

**Yoga in Australia:
An Ethnographic Study of Gita International
in Melbourne**

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Notice 1

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Abstract

This thesis is based on an ethnographic study of Gita International, one of Melbourne's oldest continuously-run Yoga schools, conducted from May 2010 until December 2011. Its aim is to explore how and why an "Eastern" spirituality such as Yoga was able to be transferred from its cultural base in India to Melbourne, Australia in the 1950s and successfully established in the predominantly Anglo-Australian society of the time. Yoga subsequently grew in popularity in the increasingly multicultural community, as indicated by the large number of Yoga groups, schools, styles and teachers in Melbourne today.

I argue that the successful establishment of Yoga in Melbourne is due to the narrowing of the cultural distance between Yoga as practised in India and the Australian socio-cultural context through a hybridisation process which includes four dimensions: the de-emphasis over traditional Indian philosophic Yoga sources; the re-casting of the representation and role of the guru as conceived in India; the re-conceptualisation of the traditional Indian Yoga ashram into an idealised spiritual home; and the adaptation of the traditional Indian Yoga lifestyle and practices to dominant cultural idioms associated with the Australian lifestyle - exercise, fitness, health and well-being. This study contends that adaptations of the yogic lifestyle and practices were necessary and strategically enacted by the founder and subsequent directors of the school to overcome the cultural distance potentially experienced by the Australian Yoga practitioners at Gita International in relation to the unfamiliar doctrines and practices of the Indian Yoga tradition when encountered in an Australian socio-cultural context. The successful narrowing of the cultural distance of the yogic lifestyle enabled Gita International to assimilate Yoga into the host socio-cultural environment and promote the long term commitment of its members to both the yogic practices and to Gita International.

Keywords: Adaptation, Australia, cultural distance, guru, home, hybridisation, Melbourne, Yoga.

Declaration

Statement of Authorship

I hereby declare that this thesis is original and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma either in part or in whole has been submitted for another degree at another university or other institution and affirms that to the best of this student's knowledge the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

The project for this thesis has been approved by Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) Research Office and the Project Number is: CF09/3151 – 20091725.

Name:

Signed:

Date:

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This work has been a collaborative effort, which, without the help of a number of people including my supervisors and staff at Monash University, Gita International staff and members, my family, friends and work colleagues, I would have struggled to complete.

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Furthermore, to Di Lucas and Lucille Wood (Directors of Gita International), the staff and members of Gita International, the interviewees and my fellow Yoga teacher trainees, they showed great patience in putting up with all my interruptions, questions, curiosity and were gracious in all my dealings with them. Thank you for allowing me to conduct my research at Gita International and for sharing your experiences.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1: How It Began: Background to the Study

One day in 1979 I was walking along a street in Sydney, Australia, in the area where I lived and I came across an alternative lifestyle bookshop. I had walked this part of the street a number of times before and never noticed this bookshop. My curiosity aroused, I went in and started browsing. My interest at this time was mainly in religion and UFOs with a growing interest in the occult, in particular, astrology. As I was browsing I came to the Health and Well-being section and it was there that I came across a book on Yoga. In fact, it turned out to be a very popular book on Yoga at that time written by B. K. S. Iyengar, founder of the Iyengar Yoga School. The book was called, "Light on Yoga". I browsed through this book and was impressed by the Yoga philosophy and practices presented to the reader. I had not read anything like this previously. Up to the point of purchasing this book, I had not heard of Yoga and in my circle of friends, Yoga was of no interest. Yoga was alien to my socio-cultural heritage as an Anglo-New Zealander. Even though I read "Light on Yoga" thoroughly, I did not seek out a Yoga school to learn Yoga, but it planted future seeds of interest in Yoga that developed over a number of years.

Years later, and having by now studied Yoga in some detail, I realized that my experience of encountering Yoga is a familiar one. Through my research of Yoga in Australia, I have observed that the cultural distance between Yoga as practised in India and the host culture of Australia plays a central role in whether people come to Yoga or not. The degree of prior contact the person has had with the benefits of Yoga through family, friends, or the media, will determine whether they come to Yoga or not. When I started my ethnographic case study at Gita International, the evidence indicated that the cultural distance between the Indian traditional Yoga and the Australian socio-cultural heritage had to be narrowed for people to become Yoga practitioners in Melbourne. Many of the people I spoke with at Gita International had similar experiences. They had no real interest in the traditional form of Yoga as practised in India.

They came to Yoga for reasons of health and well-being and not for spiritual reasons or to seek enlightenment as in the case of Yoga as practised in India. For them, all that mattered was, “Yoga works.”

1.2: The Argument

In this thesis, I argue that Yoga is a spiritual tradition which, in its historic form is culturally distant from the Australian socio-cultural context. Yoga has a focus on spiritual development, based on specific practices that are institutionally alien to mainstream Australia. In regards to the word “Yoga”, I use Yoga with a capital “Y”, in the same way that Christianity and Islam are capitalised (Feuerstein 2014, p: 69), to highlight that Yoga is a spiritual tradition which has its own tradition, history, sacred texts, philosophy, practices and goals. What distinguishes Yoga from being a religion in comparison to Christianity and Islam is that it has no founder, no centralised authority and no institutionalised creed as in the Judeo-Christian sense.

However, I do acknowledge the term “religion” to be problematic. Eller (2007) highlights defining “religion” in the Judeo-Christian sense as limiting because what constitutes a “religion” encompasses diversity, a wide range of approaches that include beliefs, mores, objects, practices, rituals and behaviours. For Eller (2007: p. xiii):

“No religion is “normal” or “typical” of all religions; the truth is in the diversity.”

Therefore, due to the problematic nature of defining what is religion or not, throughout this thesis I use Yoga as a spiritual tradition focusing on the interpretation by Yoga practitioners in their practice of Yoga in relation to their socio-cultural heritage. In this manner, I argue Yoga is a spiritual tradition which is culturally distant from the mainstream Australian socio-cultural heritage. To learn Yoga in Australia, the cultural distance of the Indian traditional form requires it to be narrowed to suit the Australian socio-cultural heritage of Australian practitioners, to meet their needs and make it accessible.

Cultural distance is a term mainly used in the context of international business assignments (for managers posted overseas in advisory, business and finance roles) and refers to

the degree of difference between two cultures as revealed by the reactions of expatriates to the host culture (Shenkar, 2001; Crofts, 2004; Fisher & Hutchings, 2013; Hemmasi & Downes 2013). According to Shenkar (2001, p: 519) cultural distance is a construct that “measures the extent to which national cultures are different from and similar to the culture of the host”. Shenkar cautions though that culture is complex, intangible and subtle and so is notoriously difficult to conceptualise and scale. On the other hand, Hemmasi and Downes (2013, pp: 72-78) relate cultural distance to contextual environmental distance which relates the home culture (normal and familiar) to the host culture (foreign and exotic). The greater the “distance” (difference) between home and host cultures there is an increased probability of tension and less desirable outcomes. To alleviate the tension of cultural distance requires cross-cultural adjustment. This is a socialisation process which is referred to as adaptation, acculturation and assimilation. I find understanding the dynamics of cultural distance, described above, to be useful for understanding the implantation and success of Yoga in Melbourne. Yoga has its own culture (Eliade 1990; Feuerstein 2000, 2002) and is culturally distant from that of mainstream Australian society.

Consequently, much of what Australians know before coming to Yoga is a romanticised and exotic viewpoint. This viewpoint is what attracts people to Yoga and is related to people hearing about the benefits of Yoga rather than focusing on the actual study of Yoga. Therefore, the process that people go through to take up Yoga practice when it is alien to their socio-cultural heritage is a key question. How and why has Yoga been successfully transferred from its cultural heartland of India to Melbourne, Australia? I argue that the successful establishment of Yoga in Melbourne is due to the narrowing of the cultural distance between Yoga and the Australian socio-cultural context through a hybridisation process which includes four dimensions.

The first dimension of the hybridisation process is the de-emphasising of the traditional Indian Yoga philosophic sources and a shift to an emphasis on western occult philosophic sources. This shift removes control of the transmission of Yoga philosophy out of the hands of an initiated, specialised minority, the Yoga gurus who were based in India. Also, this process transferred the reading and study of Yoga philosophy originally in the Indian language of Sanskrit to English. Importantly, this shift meant that initiation by a guru was no longer a prerequisite for one to become a Yoga practitioner. Yoga philosophy became democratised and popularised, with the responsibility for learning placed in the hands of the Yoga practitioner.

This shift in the way Yoga philosophy was learnt also placed the emphasis on the Yoga teachings instead of the Yoga teacher.

The second dimension of hybridisation is the re-casting of the representation and the role of the guru as conceived in India. This dimension I refer to as, “gurus without gowns”, and is a process of transformation of the guru in the Yoga tradition and his/her role within the modern world. This process is one of cultural transformation that has led to the reinterpretation of the way the modern-day guru is represented, from orange-coloured saffron gowns to black lycra clothing, branded fitness clothing and corporate clothing. Even the traditional role of the guru living in an ashram has been hybridised. The guru has become a “mentor”, now teaching in a Yoga studio, gym or community centre environment.

