founded by Ram Dass and Sridhar Silberfein), using yoga and sacred music events to raise money for causes such as Food for Life Vrindavan.¹⁶⁷ Koch notes that music and charity have often gone together with events like Band Aid.¹⁶⁸ This allows people to feel like they are giving back, possibly motivated by a desire to demonstrate 'spiritual' values such as loving kindness. In this way, yoga, in all its forms, is more than self-development.¹⁶⁹ Alternatively, it could arise from a feeling of gratitude or perhaps most relevant in the case of kirtan, connectedness. A person feels a part of 'an imagined and self-empowering community of people of good will', which adds to a feeling of companionship.¹⁷⁰ A moral community is created by a yoga practice becoming 'contextualised in an event that turns the focus from self-perfection towards other-regarding behaviour'.¹⁷¹ This applies equally to postural yoga events as bhakti festivals, where a feeling of connectedness is automatically generated through chanting together. This feeling of being part of something bigger than oneself that gives back to the global community could be a rewarding aspect of participation in kirtan. Kirtan performers agree that a sense of group

¹⁶⁷ See <https://www.cssca.org/> (accessed 26 July 2020).

¹⁶⁸ Koch, 'Living4giving', p. 538.

¹⁶⁹ Koch, 'Living4giving', pp. 540-542.

¹⁷⁰ Koch, 'Living4giving', p. 544.

¹⁷¹ Koch, 'Living4giving', p. 546.

connection is a major factor in the present popularity of kirtan in western contexts.¹⁷² This is similar to the appeal of Evangelical Christian services which have a participatory, emotive element, which until recently saw growth in the arena of American religion.¹⁷³ It fulfils a basic need to come together and share something as a group and this is more important than the actual meaning of the mantras.¹⁷⁴ This further strengthens the argument that modern yogic practice steps into the role previously fulfilled by traditional religion. Therefore, it seems that involvement in the yogic milieu fulfils a need for social and community involvement that has been left lacking since the decline of religion in the west, and this is part of its appeal, thus fuelling the search for re-enchantment. Kirtan therefore appeals to those looking to participate in something with a spiritual element alongside like-minded individuals, an activity that also provides a respite from fast paced modern society, without the need to slavishly learn about the beliefs behind it, unless one feels compelled to.

4.4 Pragmatic Appeal

Finally, yogic activities may appeal due to the observable beneficial effects they have on body and mind. Eric Mullis in his study of modern postural yoga and pragmatism observes that, even though eastern ideas are often incompatible with western science, using a pragmatic approach means practitioners can remain open minded. One can have a modern, often imaginative take on older ideas without losing respect for them. The true test for each person is the effect on one's own experiences. This pluralist pursuit of value is helpful as it means the background to yoga need not be jettisoned. Indeed, learning about it will benefit

¹⁷² Gaura Vani in Boorstein, 'Kirtan's Call and Response Chanting'

¹⁷³ Boorstein, 'Kirtan's Call and Response Chanting'

¹⁷⁴ Sha Glanski in Boorstein, 'Kirtan's Call and Response Chanting'.

one's practice. He also points out that if there is an ethical and social component to modern yoga, it is more meaningful as it is not just a physical practice.¹⁷⁵

This is true for kirtan as well as postural yoga. Undoubtedly, many who try it are initially sceptical that singing mantras alongside music will bring about positive effects but decide to try it and see.¹⁷⁶ They may be put off by descriptions that refer to yogic concepts and claim the re-alignment of *nadis* or the opening of *chakras* if they doubt their existence. However, when kirtan is marketed, the effects it brings are often advertised in a very practical way, albeit often alongside the more spiritual aspects. Below is a description from the English kirtan artist, Tim Chalice, which makes clear that kirtan is a universal practice that anyone can try. It then emphasises that it can be practiced for a number of reasons – secular and spiritual. The benefits for the body and mind are then listed, highlighting the pragmatic appeal of kirtan:

Chanting is for everyone. *No prior experience of chanting is necessary to gain the many benefits it has to offer, simply an openness to what may occur. Through chanting, you meet the practice exactly where you need to. This might be finding a still point of relaxation after a hectic week at work; the joy of singing together; feeling our hearts awaken; offering our prayers to the Divine, or simply being present to the moment. Chanting is so powerful as it affects us physically as well as spiritually. We breathe more deeply and slowly. The sound vibrations resonate throughout our bodies creating an internal massage, our brainwave patterns are altered evoking states of relaxation and our blood pressure and heart rate decreases. Regular practice can elicit a relaxation response, reduce stress, sharpen mental clarity and help support our overall health and wellness.*¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ E. C. Mullis, 'The Pragmatist Yogi: Ancient and Contemporary Yogic Somaesthetics', *The Pluralist*, 10:2 (2015) pp. 205-219.

¹⁷⁶ See for example the descriptions of those such as Nina Rao in *Mantra: Sounds into Silence*.

¹⁷⁷ T. Chalice, 'Chanting/Kirtan' Tim Chalice website <https://www.timchalice.com/chantingkirtan.htm> (accessed 28 April 2020).

A similar description is found on the website of a yoga teacher who offers kirtan in west Wales:

Chanting mantras can help unlock the places where we have become rigid, opening us to a depth of feeling which we sometimes struggle to connect with in the hustle and bustle of modern life. The repetition of mantras also helps still the mind, enabling us to become less identified with our thoughts and emotions and to feel the presence of something greater beneath. This state of openness helps us to connect with whatever we each hold highest and to experience ourselves as part of the Divine web of life.

Ultimately, trying to describe kirtan to those who have never experienced it is like trying to describe water to someone who has never had a drink. Words, and even videos, can be inadequate in conveying the powerful energy created during a live kirtan - you must try it yourself to experience the effects.¹⁷⁸

In both quotations the positive benefits are listed and then in the second passage, there is encouragement to try it for oneself as it is ineffable. This is likely to pique curiosity, but after trying the practice once, if it does not bring the intended effects, it is unlikely one would continue. Thus, it seems to be bringing positive outcomes, if there is a growing trend of uptake. However, there is also clear reference to yogic concepts of connection and divinity, which shows it is viewed as a spiritual practice and not a purely secular practice, even if it can appeal for a number of secular reasons. The physical / therapeutic benefits are packaged in combination with the spiritual benefits. This shows that the pragmatic effects cannot be divorced from the spiritual aspects. The two go hand in hand and those who are attracted to yogic practices are seeking spiritual and secular gains.

¹⁷⁸ L. Thorndycraft, 'Kirtan with Louise Thorndycraft' *Blue Sky Yoga* website <https://www.blueskyoga.co.uk/kirtan.html> (accessed 28 April 2020).

Scientific studies have proven that group singing brings emotional, social and cognitive benefits. One study showed that chanting mantras together increased heart rate variability considerably, an indicator of wellbeing and resiliency. Vickhoff, the leader of the study concluded, 'Singing regulates activity in the vagus nerve, which is involved in our emotional life and our communication with others. Songs with long phrases achieve the same effects as breathing exercises in yoga.'¹⁷⁹ Singing together also makes people feel more connected to one another. Singers, according to the study, change from an egocentric perspective to a we-perspective. This causes them to see the world from a shared point of view. The study then proposes that there is evolutionary benefit to group singing as it promotes group bonding, which has survival value. This could explain music as a universal phenomenon as well as the use of mantras in multiple cultures.¹⁸⁰

This is further strengthened by descriptions given of kirtan experiences. The feeling at the end of a chant is described thus: 'You open your eyes and look out on a sea of faces and there's not one person you recognise, yet you feel connected to everyone. You can't tell where your vibrations end and the next persons begins. Kirtan shatters boundaries and brings people back to their heart centre.'¹⁸¹ Another artist describes similar connectedness: 'We're the same person, all of us. Everybody is us. You experience that in kirtan, singing together.'¹⁸² This language of oneness is overtly yogic in nature. Thus despite the positive feelings of connection and group bonding, there appears to be more to the practice than this. In the film *Mantra: Sound into Silence*, initially reluctant participants also describe being blown away by

¹⁷⁹ B. Vickhoff et al, 'Music Structure Determines Heart Rate Variability of Singers', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9 July 2013: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00334/full> (accessed 28 April 2020).