The third dimension of hybridisation is the re-conceptualisation of the traditional Indian Yoga ashram into an idealised spiritual home. The ashram is no longer the residence of a male guru, but becomes a non-residential Melbourne-based Yoga centre, open to male and female Yoga practitioners. The idealised spiritual home of the Yoga centre becomes a place where Yoga practitioners come to study Yoga and develop spiritually, share experiences, feel at ease, safe and secure as a community of like-minded members. The members re-configure their awareness and experiences of cultural meaning and beliefs, reproducing them in new ways within their identity formation, self-expression, communication, cultural assimilation and their renewed sense of purpose. In many ways, I would argue this re-conceptualisation allows for the emergence of a “hybridity of self” as a Yoga practitioner.

Finally, the fourth dimension of hybridity is the adaptation of the traditional Indian Yoga lifestyle and practices. Yoga has been taken “off the mountain” and out of its remote secluded locations and ashrams to be established in Melbourne. The ascetic and renunciate aspects of Yoga practice (Appendix 5) were removed or adapted to meet the needs of Melbourne-based Yoga practitioners. According to Alter (2004) and Singleton (2010) part of the adaptation process was the fusion of other disciplines such as body-building, gymnastics and wrestling into Yoga practice, leading to the hybridisation of Yoga in the West. Adaptation is the final part of the hybridisation process. This was not a diminishing of ancient Yoga practice. If anything, adaptation enabled Yoga to be more accessible to a wider range of people outside of the Indian socio-cultural context.

To bring to the fore the facets of my argument, in this thesis I use an ethnographic focus on Gita International – Melbourne’s oldest Yoga centre. Gita International is a Yoga centre (Chapter Four) located at 16 Hoddle Street, Abbotsford, which is on the edge of the Melbourne central business district (CBD). Due to its location, Gita International is easily accessed by members and the public as there is plenty of public transport and parking available.

Gita International was originally known as the Gita School of Yoga and was started in Melbourne in 1960 by Margrit Segesman (1905-1998). Segesman was a Swiss-born Yoga pioneer in Australia who came to Melbourne in 1954. Segesman started teaching Gita Yoga in Melbourne from 1955 onwards. In 1960, Segesman established her Gita School of Yoga. In 1983, Segesman sold the Gita School of Yoga to Di Lucas and Lucille Wood,¹ the current directors, who by 1986 emphasised it as a “Light Centre” – “a centre for personal growth” (Newsletter No. 16 July 1986).

By 1991 (Newsletter 1991), the Gita School of Yoga had been renamed, “Gita International”. According to Wood the importance of this name change was in line with the direction that Gita was heading towards. Wood states:

“It wasn’t changed immediately. It was, we took over as Gita School of Yoga, but it soon became apparent that more and more “International” in the way people were thinking and doing. People were travelling much more. We were getting more people internationally. Our teachers were travelling more. Our teachers began to spread out all over the globe. And, it was a move, I think, very strongly directed by, we have to stop thinking, “Gita Melbourne” and think, “we are a globe”, “we are a world”, “we are part of everything”. So, it was more holistic, we have to see ourselves as “citizens of the world” to quote Socrates, rather than “citizens of Athens”.”

Wood said that the overriding feeling was that the Gita School of Yoga need not be limited to Melbourne, but should become “Gita World”. This new direction, along with the name change to “Gita International”, shifted the emphasis from that of a local Yoga centre in Melbourne and

¹ Wood and Lucas wanted their real names used at all times within the thesis and not have aliases used. They did not want anonymity for themselves and their organisation, Gita International. They felt this was important because it would result in acknowledgement of the work they had done.

expanded its context into a broader global context to introduce an understanding of Yoga teachings to a global audience. Gita International trained Yoga teachers began to live overseas and teach the Gita Yoga method in such places as England, Egypt, Poland and Singapore. In addition, the process of change continued and in 1996, the “Light Centre”, Gita International, morphed into a self-styled educational organisation, “University of Light” (Newsletter Summer 1996/97).

1.3: Methodology

My research was granted permission to be conducted by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) on the 7 December 2009 and the project number is: CF09/3151 – 200900175 (Appendix 1). In preparation for my research, I had to meet a number of requirements outlined by the MUHREC that included obtaining written permission (Appendix 2) from the directors of Gita International to conduct my research of their organisation; an Explanatory Statement (Appendix 3) outlining the aims of my research, benefits, protection of the privacy and confidentiality of participants, how my data was collected, stored and secured; a Consent Form (Appendix 4) to conduct interviews. Even though I was granted approval by MUHREC in December 2009, I did not begin my research of Gita International until the 10 April 2010 after I had received from the directors of Gita International the Letter of Permission on 6 April 2010. The delay in commencing my research was due to unforeseen personal circumstances at the time. All of my research was conducted at the Gita International premises.

From the outset, my aim was for depth rather than breadth in seeking to explain the enduring presence and success of Yoga in Melbourne. The main advantage of this type of ethnography is that it has allowed me to focus my resources and abilities into a case study of Gita International and the lived experiences of the Yoga practitioners. For my research, I used a methodology of ethnographic inquiry that included interviews, literature search and participant observation.

Furthermore, since beginning my case study of Gita International, I broadened my methodological approach to include participation in the Yoga teacher training course which, by coincidence, was just beginning at the time I started my research. I decided to participate in this course, which was from 2010 to 2011, because it enabled me to deepen my emic/insider

experiences and gain a greater understanding of the organisational culture and structures of Gita International. I paid for the course with my own money. I felt that this was a rare opportunity which presented itself because the year that I came to Gita International to conduct my research just happened to be the year that Gita International started their Yoga teacher training course. Participating in the Gita International Yoga teacher training course allowed me to gain access to all the activities at Gita International. A number of activities conducted at Gita International are only open to Gita International Yoga teachers or Gita International trainee Yoga teachers.

During my Yoga teacher training, I conducted a number of interviews which included 21 participants. 19 of these interviews were conducted at Gita International and 2 were conducted outside of the Gita International premises. The directors of Gita International were happy with the interviews being conducted on their premises and provided rooms for privacy. Due to the time constraints of all the interviewees, the interviews were conducted for approximately a one hour period.

For the selection criteria and to ensure that the diversity of interviewees were representative of the people who I met at Gita International, I selected a range of participants who were male and female members and non-members. The diversity of interviewees included: the directors, people who work at Gita International, Yoga teachers, Yoga teacher trainees, students and visitors. The breakdown of this number is as follows: Directors - 2 directors (Di Lucas and Lucille Wood); Staff - 4 staff and 1 contractor (a person who came to do work for Gita International); Yoga teachers – 3 teachers and 2 outsider Yoga teachers (Yoga teachers who were non-members but were connected to Gita International through the founder, Margrit Segesman); Yoga teacher trainees - 3 Yoga teacher trainees; Students – 5 students; Visitors - 1 visitor. The analysis of the interviews focused on the lived experiences of the participants and why they came to Yoga and in particular, why they came to Gita International. I wanted to investigate how Gita International functioned and how, as an organisation, it supported its Yoga practitioners culturally and socially. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

To conduct an interview, I invited the participant if they would like to be interviewed. Each participant was given the Explanatory Statement outlining how their personal information is protected and their anonymity ensured. If they had any concerns in regards to the way the interview was conducted, their privacy, confidentiality, storage and security, the Explanatory Statement also outlined the complaints process.

The questioning within the interviews focused on the up-bringing, socio-cultural heritage of the participants and why they came to Gita International. The analysis of the interviews was in the comparing of the experiences of the participants to the hybridisation process. I was seeking to find how the participants acculturated the Yoga tradition that is taught at Gita International into their Australian socio-cultural context. One of the limitations to the analysis of the interviews was that there is a lack of literature dealing with Yoga in Australia. The interviews were conducted as to not conflict with the participants Yoga classes or the Yoga teacher training schedule.

My research into Gita International began in earnest with participant observation once I had been accepted into the Yoga teacher training course in May 2010. When I participated in this course, it gave me an in-depth perspective and infused me with the culture of Gita International. It enabled me to participate in all classes, events and activities at Gita International. The data was collected by way of observing and recording these observations in my diary and my class notebook, the receiving of a number of handouts for the various philosophy classes and the Yoga teacher training sessions, and the collection of the Gita International newsletters and pamphlets. The analysis of the data was collated into categories that match the hybridisation process mentioned above and compared this to the research of Yoga in the West.

Nevertheless, gathering my data may have been problematic because of the way in which it was collected. The ambiguity of my status as a researcher may have been compromised especially during the Yoga teacher training phase of my research. I acknowledge that at times I seem like an insider and at other times I seem like an outsider. But, I do not subscribe to either position. I take a third position of being, “context specific”. I recognise insider/outsider positions are important and yet are not absolute. I regard myself as an anthropologist and my aim was to focus on the hybridisation process and be as critically objective as possible.

On the one hand, I did not want to become totally an insider, or as Clifford Geertz (1973, p: 13-14) writes: “...native or mimic”, but instead, “...contextualise and thickly describe.” Having an insider status at times meant that I could participate in all activities at Gita International and be part of the gathering especially whilst participating in the Yoga teacher training course. It was an intimate and personal experience where we as trainees were not only indoctrinated into Gita International culture and philosophy we also bonded with each other and the senior Yoga

teachers conducting the course. During this phase of my research a number of close friendships were made.