¹⁸⁰ Vickhoff et al, 'Music Structure Determines Heart Rate Variability of Singers'.

¹⁸¹ Ragani in L. Johnsen & M. Jacobus, *Kirtan! Chanting as a Spiritual Path*, (Saint Paul, MN: Yes International, 2007), p.72.

¹⁸² Bhagavan Das in Johnsen and Jacobus, *Kirtan! Chanting as a Spiritual Path*, p. 50.

the powerful feeling gained from kirtan, which leaves them literally addicted to it. One interviewee explains how *bhakti yoga* saved her life and that it is the deepest form of meditation that comes with a feeling of warmth and friendliness.¹⁸³ The positive effects mean that people continue to engage in these practices. However, a deeper yearning for a spiritual element of life leads people to seek out yogic practices, which supports the argument that the development of practices within the yogic milieu is symptomatic of a longing to return to a spiritual understanding of reality.

A strong case can therefore be made to show that the practical, physical and mental benefits have contributed to the rise of kirtan in the west. However, this is underpinned by a deeper need for a sense of wellbeing which also needs to be accounted for. It can be argued that exotic religious resources have been psychologized, in that they are being explored in order to transform the self and one's attitudes.¹⁸⁴ A growing 'therapy culture' has emerged whereby people increasingly address everyday problems in psychological terms and there is a general belief that social problems can be tackled via self-transformation.¹⁸⁵ This has potential roots in American Puritanism, New Thought, Christian Science and the arrival of new therapeutic techniques from the 1960s onwards.¹⁸⁶ Therapies are pragmatic in that their legitimacy relies on their proclaimed effectiveness. With the arrival of psychologists like Jung and Maslow, who equated religious experience with self-realization, the boundaries between religious and therapeutic techniques became blurred. However, the west lacked the appropriate resources, leading to the appropriation of eastern religious resources. This is seen in the appeal of using mindfulness for the treatment of depression, anxiety and stress in the

¹⁸³ Caren Fine in Wyss, (Director) *Mantra: Sounds into Silence* (2018 film).

¹⁸⁴ Atglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, p. 201.

¹⁸⁵ Atglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, p. 202.

¹⁸⁶ Atglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, pp. 202-203.

west.¹⁸⁷ The constant encouragement of personal growth implies that people are not as healthy or fulfilled as they should be which motivates a search for relevant techniques to bring a sense of wellbeing.¹⁸⁸ Hindu origins become irrelevant when a cost-benefit analysis is carried out.¹⁸⁹ This allows people to try kirtan outside of an Indian context without considering the appropriateness of doing so. This leads to brands such as Siddha Yoga being marketed as a therapy, rather than a religion. Followers are taught that mantras such as *Om Namah Shivaya*, should be interpreted as 'I bow to the God within', which resonates with a quest for self-empowerment and is in line with Vivekananda's inner-worldly and practical philosophy that makes renouncing the world unnecessary.¹⁹⁰

Atglas argues that religious teachings have become a means to an end for practitioners, and all that matters is that they work.¹⁹¹ There is an instrumental relationship to practices, which has led to the combination of exotic and therapeutic techniques.¹⁹² If yogic practices such as kirtan were marketed as foreign and complicated, individuals raised in western countries would be unsure whether these practices are relevant for them. This could lead to yogic practices being regarded as belonging to 'eastern' religions that are unfamiliar and as unsuitable for those without a Hindu upbringing. The Hindu America Foundation criticised *Yoga Journal* in 2008 for describing texts such as *the Upanishads* as eastern or ancient, rather than Hindu. *Yoga Journal* responded by claiming this was a deliberate attempt to disassociate yoga from the religious baggage of Hinduism. Deepak Chopra criticised the campaign and admitted that we need to be 'honest about yoga as a spiritual science and

¹⁸⁷ Atglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, pp. 250-206.

¹⁸⁸ B. Zilbergeld, *The Shrinking of America: Myths of Psychological Change*, (Boston, Toronto: Little Brown & Company, 1983), p. 17.

¹⁸⁹ Atglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, p.213.

¹⁹⁰ Atglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, pp.217-219.