As a result, I argue that researching at such an intimate and personal level does not bestow full insider status. Thomas Hyland Eriksen (2001, pp: 37-38) highlights this point and gives three reasons why a researcher could not have fully insider or emic status. First, the researcher has to translate two different languages and the translation is different from the original. Second, Statements changed when transformed into writing. And three, an anthropologist can never become identical with the people s/he writes about. For Eriksen (2001, p: 37):

“The only truly emic descriptions possible in Anthropology are therefore accounts written by natives in their vernacular.”

On the other hand, just to be an outsider/etic researcher would have limited my access to certain areas and activities such as the Yoga teacher training course. However, Marvin Harris (1971) favours the outsider or etic approach for two reasons. First, it allows for a comparative analysis and second, the researcher can develop a generalised theory to explain what they are studying. According to Russell McCutcheon (1999), Harris critiqued Kenneth Pike (the developer of the emic/etic approach and who favoured an emic approach to research especially in religion), and accused Pike of favouring the emic at the expense of the etic. McCutcheon writes (1999, p: 2):

“Harris argues, after all, in developing a theory of religion in general, no one religious viewpoint could come to dominate...Instead, we are seeking criteria from outside each of these particular systems [religions] so as to compare and then explain them all together.”

McCutcheon also highlights that Harris makes the point that if the insider/emic approach dominates the researcher simply becomes a “passive documenter of native claims.” McCutcheon does present an alternative approach using the example of Geertz. According to McCutcheon, Geertz argues that one should not see insider/outsider positions as polar opposites instead use the

approaches of “experience-near” and “experience-distant” to interpret and understand the various positions.

For the purpose of my research, I do not agree fully with Harris’s viewpoint as the outsider approach is necessary, but can exclude the intimacy experienced in an activity by a researcher. I feel that my research is context specific and tend to favour the Geertz approach of “thick description”. Furthermore, I do concede that in conducting this type of research though, the tension between insider/outsider positioning is likely and may be reflected in and may influence the writing of my thesis. Therefore, I leave it up to the reader to decide whether the merits of my thesis are tilted towards an insider or outsider or a context specific viewpoint. The ambiguity of my status at Gita International and my participation in the Yoga teacher training course was one of the methods used for data collection.

1.4: The Gita International Yoga Teacher Training Course

The Gita International Yoga teacher training course is one of the main ways in which Gita International perpetuate their organisation. During this course, the directors Wood and Lucas, spent approximately 900 hours of training over a 16 month period, to pass on the heritage of Gita Yoga and instil within the Yoga teacher trainees many of the values that are foundational to Gita International as an organisation. I argue that, in creating their own diploma-based Yoga teacher training course, Gita International has hybridised the *Yoga paramparā* tradition for student Yoga teachers by de-emphasising the ascetic and renunciate aspects (Appendix 5) of the Indian Yoga tradition which narrows the cultural distance between Yoga and the Australian socio-cultural heritage.

Historically, within an Indian socio-cultural context, Yoga is learnt under the instruction of a guru or spiritual preceptor. According to Feuerstein (2000, pp: 112-113), the guru, usually male, is a self-realised “enlightened” adept who transmits the teachings of Yoga to his disciples individually within the context of a ritual and spiritual bond. This “transmission” method of instruction is part of the Yoga tradition and is what Feuerstein (2000, p: 213) refers to as, *paramparā* (“from one to another”). However, with the arrival of Yoga in Australia, the role of the guru has been recast to that of mentorship and the importance of the guru tradition, as found in India, has been diminished.

Moreover, the Gita International Yoga teacher training course trains people to become Yoga teachers as a vocation, but the training is not provided under the Australian government Vocational Educational Training (VET)² system or any other Australian government-recognised educational or training system. Gita International as an educational organisation styles itself as a, “University of Light”, but is not recognised by the Australian government as a university within the Australian educational system, nor does it offer a nationally-recognised course within the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).³ This means that as an organisation it is not bound by Australian government standards, nor does it receive any funding from the Australian government. Therefore, the Gita International Gold Diploma of Teaching Hatha Yoga is only recognised within the Gita International organisation, as meeting their own standards, and Yoga Australia.⁴

However, even though Gita International offers an organisational standards-based course it is quite expensive (course cost \$15,000) for 900 hours, less hours when compared to other Yoga organisations, such as, the Centre for Adult Education (CAE) Yoga training course and the Satyananda Yoga Academy (SYA). The CAE and SYA offer Yoga teacher training for a cheaper fee which also meets an Australian government nationally recognised accreditation standard For example, CAE (RTO No. 3737) offer an “Advanced Diploma of Yoga Teacher Training”, which

² The Vocational Education Training (VET) system is part of the Australian National Training System which is administered by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA). The VET sector provide achievement of competency standards according to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). This competency-based approach to training provides for the delivery, assessment and certification of skills and knowledge required for effective workplace performance. For further information view the ANTA website, www.anta.gov.au (viewed 3 October 2014).

³ According to the AQF website, <http://www.aqf.edu.au> (viewed 3 October 2014): “The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is the national policy for regulated qualifications in Australian education and training. It incorporates the qualifications from each education and training sector into a single comprehensive national qualifications frameworks.”

This body is a single, coherent framework which covers qualifications issued by secondary schools, VET providers and higher education (tertiary) institutions. All qualifications are nationally recognised for Schools Sector: Certificate of Education; VET Sector: Certificates I, II, III, IV, Diploma and Advanced Diploma; Higher Education (Tertiary): Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Bachelor Degree, Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters Degree and Doctoral Degree. Only Registered Training Organisations (RTO) are required to meet the AQF standards.

⁴ Yoga Australia (YA), previously known as the Yoga Teachers Association of Australia, is not a Yoga training organisation, nor is it a RTO and does not control Yoga teacher training in Australia. Not all Yoga teachers and Yoga groups in Australia are registered with YA. YA is a voluntary, not-for-profit association, advocacy and representative organisation for Yoga teacher members in Australia. According to the YA website, <http://www.yogaaustralia.org> (viewed 3 October 2014): “Yoga Australia is the only national representative organisation that is fully independent of any one teaching style or course and is recognised as the peak body for the Yoga teacher profession. Our registered teachers enjoy the benefits of a nationally and internationally recognised credential.”

is a Victorian state and nationally recognised course, for 1040 hours conducted over 2 years. The course fee is \$9500. On the other hand, the SYA (National Provider No. 90879) offer Yoga teacher training that is nationally recognised, for 1440 hours over a 2 year period. The course fee is dependent on accommodation type as this is an in-house training course, but ranges from \$7,910 to \$14,210. I chose the CAE and SYA in my comparison to Gita International because the CAE and SYA are examples of non-traditional (CAE) and traditional (SYA) Yoga teacher training. Like Gita International, the CAE course has a minimal Indian influence, whereas the SYA course has a strong Indian cultural influence including the traditional guru system.

Table 1.1: Comparison of Yoga Teacher Training Courses

Source: Compiled by author from CAE, SYA and Gita International course outlines.

Name:	CAE	SYA	Gita International
National Provider/ RTO:	3737	90879	No
Nationally Recognised Course:	Yes	Yes	No
Yoga Australia (YA) Recognised:	Yes	Yes	Yes
Course Name:	Advanced Diploma Of Yoga Teaching	Diploma of Satyananda Yoga Training	Gita International Gold Diploma of Teaching Hatha Yoga
Duration:	2 year period	2 year period	2 year period
Course Hours:	1040 hours	1440 hours	900 hours
Course Fee:	\$9,500*	\$7,910**	\$15,000***
Traditional Content:	Strong	Minimal	Minimal
Guru:	Yes	No	No
Meet Yoga Australia Standard of 350 Hours:	Yes	Yes	Yes

*The CAE fee is the current fee for 2014, but does not include other costs such as Yoga equipment, books, extra training which may cause the fee to extend to between \$11-12,000. Information about the course obtained from the CAE website, www.cae.edu.au (viewed 3 October 2014), go to, “Yoga teacher training”.

**The SYA course fee ranges from \$7910 to \$14210 depending on the type of accommodation the Yoga teacher trainee chooses as the training is conducted at their Yoga ashrams in Australia. Information obtained from the SYA website, www.satyananda.net (viewed 3 October 2014), go to, “Yoga teacher training”.

***The Gita International course fee was from the 2010/11 period when I completed my Yoga teacher training. The latest fee is not known at the time of writing this thesis. For the latest information go to the Gita International website, www.gita.com.au, (viewed 3 October 2014), go to, “Yoga teacher training”. Course fee not advertised on website.

The above comparison is not intended as a criticism of Gita International nor does it lessen the value of their Yoga teacher training course. What it does reveal is the way in which

Gita International have invented their own standards system and have hybridised the traditional Yoga system from India, while remaining outside the Australian government educational system standards. For this reason, they have invented a process to strengthen their group, validate and perpetuate the organisation's existence through the training of Yoga teachers in their tradition, and retain their organisational integrity with the control of all aspects of the training they provide. But, what does this hybridised form of Yoga mean to the Gita International members?