¹⁹¹ Atglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, pp. 231-232.

¹⁹² Atglas, *From Yoga to Kabbalah*, p. 238.

religious discipline to ensure that Hindus as a people can take pride in our civilisational contribution.¹⁹³ Marketing yogic techniques as purely religious may be off-putting to those with no religion, yet marketing them as purely secular does a dis-service to its religious roots also. Thus, a balance needs to be struck; focusing on the beneficial effects is often useful but this does not mean it cannot function as a spiritual practice also.

Atglas is undoubtedly correct that the rise of therapy culture has impacted on the appeal of kirtan. This can be seen in the way its effect on wellbeing is described in marketing materials. However, her claims about an instrumental relationship to practices can be questioned. It is more likely that as Mullis suggests, most participants are eager to learn more about the philosophy and teachings behind mantras and not just use them for their benefits.¹⁹⁴ This can be seen in the rise of the number of books published about kirtan which give detailed explanations of the meaning of mantras and the deities that inspired them.¹⁹⁵ Many also feel inspired to undertake an online course or retreat at a yoga centre in this country or abroad to learn more and fully immerse themselves in the practice.¹⁹⁶ Jai Uttal seems to resonate with Mullis' claim when he says that, 'Kirtan without bhakti, that calling of the heart, doesn't really mean anything. But of course, the practice of kirtan can transform your heart.'¹⁹⁷ This suggests that initially it could be taken up as an instrumental activity within

¹⁹³ S. Shukla, 'Yoga, India's Soft Power: Balancing the Sacred and the Secular', *Hindu America Foundation*, 18 December 2018: <https://www.hinduamerican.org/blog/yoga-indias-soft-power-balancing-the-sacred-and-the-secular> (accessed 22 June 2020).

¹⁹⁴ However, there is a need for further empirical study to confirm this, as studies to date have been lacking.

¹⁹⁵ For example, D. Prabha, *Kirtan: The Art & Ecstasy of Chanting* (Halifax, NS, Canada: Shining Bay Books, 2016); Girish, *Music and Mantras: The Yoga of Mindful Singing for Health, Happiness, Peace and Prosperity* (New York: Enliven, 2016); A. Kaivalya, *Sacred Sound: Discovering the Myth and Meaning of Mantra and Kirtan* (Novato, California: New World, 2014).

¹⁹⁶ See Embodied Philosophy which offers online courses in various deities, the philosophy of bhakti yoga etc: <https://www.embodiedphilosophy.com/learn/>. See Mandala Yoga Ashram website for details of annual courses such as *The Alchemy of Mantra* and a four day *Celebration of Kirtan* <https://www.mandalayogaashram.co.uk/courses>. See Heart of Sound retreat in Rishikesh, India (all accessed 14 April 2020).

¹⁹⁷ Johnsen & Jacobus, *Kirtan! Chanting as a Spiritual Path*, p. 88.

the secular realm, but gradually people end up connecting with the original intention of the practice and experience deep devotion for all beings. Therefore, an amount of sacralization has occurred. At the same time many kirtan leaders admit that it is not necessary to know the meaning of the chants. The practical effects are prioritised above the translated definition of a chant: 'The meaning of the Sanskrit words isn't as important as the effects the vibrations have on the body.'¹⁹⁸ There is still a spiritual element, but there is an emphasis on gaining connection experientially, as opposed to intellectual ascent or understanding. Edwin Bryant explains that, historically, kirtan has been taken up as a result of self-centeredness, rather than a pure love of God, but over time these impurities clear gradually as the heart is cleansed.¹⁹⁹ The artist Wah! describes kirtan in a light-hearted way as 'a fun meditation practice you do as a group. It's not serious, but you do have a meditative experience.'²⁰⁰ This makes it sound like a secular, instrumental practice, but she later says, 'It's a downpour of love. We're collecting together in one and receiving divine energy.'²⁰¹ This further emphasises it as a devotional, spiritual practice, yet one that is easily accessible in a secular society. It seems as if practitioners have different aims and intentions, but it would be wrong to generalise all participants as using this exotic practice as a means to a personally beneficial end as Atglas suggests.