1.5: The Meaning of Yoga

The linguistic meaning of the word “Yoga” is “union” and is said to derive from the Sanskrit root, “*yuj*”, which means “to yoke” or “to bind”, similar to how these words are used in English. However, scholars realise that there is more to the simple root meaning of the word “Yoga” (Alter, 2004; Danielou, 1991; De Michelis, 2004; Eliade, 1990; Feuerstein, 2000 and 2002; Iyengar, 1993; Singleton, 2010). For example, Danielou (1991, pp: 20-22) highlights that there can be multiple meanings applied to the word Yoga. Yoga is not simply used to mean “to yoke” (*samyamana*). Yoga also denotes union (*samyoga*) and the dissolution of the individual into “Total Being” (*samādhi*).

Conversely, Feuerstein (2002, p: 7) takes the meaning of the word Yoga to encompass the historical and cultural depth of India when he writes:

“In its technical sense, Yoga refers to that enormous body of spiritual values, attitudes, precepts and techniques that have been developed in India over at least five millennia and that may be regarded as the very foundation of the ancient Indian civilisation. Yoga is thus the generic name for the various Indian paths of ecstatic self-transcendence, or the methodical transmutation of consciousness to the point of liberation from the spell of the ego-personality. It is the psycho-spiritual technology specific to the great civilisation of India.”

From a hermeneutical perspective, Yoga texts do not dwell merely on the linguistic limitation of the word “Yoga” and instead provide an interpretive dimension according to the focus of the text. As an example, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali give a very concise definition of

the meaning of Yoga in Chapter One, verse two, *Yogaḥ cittavṛtti nirodhaḥ* - “Yoga is the cessation of movements in the consciousness” (Iyengar 1993, pp: 45-46).

Alternatively, Tapasyananda (1988, pp: 61-62) translates the Bhagavad Gita meaning of Yoga to encompass the steadiness in how one lives one’s life, defining Yoga as “skill in action” and “non-attachment to the fruits of one’s actions.” Tapasyananda writes:

“Engage yourself in action with the mind steadfast in Yoga. Abandon attachments, O Arjuna, and be unperturbed in success and failure. The unperturbed sameness in all conditions is Yoga.”

“O Arjuna, mere action (with attachment) is far inferior to action done with the mind poised in evenness. Seek shelter in this state of unperturbed evenness (which can arise only in a desireless mind in communion with the Divine). Those who work for selfish gains are indeed pitiable.”

“One endowed with this unperturbed evenness of mind abandons the effects of both good and bad actions even here itself. Therefore, strive for the state of Yoga. Yoga is skill in action.”

Additionally, Yoga has its own traditional goal. Practising it is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve a higher state of consciousness. In other words, the goal of Yoga is the transcendental experience of enlightenment and freedom through the union of the true Self with the ultimate reality - the Divine (Feuerstein 2002, pp: xxv-xxxii). This is referred to as “*samādhi*”.

When I conducted my research, the Yoga practitioners at Gita International gave a range of meanings to what they considered Yoga meant for them. Much of their explanation focused on Yoga as a lifestyle which was not related to the above-mentioned Yoga texts. For example, one participant, a Yoga teacher of eight years, shared her insight concerning the importance of lifestyle when she said:

“What’s it mean to me? That’s not an easy question to answer because it is not, it’s not one word. It’s not a sentence and it’s not a paragraph, basically for me it has become a lifestyle. And, I know that’s one word,

but it's the way I have chosen to live my life, the way I eat, the way I interact, what I do, yeah.”

Another participant, a Yoga teacher of nineteen years who was taught Yoga from the age of five, felt Yoga was a way to “improve the world” that was for “helping others”. As she said:

“It's a means to health and to well-being and to, you know, enabling you to make the most out of life. To be the best you can be. To, you know, so that you can help and support others who perhaps are a little more fragile or, a little more needy.”

Another participant, a student of Yoga for three years, felt Yoga was a way of exploring the self, that is, “working on the self” and “self-development”. He went on to say:

“So, I would say that as a union between myself and my body, I will keep on exploring new ways of getting closer to answering the questions that I had over the past. Why are we here? So to me, it's, it's that continuous exploration of how close I can get to that union. Because to me, ultimately, that's where you will be able to answer certain questions.”

Finally, a participant, a Yoga teacher of thirteen years, felt that Yoga enabled her to live a life with “meaning and purpose” when she said:

“Yes, I had actually come to a standstill. So, I was so relieved when I first started at Gita with my past journey. The Yoga did not really interest me when I first started. I was really drawn to the philosophy classes. I couldn't get enough of it. I felt like a sponge. I knew I had to make more, life had to have more purpose and make more sense. And, I could not wait for the hour to come every week just so I could sit in there and listen and wait for changes, you know, how to do changes in life.”

However, I argue that these examples of the Gita International members' remarks are attempts to narrow the cultural distance of Yoga. These members were not interested in the ascetic or renunciate aspects of traditional Yoga practice. Yoga practice was brought in line with their Australian middle-class socio-cultural sensibilities.

Also, this method of learning Yoga was not within a traditional ashram setting. An ashram is a hermitage usually found in a natural setting such as a forest and is the place of residence for the guru. It is to this place that the initiated disciple traditionally comes to learn Yoga. Since the advent of Yoga in Australia, the ashram setting has significantly changed. For example, Gita International is not referred to as an ashram, but as the, "Light Centre" (Newsletter 16 1986, p: 1):

"A centre where people have come together to seek for and explore their own expression of the light within."

And, ten years later, transformed into a "University of Light" (Newsletter, Summer 1996/97):

"A centre for personal and spiritual development, training people in order to be of greater service to the community."

However, according to Wood, if Gita International were to be referred to as an ashram, this would be in the context of a modern-day Australian socio-cultural setting. As Wood said:

"A modern day ashram I would say in the sense, that yes, it was like-minded people coming together for a high spiritual purpose, for mutual support and all those sorts of things. But, it hadn't be 'follow the leader bit'. It had to be more that everybody independently earn their living and come and make their contribution and learn. And for that, you need a premises whether you rented them or bought them or whatever. And, you needed to, you know, do your bit. So that, it was in the sense, an ashram is a collection of like-minded energies, yes. But, in terms of, particularly you get some of your Indian ashrams, no, not at all."

Wood's comment's above highlight how Gita International has become re-conceptualised as a "collective of like-minded people" instead of as a traditional ashram as found in the Indian socio-cultural setting. Notwithstanding, the Indian traditional ashram can be found within the Australian socio-cultural context by way of the Satyananda Yoga movement who operate two ashrams in Australia - one in Mangrove Creek, New South Wales and one in Rocklyn, Victoria.⁵ Therefore, I argue that this is another way in which Gita International narrowed the cultural distance between the Indian traditional ashram and the Australian socio-cultural setting where Yoga is taught.

When I started my research I found Melbourne to have a diverse range of approximately 940 Yoga groups, schools, styles and teachers.⁶ The existence of this large number indicates the popularity of Yoga. The spread of Yoga includes classes at Dance Schools, Gyms and Fitness Centres, dedicated Yoga groups and schools, Healing Centres, Health and Well-being Centres, Meditation Centres, Personal Trainers, Sports and Aquatic Centres, Recreation and Lifestyle Centres. At these various places, the focus of Yoga practice is either as a spiritual lifestyle, or for health, well-being and/or personal development.

In Melbourne, there are three main types of Yoga practised at these venues: Hatha Yoga (Yoga of health and well-being), Rāja Yoga (Yoga of meditation) and Bhakti Yoga (Yoga of devotion). Apart from these main types, there are many other styles of Yoga⁷ that are off-shoots. Each of these styles is either named after the founder of the style (e.g. Iyengar Yoga, named after the founder B. K. S. Iyengar, 1918 - 2014). Or, Yoga is named after the main quality that the

⁵ For further information see Satyananda Yoga Australasia website, www.satyananda.net (viewed 12 May 2010) for an outline of these two ashrams.

⁶ See for example, Yoga Teachers Association Of Australia; <http://www.yogateachers.asn.au> (viewed 3 February 2010).

Since beginning my research in 2009, the Yoga Teachers Association of Australia has changed its name to Yoga Australia. <http://www.yogaaustralia.org.au>; (viewed 3 February 2010).

See also International Yoga Teachers Association Of Australia; <http://www.iyta.org.au>; (viewed 3 February 2010).

Yoga Schools In Australia; <http://www.findyoga.com.au/indexSchools.asp>; (viewed 3 February 2010).

Yoga Teachers In Australia; <http://www.findyoga.com.au/indexTeachers.asp>; (viewed 3 February 2010).

⁷ Examples of Bhakti Yoga organisations found in Melbourne are the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKON) and Sahaj yoga.

Within the Hatha Yoga typology there are groups practising, Ashtanga Yoga, Bikram Yoga, Dru Yoga, Gita Yoga, Hot Yoga, Iyengar Yoga, Kuṇḍalinī Yoga, Okido Yoga, Power Yoga, Satyananda Yoga, Swaroopa Yoga, Tantra Yoga, Yin Yoga and Zen Ki Yoga.

Within the Raja Yoga classification there are, Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU) and Siddha Yoga.

This list may not cover the full range of every single Yoga style found in Melbourne, but it gives an overview of the range and diversity.

style focuses on (e.g. Kuṇḍalinī Yoga, named after the raising of spiritual energy called, *Kuṇḍalinī*).

According to Atmananda (1991) in India there are four main styles of Yoga and these are Bhakti Yoga (Devotion), Jñāna Yoga (Knowledge), Karma Yoga (Selfless Service) and Rāja Yoga (Self-Mastery). All other styles of Yoga are only variations of these four main styles. Atmananda (1991, pp: 1-3) stresses:

“The four Yogas have a common aim, namely, to bring out the divinity latent in Man, the four alike take constitutional differences in Man as the starting point in each.”

Atmananda goes on to highlight that Yoga was tailored to meet the need of Man’s constitution. For those who are predominantly emotional, Bhakti Yoga evolved. For those who are predominantly intellectual, Jñāna Yoga evolved. For those who predominantly want to help and serve humanity, Karma Yoga evolved. Finally, for those who are seekers of truth and contemplation, through meditation, Rāja Yoga evolved.

When comparing the different styles of Yoga, the Bhakti Yoga style is not as popular as Hatha Yoga style. Bhakti Yoga tends to be religious in nature and adopts a devotional approach that includes participating in chanting (*mantra*), charity, communal singing (*kīrtan*), fasting, offering of sacrifices, recitation (*japa*), rituals, service to the community, the study of scriptures and worship. Movements like the Hare Krishnas (ISKON) focus on this style of Yoga in their religious practices.

The Hatha Yoga style is by far the most popular form of Yoga found in Melbourne. Hatha Yoga emphasises the promotion of health, living positively, personal development and well-being. Hatha Yoga focuses on breath control (*prāṇāyāma*), cleansing practices (*kriyās*), dietary controls, exercises, hand gestures (*mudrās*), locks (*bandhas*), meditation (*dhyāna*) and postures (*āsanas*). It is this style that characterises the teaching of Yoga at Gita International.

Finally, Rāja Yoga is the style of Yoga practice which emphasises mental development and concentration. Its main focus is on introspection, meditation and study of inspirational, sacred and scriptural texts. An example of a movement practicing Rāja Yoga is the Brahma Kumaris (BKWSU). However, the existence of the variety of Yoga styles does not fully reveal

why Yoga has been successful in Melbourne. Bhakti Yoga and Rāja Yoga have been little hybridised due to the importance of respecting central doctrines and rituals. But, in the case of Hatha Yoga, the most popular in terms of number of practitioners, hybridisation factors as mentioned above are the key to its proliferation. This thesis, therefore, examines the success of Hatha Yoga through hybridisation of an in-depth examination of the case of the Gita Yoga hybridised style of Hatha Yoga taught at Gita International.

Gita Yoga as a style of Yoga was developed by Segesman. According to Wood and Lucas (2007, p: 13):

“Gita Yoga is a specifically-formulated sequence of Hatha Yoga exercises which are known to be many thousands of years old. It is an integrated form of Yoga combining Bhakti, Karma, Rāja, Gnāni, Kriya Yoga and others, and, of course, Hatha Yoga.”

Therefore, Segesman received her traditional Yoga training under her guru in India and brought this Yoga training to Melbourne which became the hybridised Gita Yoga. In other words, out of the seclusion of the Himalayan Mountains in India and beyond the ashram setting, Segesman pioneered Gita Yoga in Australia.

Table 1.2: Comparison of the Main Yoga Styles with Gita Yoga

Source: Compiled by the author from Swami Atmananda (1991), *The Four Yogas* and Wood and Lucas (2007), *Yoga for You*.

Name:	Key Quality	Path of:	Perfection of:	Main Practice:	Moral Code:
Bhakti:	Devotion	Love	Heart	Chanting	Yamas/Niyamas*
Hatha:	Health	Well-being	Body	Postures/āsana Breath control/ Prāṇāyāma	Yamas/Niyamas*
Jñāna:	Wisdom	Knowledge	Intellect	Study/ Recitation	Yamas/Niyamas*
Karma:	Compassion	Selflessness	Action	Helping Humanity	Yamas/Niyamas*
Rāja:	Mastery	Self- Mastery	Mind	Meditation Contemplation Breath control/ Prāṇāyāma	Yamas/Niyamas*
Gita:	Integrity	Evolution	Self	Hatha Yoga/ Wholeness	Yamas/Niyamas*

*Refer to Appendix 5 for definition.

I argue that the hybridisation of Yoga has led to the successful transference of Yoga to Melbourne from India. The process of hybridisation is the de-emphasising of traditional Indian Yoga practices and the adaptation of those practices in ways that are acceptable to Australian Yoga practitioners. Wood highlights that Segesman was fearless in breaking away from the Yoga tradition she learnt in India. Tailoring Yoga practices for Gita Yoga members was essential for the promotion of Yoga in Melbourne. Other examples of the hybridisation process of Yoga into the Australian socio-cultural context can also be found, for instance in the case of Rāja Yoga with Howell and Nelson's (1997, 2000) focus on the Brahma Kumaris (Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University or BKWSU). The evidence indicates a recurring pattern of adaptation of Yoga practice to suit the Australian socio-cultural context when Yoga is transferred outside of its cultural heartland of India to Australia.

The BKWSU is an international Yoga organisation with its headquarters based in Mt Abu, Rajasthan, India. According to their website: www.brahmakumaris.org (viewed 10 December 2014), are an international Yoga organisation which teaches Rāja Yoga meditation and have 8500 centres worldwide in 110 countries. The BKWSU are a millenial world-rejecting or *saṃnyāsa* type Yoga movement (Wallis, 2003) whose Rāja Yoga teachings emphasise ascetic practices with strong purity rules centred in celibacy, daily meditation and vegetarianism. Howell and Nelson found that when the Brahma Kumaris established themselves in Australia, local leaders, under the direction of the leadership in India, were allowed to adapt the way the Movement's organisational structure operated to enable it to expand and grow in Australia. The first Australian members who learnt Rāja Yoga in London and made it through the "cultural barrier" (Howell and Nelson 1997, p: 10) found this cultural barrier too great for the Australian socio-cultural context. In India the BKWSU, at the local level, run the Movement as a traditional ashram system with "surrendered" (lifetime commitment) sisters and brothers running the organisation. In Australia however, members adapted the organisational structure of an ashram into a communal living style that Howell and Nelson refer to as a "household collective".

This adaptation was implemented because the members had to work to earn a living. The organisation in Australia could not financially support a "surrendered" member system as found in India. This change to the spiritual status of the ashram and the members allowed for the organisation to be operated as a congregational-based organisation in which the members were referred to as "family" and were able to control the promotion and development of the organisation in Australia. Therefore, casting the organisation as "family-orientated" narrowed the distance between the "foreignness" of the Movement and its teachings and the Australian socio-cultural heritage of its members and the public. In India, as a New Religious Movement within a Hindu cultural context, the BKWSU became a spiritual organisation promoting itself as a self-styled "spiritual university", which does not meet any Indian government educational standard. According to Howell and Nelson (1997, pp: 28-30), in Australia and overseas locations, the Brahma Kumaris invent a way in which they were able to legitimise their existence and public image in their recruitment and public service activities which focused on teaching meditation and the promotion of social causes. The initial world-rejecting teachings of the organisation in a sense became de-emphasised and were only available to the core membership. Similar to Gita

International, I argue, the Brahma Kumaris narrowed the cultural distance between the traditional Rāja Yoga practices used in India and the Australian socio-cultural context in much the same way as Segesman did when she introduced Yoga to Melbourne.

1.6: Yoga and the Australian Socio-Cultural Context

Research into the growth of Yoga in a modern Australian context is limited. There is only a small body of academic publications and literary sources. This indicates that the growth of Yoga in Australia is under-researched as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Part of the problem is that Yoga research has been included in the general heading of the study of Hinduism and Indian migration patterns in Australia. However, a number of researchers (Aveling, 1996; Bilimoria 1989, 1996; Howell 1997, 1998; Howell and Nelson, 1997, 2000; Penman *et al*, 2008; Samways, 1994) have provided some insights from their research into the growth of Yoga in Australia. The above-mentioned researchers found that Yoga has undergone radical changes to establish itself here in an Australian socio-cultural environment. This establishment has not been an easy one.

Bilimoria's (1989, 1996) extensive research of Hinduism in Australia, included an account of the growth of Yoga. His research revealed that the public perception of Yoga in Australia is that it is a Hindu practice which is exotic, cultish, and with a focus on guru worship. Additionally, Bilimoria (1989, p: 8) discovered that from the 1960s onwards, Yoga has been divested of a number of its Hindu characteristics by Australian Yoga practitioners and is now found within a "Yoga supermarket" context by being presented as an "alternative spirituality" and practised as an "ancient teaching" in the modern world. Bilimoria (1989, p: 26) also discovered this divestment of Hindu characteristics can be limited to influences from the Hippie and Counter-Culture movements and the New Age Movement.