It appears that kirtan and *bhakti yoga* mean different things to different people, as Jain and other scholars point out is the case with postural yoga and its contextual nature.²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ Deva Premal in Johnsen & Jacobus, *Kirtan! Chanting as a Spiritual Path*, p. 34.

¹⁹⁹ E.F Bryant, *Bhakti Yoga: Tales and Teachings from the Bhagavata Purana* (New York: North Point Press, 2017), pp. 46-47.

²⁰⁰ Johnsen & Jacobus, *Kirtan! Chanting as a Spiritual Path*, p. 111.

²⁰¹ Johnsen & Jacobus, *Kirtan! Chanting as a Spiritual Path*, p. 111.

²⁰² Jain states that 'yoga is contextual' (*Selling Yoga* p.18) and Newcombe, meanwhile, claims that 'yoga is immensely flexible and amorphous' See S. Newcombe 'Spaces of Yoga: Towards a Non-Essentialist Understanding of Yoga' in Baier, Maas & Preisendans (eds.) *Yoga in Transformation: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Vienna: Vienna University Press, 2018), pp. 549-573, at p.569.

Hauser is also in agreement that mantra chanting is an ambiguous method (being both spiritual and secular) that evokes immediate wellbeing, and its openness to use in yoga classes results from a wide understanding of self-care bred from a constant goal of self-optimization.²⁰³ Hence, it is no surprise that just like other forms of yoga, the *bhakti* practice of kirtan is meaningful in a personal way, and appeals to different people for different reasons. If someone is looking for a new form of meditation to calm the mind, the descriptions of the practical benefits of kirtan that can be observed empirically will appeal to them and they may later come to understand it as a devotional / spiritual practice. Alternatively, if someone is looking for a spiritual practice to enchant their life, they will also find what they want in the more devotional descriptions of kirtan. Therefore, it appeals on several levels and again a convergence of sacralization and secularization can be observed as contributing to the popularization of this practice from the yogic milieu. This supports the views of those such as Ruah-Midbar Shapiro (discussed in section 2.5) that the blurring of the boundaries between secularization and spiritualization assist in the growth of contemporary spiritualities. Re-enchantment is occurring as people are looking for practices that help them relate to something greater than themselves, yet they need to be packaged in a way that makes them seem relevant in secular society for yogic practices to have initial appeal.

4.5 Conclusion

Kirtan, as an example of a yogic practice within a wider occulture has gained in popularity for a number of reasons. It is branded as universal, inclusive, and welcoming of all viewpoints, privileging none. It also has measurable, practical benefits that add to its appeal. This has assisted its popularization in secular societies that value observable advantageous

²⁰³ Hauser, 'Following the Transcultural Circulation of Bodily Practices', p. 524-525.

behaviour that will impact other areas of life. Yet, it also has a mystical appeal, as it is rooted in what is considered to be an older, eastern culture that still values the metaphysical. De-contextualization has allowed it to become firmly rooted in the western yogic milieu, making kirtan available as a practice that can be chosen alongside postural yoga for various reasons. The fact that people are seeking yogic practices supports the idea that a re-enchantment process is taking place, with alternative spiritual practices being sought, as traditional religion declines. The descriptions given here by insiders reveal the significance of the practice in their lives. It is meaningful to them and gives their life a spiritual dimension. Despite the commodification of kirtan, it is still an important SBNR practice that needs to be judged on its own terms and is worthy of further study.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Having analysed the reasons for a rise in the popularity and development of the yogic milieu, it is now necessary to draw some conclusions. In the previous chapter, kirtan was used as a case study of a practice that is growing in popularity within a wider yogic milieu. I examined three main reasons for this growth: 1) its pluralistic appeal and accessibility; 2) its social and community appeal; and 3) its pragmatic appeal. The aim of this was to demonstrate that despite evidence to show that many practitioners first take up the practice for 'trivial' reasons (e.g. stilling the mind), they come to find in it a deeper meaning, and it has a significant effect on the rest of their lives. Additionally, it demonstrates that secularization is partly responsible for a growth in such practices. If many in a western society no longer attend religious worship, then a loss of connection with others and a lack of space for quiet reflection is felt. Therefore, practices with deeper meaning are sought from the secular realm. Therefore, sacralization is also a major factor, as the holy meaning and deeper significance of such practices is also emphasised, making them appealing to those who lack spiritual resources to give life wider meaning. This is true for kirtan, as well as other practices within the yogic milieu. These are all part of what Partridge calls occulture, a pool of resources from which new age seekers can draw. Therefore, I contend that the enduring popularity of the yogic milieu proves that a process of re-enchantment is taking place. The spiritual revolution predicted by Heelas and Woodhead is underway, as evidenced by an increase in those who identify as SBNR / 'the nones'. As traditional religion declines, the search for meaning is not hampered and new practices will be sought to give a spiritual aspect to life. There is a yearning for meaningful practices, performed within a community context and grounded within a