Furthermore, Bilimoria tracked the historical growth of both Yoga and Hinduism in Australia, which occurred in two waves. The first wave coincided with a reformist impetus taking place within Hinduism in India from the 1890s onwards and this was filtered through to the West - mainly through the Theosophical Movement (from 1895 onwards in Australia). This reformist impetus sought to adapt traditional Hindu beliefs and practices to meet the needs of a growing western audience (Bilimoria 1989, pp: 20-24).

The second wave tying Yoga's development to the growth of Hinduism in Australia, according to Bilimoria, was linked to the arrival of a number of gurus⁸ and swamis⁹ in Australia in the early 1960s. The teachings of these gurus and swāmis who came during this early period were sectarian-based, that is, they taught Yoga philosophy according to the traditions of the Hindu sects they belonged to. They came with the aim of propagating the ancient Yoga teachings. During their visits to Australia, they set up a number of ashrams (retreat centres), Yoga and meditation centres and organisational networks. The main focus of their teachings was on devotional forms of Hindu worship (e.g. the Hare Krishna Movement), health, meditation, self-empowerment and well-being (Bilimoria 1989, pp: 24-39).

However, by the early 1970s, there was a gradual shift away from Yoga being tied to Hinduism in Australia. Yoga was no longer perceived as a sectarian-based Hindu teaching. The break from Hinduism further increased when Yoga began to be tailored to a growing Western audience, in this case, those of Anglo-Australian or European-Australian heritage. Yoga started to be divested of its Hindu socio-religious cultural heritage. During this period, the Theosophical Society began to lose its ability to be one of the leading organisations promoting Yoga philosophy and teachings. Individual Yoga groups began to arise in the Australian community and become dominant in the promotion of Yoga. Hinduism became more and more associated with the socio-religious practices of the increasing flows of Indian immigrants to Australia (Bilimoria 1989, pp: 41-56). This led to Indian communities around Australia setting up their own centres for socio-religious practices and constructing temples for worship. Even though Yoga is considered to be a part of Hinduism, many of the Indian immigrants did not prefer this form of religious practice. Instead, they preferred the more traditional temple-based and communal worship rituals (Bilimoria 1989, pp: 57-76).¹⁰

Consequently, the implantation of Yoga into Australia and hybridisation of its practices has not been easy one. Bilimoria (1989, pp: 35-46) has observed that the transition of Yoga into

⁸ Guru means teacher, especially a spiritual teacher. Guru also means adept or master. Guru means "one who dispels the darkness". The syllable, "gu" means shadows and the syllable "ru", one who disperses them.

⁹ A swāmi is an ascetic or yogi who has been initiated into a religious monastic order founded by a religious teacher. The initiation is conducted by the current head of the Order and the initiated Swami will follow the practices and lifestyle of that order. Also, swami means, "master", "lord", "prince" or "husband".

¹⁰ For example, the Sri Venkateswara Temple located in Helensburgh, between Sydney and Wollongong, New South Wales. The construction of this temple started in 1978 and it was consecrated on the 30th June 1985. This temple was built on land purchased by the Sri Venkateswara Association of New South Wales for the promotion of Hindu culture and philosophy and it provides a central place of worship for people of Hindu faith in Australia.

Australian society caused it to lose much of its founding philosophy, spirit, and traditional ethos. This has led to Yoga in Australia becoming what Bilimoria has called “a false system” in the sense that it is now a physical system with a spiritual component, when in reality Yoga should be a spiritual system with a physical component. Sadly, Bilimoria (1989, p: x) laments, the false view dominates:

“Much scholastic study on Yoga and gurus has been left behind and there is a need for more intellectual rigour to serve Yoga in the West better”.

Moreover, Carrette and King (2005, p: 117) found similarities with Bilimoria’s observation when they wrote:

“By detaching Yoga practices from the culturally specific belief-systems of Asia they can be universalised for a global context... In this way, Yoga loses much of what is genuinely counter-cultural, transformative and challenging to western cultural norms. It becomes secularised, de-traditionalised and oriented exclusively towards the individual.”

Finally, Penman *et al*’s (2008) research partially supports Bilimoria’s findings. They found that there has been a shift in the focus of research on Yoga as tied to Hinduism. Penman *et al* note that the research interest in Yoga in Australia has come to focus more on the effectiveness of Yoga, in promoting holistic health. However, Penman *et al* found there were earlier antecedents of this historical shift in an Australian socio-cultural setting. Penman *et al* found examples of developments as early as the 1950s with the establishment of the Sydney Yoga Centre founded in 1950 by Michael Volin (1914-1998), Gita Yoga founded in Melbourne in 1955 by Margrit Segesman (1904-1998) and the Sydney Yoga Club founded in 1956 by Roma Blair (1923-2013). From these humble beginnings back in the 1950s, Yoga groups, styles and practitioners have increased steadily over the ensuing years.

Now that I have presented the key argument of my thesis, I now conclude this chapter by presenting a short description of the aims of the following chapters.

1.7: Conclusion: Thesis Outline

In Chapter One, I have outlined the unique contribution of my research on the establishment of Yoga in Melbourne, using an ethnographic case study of a Melbourne-based Yoga centre, Gita International, the context of Yoga with a focus on the narrowing of cultural distance and hybridisation as the main theme in Melbourne. I argue that the significance of this research is that it greatly adds to academic research into Yoga in Australia and provides an insight into how Yoga, an eastern spiritual tradition, can be transferred from one country to another with a different host culture. My research at Gita International suggests that the growth of Yoga in Melbourne is determined by the hybridisation process and the resultant meeting of the needs of Yoga practitioners within their Australian socio-cultural heritage. Also, throughout Chapter One, I have presented an overview of the large number and diversity of Yoga styles, groups, schools and teachers found in Melbourne. This overview includes the foci on assimilation of Yoga into an Australian socio-cultural context, research into Yoga in Australian, and how Yoga has moved away from its public perception as exotic or cultish to being a mainstream practice.

The aim of Chapter Two is to indicate how Yoga was able to migrate to the West and arrive in Australia. One of the ways this was achieved was through Gita International is a process of narrowing of the cultural distance between Yoga and the Australian socio-cultural context with the de-emphasising of traditional Indian philosophical sources and the encompassing of western-based philosophical and occult sources. Importance was placed on the antiquity and the historicity of Yoga as a basis for comparing this to occult and religious traditions. I demonstrate how, through the separation of Yoga from other types of ancient practices such as Shamanism, Yoga has been able to stand alone as a spiritual practice in its own right. Yoga is considered by Occultists and Theosophists to be an original teaching and is referred to as the “ancient wisdom tradition”. I will show how Gita International utilises the teaching of Yoga as the ancient wisdom tradition, albeit from a Western Theosophical context, in their philosophy classes to consolidate their organisational integrity.

In Chapter Three, my aim is to introduce Margrit Segesman as a Yoga pioneer who brought Yoga to Melbourne, Australia and show how she was able to re-cast the representation and the role of the guru from its Indian socio-cultural context into a mentoring role. I will illustrate how the process of the representation of the guru was changed over time using

Segesman's life-story as an example. I will also introduce the importance of the Age of Aquarius, outline when this Age was believed to have started and explain how this is related to modern-day Yoga practice at Gita International and its impact on the role of the guru.

The aim of Chapter Four is to explore how Gita International became reconceptualised as an idealised spiritual home. This exploration includes a description of the background of the members and the reason why they became Yoga practitioners. A focus on the concept of an idealised spiritual home includes discussion of the reasons why people who come to Gita International and how they experience Yoga. Field data shows that this experience has such an impact on the practitioner that he or she returns again and again to a Yoga centre and to the practice of Yoga. I argue that what makes this experience powerful is that Yoga is a new spiritual element within the Australian socio-cultural heritage, yet hybridised so that Yoga practitioners are no longer considered as dwelling on the fringes of society, as is the case today, but are family-minded and career-oriented members of society. The Yoga centre becomes the place of the extended family, a place where they can develop spiritually and share experiences in a community of like-minded members.

In Chapter Five, I aim to highlight the process of how Segesman was able to take Yoga "Off the Mountain" and to radically adapt the Yoga practices and lifestyle of her training in India to meet the needs of the students at Gita International. Segesman removed the austere and ascetic aspects of Yoga practice which she learnt in India to incorporate her student's Australian socio-heritage by emphasising a focus on health and well-being through the invention of new methods of teaching. Segesman then re-branded her hybridised Yoga and called it, "Gita Yoga". Therefore, this chapter highlights how the adaptations of Yoga help create new forms of practice that shape the awareness of the Gita International members and sustain Gita International as an organisation.

Finally, the aim of Chapter Six is to present my conclusions on how and why an eastern spirituality like Yoga was able to be successfully transferred from India to an Australian socio-cultural context. I will re-affirm how Yoga came to be reformulated, stripped of its many Hindu influences, especially the role of the guru, and tailored to meet the needs of the Gita International practitioners by adapting and creating new forms of Yoga practice leading to its successful assimilation. No longer are Yoga practitioners forest-dwelling ascetics living in hermitages in India. Many Yoga practitioners today live in contexts such as Melbourne, Australia.

Chapter Two

The Antiquity of Yoga and the Western Occult Tradition

In this chapter, I will demonstrate the importance of the antiquity of Yoga as an ancient wisdom tradition through a focus on the occult and esoteric aspects of Yoga practice. Learning the ancient wisdom tradition becomes a shift away from Indian traditional Yoga philosophical sources to Western occult sources recognisable by Australians. I will highlight the way in which occult philosophy is learnt at Gita International and how this learning shapes the awareness of its members. Furthermore, I will explore the origins of Yoga and the relevance of whether Yoga is a religion or a spiritual path. Finally, I will examine the growth of new forms of spirituality in Australia, New Religious Movements (NRMs) and how this coincided with the arrival of Yoga from its cultural heartland of India to Australia. Then, I will explore the importance of their regulation. I will show how a self-regulatory process developed from existing traditional Yoga sources to produce a Code of Ethics.

Therefore, in Chapter Two I argue that as part of the effects of the hybridisation process in Gita International's presentation of Yoga, the Indian traditional Yoga philosophical sources were de-emphasised and a new emphasis was placed on the learning of Western occult sources at Gita International, such as the writings of Alice Bailey (1880-1949), and the Theosophical writings of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), allowing for Yoga to be established in Melbourne by Margrit Segesman.

Segesman was no stranger to the Western occult tradition. Wood (2011, p: 23) claims Segesman had studied this tradition for many years. Segesman did not indicate when she first learned about the Western occult tradition, but it was probable that her first introduction to the Western occult sources was when she lived in Switzerland before World War II. According to Segesman (1987, p: xix), a family friend, Dr Carl Jung (the well-known psychotherapist), in his visits to the Segesman family household, introduced Segesman to Yoga philosophy and because of his interest in the occult, it would be of no surprise that he would have spoken to Segesman about the occult tradition.

After World War II, another probable influence in introducing Segesman to the Western occult tradition were her first Hatha Yoga teachers, Elisabeth Haich (1897-1994) and Selvarajan Yesudian (1916-1998). Haich and Yesudian founded a Yoga school in Zurich, Switzerland in 1946 and Segesman went to study Hatha Yoga at this Yoga school under their guidance. According to Wood, Haich was known for her interest in the occult and wrote her best known work, *Initiation*, an autobiographical novel. Haich went on to write books on Yoga and Tarot. Consequently, I argue that due to these three influential personalities above, they were the reason why Segesman took the approach she did in focusing on the Western occult sources. Segesman used Western occult sources as a way to narrow the cultural distance between Yoga and the Australian socio-cultural heritage.

2.1: The Origins of Yoga

One of the great mysteries in Yoga is its actual origins, how it came into being and whether it is a religion or not. The emphasis on the antiquity of Yoga is very important at Gita International because it is taught as a “timeless” tradition which pre-dates religion. Gita International emphasise Yoga as a spiritual path for self-development and not as a religion or for religious development. As Feuerstein (2002, p: 121) argues:

“Without adequate understanding of the historical unfoldment of Yoga, it is hard to imagine that we could arrive at a genuine appreciation of its spiritual treasures, or could practice it meaningfully and with ultimate effectiveness.”

Historically, the origin of Yoga is located within India with the earliest record referring to Yoga dated around 6500 BC in the Indus/Sarasvati civilization (Feuerstein 2002, p: 130). A number of scholars (De Michelis, 2004; Eliade, 1990; Feuerstein, 2002; Singleton, 2010) have attempted to accurately locate Yoga in an historical context focusing on its antiquity and authenticity. Even though the historicity of Yoga is difficult to prove, this does not detract from the fact that Yoga has been highly influential on many of the spiritual and religious traditions of the East (Feuerstein, 2002).

However, attempts have been made to link the origins of Yoga to Shamanism. This would then date the emergence of proto forms of Yoga at around 25,000 BCE, that is, emerging in the Stone Age period (Feuerstein 2002, pp: 124-127). The evidence (Eliade, 1990; Feuerstein, 2002) in linking Yoga to Shamanism is no easy task as they may appear at first to be very similar (Eliade 1990, pp: 318-326). These similarities are related to the technologies used to enter into altered states of consciousness, but with a more rigorous comparison between Yoga and Shamanism, the distinction becomes apparent.

Generally, Shamanism is located within a tribal setting. Shamanistic practices focus on healing, the removal of evil influences, prognostication and the maintaining of the well-being of the tribe and tribal members using ecstatic technologies to enter into trance-like states. These ecstatic technologies tend to use external contexts and experiences that include ascent into Heaven, chanting and singing, descent into Hell, dietary control, ecstatic flights, fasting, healing techniques, imbibing hallucinogens and intoxicants, initiation, mastery over fire and water, magic, percussion instruments, recovery of lost souls and shape-shifting into animal forms.

On the other hand, Yoga is not limited to a tribal setting. According to Eliade (1990, pp: 3-5) Yoga is a world-rejecting practice that is founded on the principle of renunciation or *samnyāsa* whereby a spiritual aspirant works towards spiritual perfection and absolute freedom. Examples of Yogic technologies include ascetic practices, ethics, observances, breath control, postures, withdrawal techniques, concentration techniques, meditation, renouncing the world and worldly pleasures, self-development and entering into higher states of consciousness. Yoga uses what Eliade (1990, pp: 79-100) defines as enstatic technologies. Enstasy¹¹ is a term used by Eliade for the highest state in Yoga, *samādhi*. In this manner, enstatic technologies are not reliant on external sources as used in Shamanism to achieve higher states of consciousness. Instead, enstatic technologies include the use of ascetic practices, meditation techniques, mental exercises and breath control. This system was codified within the Yoga Sutras by Patanjali in India, in approximately 200 BCE. Nevertheless, whatever the distinctions between Yoga and Shamanism, this does not reveal if Yoga is defined as a religion or not because according to Eller (2007) to use the term “religion” is problematic. Much of what is known about religion is tied to the lived experience and not institutions when he (2007, p: 28) writes:

¹¹ Enstasy is a term used by Eliade to define *samādhi*. I have not found enstasy used by other scholars to define *samādhi* as Eliade does. Even in the dictionary I could not find the word enstasy. Therefore, enstasy is a term coined by Eliade to define this highest state in Yoga.

“Religion is part of lived human experience. How we define and conceptualise religion will affect what we accept as religion, along with what aspects of it we particularly attend to. No definition may capture all of the depth of religion, but each contributes a portion to our final understanding.”

Thus, I find using Geertz’s often quoted definition helpful in the typifying of Yoga when he (1993, p: 90) writes:

“Without further ado, then, a religion is: (1) a system of symbols which act to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”

Geertz’s definition deconstructs the notion of a religion as a structured, institutionalised and hierarchical entity to that of symbols and meaning which has relevance for the Gita International members. They apply their own meaning to the Indian Yoga tradition to make it accessible and bring it in line with the Australian socio-cultural heritage of its members with an emphasis on the “ancient wisdom tradition”.

2.2: Yoga as the Ancient Wisdom Tradition

To help understand the emphasis on the importance of occult and esoteric aspects of Yoga, the *Collins Dictionary* (1998) definitions are helpful. Occult (1998, p: 785) is defined as, “of or characteristic of mystical or supernatural phenomena or influences; beyond human understanding; secret or esoteric.” Esoteric (1998, p: 382) is defined as, “restricted to or intended for an enlightened or initiated minority.” In this manner, these definitions bring an understanding to the depth of the Yoga tradition. Yoga has thus been defined as a, “secret and mystical teaching practised by an initiated specialised minority over a long period of time.” In other words, according to the Theosophical esoteric traditions, Yoga is mystical, secretive, beyond human understanding and is taught as an ancient wisdom which is “timeless”. Using this understanding,

I will now explain the relevance of the occult philosophy derived from the Theosophical Society movement which is taught in the philosophy classes at Gita International.

The Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831 to 1891) and Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907), due to a growing interest by Westerners in the occult. The Theosophical Society was a path-breaker in introducing hitherto Eastern esoteric doctrines and spirituality to the West. From 1875 to 1937, the Theosophical movement and Theosophy had reached a level of popularity, where, as Ransom (1989, p: 554) highlights, by 1937 the Theosophical Society had issued 49 charters to national societies in 49 countries around the world. During the growth of Theosophy, Blavatsky wrote two influential texts, *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) which became foundational in promoting the understanding and increased the accessibility of the occult and esoteric traditions for Westerners.

In the two texts mentioned above, Blavatsky emphasised the antiquity of Yoga as a “timeless” tradition. According to Blavatsky (SD. I 1993, pp: xviii-xlvi),¹² she referred to Yoga using many names, including “ancient wisdom tradition”, “ageless teachings”, “ageless wisdom”, “secret doctrine”, “secret science”, “secret wisdom”, “*gupta vidya*”. I argue that from the time of Blavatsky’s writings we see the narrowing of the cultural distance begin with the shedding of the use of Yoga Sanskrit terminology to describe the ancient wisdom tradition in making Yoga’s migration to the West more acceptable to Western audiences. However, Blavatsky did not predict the growth of Yoga as a global phenomenon in the modern world, nor the hybridisation of Yoga practice to be tailored for Western Yoga practitioners. What is important to Gita International members is that they can study philosophy classes on what they believe to be the ancient wisdom teachings. As one member said: “Yoga practice without philosophy is merely gymnastics.”