wider background of ethics and philosophy, that is available to research if one feels compelled to.

In chapter three, the historical development of the yogic milieu was analysed with the express purpose of demonstrating that it has not arisen overnight as an inconsequential, short-lived movement that is currently fashionable, but is instead a process that began in the nineteenth century when western philosophers and writers began to access translated works from the east. It may not have direct connections to pre-modern forms of yoga, but this does not mean that it should be discounted as inauthentic or insubstantial. In the last twenty years, use of yogic practices has increased. It is not a fad or trend that has faded away, as some scholars such as Bruce, Carrette and King expected. Involvement is substantial, significant, and meaningful. It gives purpose and meaning to life that cannot be found in the realm of everyday, secular activity. Yet, in some ways, modern yoga has been accepted as secular and outside religion, but it functions in the same way as a religious practice, as Jain and De Michelis contend. Therefore, a certain amount of secularization *and* sacralization has occurred. This chapter additionally demonstrates that the development of spiritualities of life is complex and entangled with a range of social processes, and thus deserves further study. They should not be labelled mere commodifications or pseudo-religion / spirituality. Twenty first century involvement in kirtan is a further evolution of this process that began well over one hundred years before when Thoreau declared himself a part-time 'yogi'. The case study in this dissertation shows how yogic ideas continue to appeal to a range of people today in the same way and for many of the same reasons as they appealed to previous generations.

In chapter two, I argued that those scholars who regard yogic activity as part of a wider significant, meaningful and holistic milieu are correct and this can challenge simplistic

secularization theories that fail to recognise that a re-enchantment process is taking place. Scholars such as Bruce, Carrette and King are too quick to denigrate spiritualities of life without consulting a representative range of those involved. Therefore, they fail to consider the role such spiritualities play in the lives of the SBNR generation / 'the nones'. Woodhead's research shows that more analysis needs to be done with regard to those who no longer practice a religion and why many people still find spiritual practices appealing. I contend that the growth of the yogic milieu is one indicator of a re-enchantment process that is taking place outside the confines of organised religion, and this demonstrates that spiritual activity has adapted and is still worthy of study in the same way as any other religious activity.

My unique contribution to this debate is to make it clear that there is now more evidence for the re-enchantment process than when Partridge was writing just over fifteen years ago. The yogic milieu is continually expanding with the growth of practices such as kirtan, and this is just one example of a subsection of a wider occulture available within a broader holistic milieu. The dis-enchantment of the west has given rise to opportunities for re-enchantment, and thus there has been a rise in spiritualities of life in the last half century. This increase in activity is not shallow and trivial but has depth and can counter linear secularization paradigms. The west has not become secular; spiritual activity continues in a variety of contexts, as evidenced by the yogic milieu. The re-enchantment process is complex and involves de-contextualisation and a certain amount of westernization of concepts, but this makes it even more enduring. The fact that eastern ideas have been adapted for western involvement demonstrates the strength of appetite for them and does not indicate that they are too far removed from their original roots to be considered meaningful.

This dissertation is intended as a call for further research into yogic practices as examples of new spiritualities of life. It is also a reminder that the power of sound and the use of music in spiritual contexts is a field that deserves further study. Contemporary involvement in alternative spiritualities is just as significant as any other spiritual / religious activity and the future of Religious Studies as a discipline depends on a wide definition of 'religion' that can encompass these new forms of belief and practice.

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