¹². The Secret Doctrine (SD, Vol I &II) is one of the foundational texts of the Theosophical Society that deals with the occult understanding of the beginnings of the cosmos (Cosmogogenesis) and the beginnings of life (Anthropogenesis). The Secret Doctrine was written by Blavatsky in 1888 from teachings that she claimed were passed on to her telepathically from her masters Master Mourya, Master Kooth Humi and to a lesser extent Master Dwjal Khul. These Masters are considered to belong to the Occult Fraternity of the Great White Brotherhood who were said to have resided somewhere in Tibet. Also, in the same vein as the Secret Doctrine, using the same means of communication, are the writings Alice A Bailey and primarily her foremost work, “A Treatise on Cosmic Fire”. Alice Bailey is said to have received her information from Master Dwjal Khul - who is also known as the “Tibetan”. At Gita International, passing on the “ancient wisdom teachings” to their Yoga practitioners is mainly conducted within their philosophy classes. Gita International use the writings of Alice Bailey and not the Secret Doctrine nor other written works which are used in the Theosophical Society. However, in her writings, Alice Bailey draws heavily from the works of Blavatsky, especially the Secret Doctrine which she acknowledges.

2.3: The Importance of the Philosophy Classes

In my research about Gita International, I attended many philosophy classes. At first, my attendance in these classes was out of curiosity. Having studied occult philosophy for a number of years, I wanted to explore the class syllabus and how the learning took place. In this manner, I gained an in-depth insight to the importance that Gita International places on their philosophy classes. The other reason I attended was to complete the requirements for undertaking the Yoga teacher training course. During these classes the antiquity of the occult emphasis was repeated many times over with Yoga practice as the main theme.

Gita International offer many philosophy classes. These classes incur a fee and are part of a range of classes that Gita International offer to members and non-members. Traditionally, Yoga teachings were free or given for a donation. Gita International participants can pay an hourly rate and attend one class. Or, they can pay a monthly fee and attend as many classes as they like. This commodification of the ancient wisdom teaching is one way Gita International has hybridised an aspect of the Yoga tradition. When I questioned one of the participants, at Gita International, a Yoga teacher of around forty years, about charging fees, she said:

“Yes, knowledge is free, but the fee covers the cost of running the classes, providing for the utilities such as the up-keep of the facilities, power and water. It’s a fair price for what the costs are for.”

The participant went on to say that it costs money to have quality teacher training and Gita International justifies their fees for maintaining standards within their organisation.

At the time of my research, Gita International ran six different types of philosophy classes. Two of these philosophy classes were only for members who had graduated from the Yoga teacher training course. These classes focus on personal development, the writings of Alice Bailey (1880-1949) and New Age writers such as David Spangler (1945-Current). According to the class outline, these classes are:

“An on-going disciplined program of spiritual studies for teachers who are working physically at advanced level. This is an established senior class

with a focus on practical World Service, applying spiritual principles to the challenges of daily living and teaching.”

These two advanced classes give the members a deeper understanding of the occult aspects of Yoga. But, for Gita International teachers, attendance at either of these two philosophy classes is compulsory as it provides for them an insight into what world service is. World Service is an important concept at Gita International whereby the members inculcate the ancient wisdom teachings (the “Light”) into their daily lives and then teach others (share the “Light”) out in the world. This is why the motto of Gita International is: “Live with understanding, teach by example.”

The other four philosophy classes are open to members and non-members alike. These classes introduce the participants to ideas and concepts promoted by Gita International. These ideas and concepts are culturally distant to mainstream Australian society. They instil an appreciation of the depth of Yoga and the occult emphasis.

Wood and Lucas always conduct the philosophy classes. This is to ensure that they maintain the control and continuity of the knowledge taught at Gita International. The philosophy class experience follows the same format for all classes. Classes are conducted in a light-hearted and collaborative way to promote an atmosphere of introspection and inquiry. The inclusion of meditation and the recital of the Great Invocation¹³ provide a level of formality and

¹³ The Great Invocation was developed by Alice Bailey in 1945 and is used extensively by Gita International throughout their classes, meditations, events and ceremonies. The Great Invocation is promoted through the occult school she started, The Arcane School, which is administered by the Lucis Trust. According to the Lucis Trust website, www.lucistrust.org/en/services_activities/the_grat_invocations_1 (viewed 23 September 2014):

“The Great Invocation is a world prayer. It is an instrument of power to aid the Plan of God find full expression on Earth. To use it is an act of service to humanity and the Christ. It expresses certain central truths which all people innately and normally accept:

- That there exists a basic intelligence to whom we give the name of God.
- That there is a divine evolutionary Plan in the universe – the motivating power of which is love.
- That a great individuality called by Christians the Christ – the World Teacher – came to Earth and embodied that love so that we could understand that love and intelligence are effects of the purpose, the will and the Plan of God. Many religions believe in a World Teacher, knowing him under such names as the Lord Maitreya, the Imam Mahdi, and the Messiah.
- The truth that only through humanity itself can the divine Plan work out.

By means of invocation, prayer and meditation divine energies can be released and brought into activity. Men and women of goodwill of many faiths and nations can join together in world service, bringing spiritual value and strength to a troubled world. Men and women have the power, through focused, united invocation, to affect world events. Knowledge of this fact, scientifically applied, can be one of the great liberating factors within humanity.”

adds an element of ritual. The Great Invocation is a Judeo-Christian formulation created by Bailey, which Gita International have applied into a Yoga context. The Great Invocation is:

“From the point of Light within the Mind of God,
Let Light stream forth into the minds of men,
Let Light descend on Earth.

From the point of Love in the Heart of God.
Let Love stream forth into the hearts of men,
May Christ return to Earth.

From the centre where the Will of God is known,
Let purpose guide the little wills of men,
The purpose which the Masters know and serve.

From the centre which we call the race of men,
Let the Plan of Love and Light work out,
And may it seal the door where evil dwells.

Let Light and Love and Power restore the Plan on Earth.”

Gita International uses the Great Invocation in many of its proceedings. I argue this is another way in which Gita International narrows the cultural distance of Yoga in an Australian socio-cultural setting. They achieve this by tapping into the Judeo-Christian heritage of their members and combine this with Yoga practice.

2.4: The Philosophy Class Setting

When I came to Gita International I attended a number of philosophy classes which were quite instructional and a rich source of interactive experiences. Upon entering the room, the participants greeted each other even if someone was new. Once seated, participants would share

their day-to-day experiences or talk about a topic of interest. The atmosphere was vibrant and chatty which indicated that the participants were eager to be in the class setting. They brought with them notebooks, water bottles, and sometimes, snacks. Some of the participants come directly from their workplaces and so do not have time to eat. Blankets and bolsters are provided to sit on for participants' comfort.

Those who came on a regular basis, generally take a position in the class where they previously sat. Many times I observed that participants tend to group together and use the class setting as a means of socialising. If a participant came in late or cannot sit in the position of the week before this is not a problem. They will sit wherever they can find a place. If a newcomer comes into the gathering space is made available and as a rule other participants direct them to sit up the front of the class. Generally, the participants arrive first and the director (Wood or Lucas) conducting the class usually arrives last. When the director arrives, everyone becomes quiet. A warm welcome is given to the participants. Sometimes there is a short discussion about what happened during the week within the world. Other times the class begins with a meditation and the use of the Great Invocation followed by the class topic which is given as a handout to the participants. One of the participants would then read out a section. When that person has finished reading, Wood or Lucas give their understanding of the reading which leads into a discussion and questions from the participants. The participants speak freely and openly. No judgements are made on what is said. Banter between individuals sometimes arises. The class finishes on time after the discussion and the participants disperse to a Yoga class or go home.

The above format used by Wood and Lucas highlights their control of how the ancient wisdom tradition is learnt at Gita International. They combine a collaborative atmosphere, meditation, ritual and chanting into the learning experience and tie this to the Gita Yoga practice. Therefore, in the philosophy class setting, the participants are encouraged to adopt an attitude where occult knowledge is learnt and questioned, not accepted as the "truth" with a "blind-faith" mentality. One of my participants, a Yoga student of seventeen years, gave an insight into why this format drew him to Gita International. He said:

"It depends on what stage of life you're at. So, to me, it's not fixed. Initially, it was both [Yoga and philosophy] and, and I really liked the philosophical esoteric studies that we did because it did enable me to formulate my own framework

of understanding. I don't quite agree with everything which we are told. I always stop and think, as we all should, you know, take what's valuable with what we are presented with and discard that, that which isn't."

This quote sums up the approach of Wood and Lucas. They feel this way of learning to be in line with what my participant said. It is better to clarify an understanding than to have the participants go away confused. For example, during a class, a topic can become circumvented and a new direction in the topic emerged. I observed this happening on numerous occasions. At the end of the class, a brief summary was provided by either Lucas or Wood. However, many times the classes finished in the middle of a reading or a point of discussion which led to the topic being discussed over a number of weeks to ensure the understanding of the topic was completed. The participants would then go off to a Yoga class or leave to go home. Moreover, as the participants left the room, I noticed that they tended to be more introspective and less chatty. Each philosophy class ran for one hour and was part of the daily class schedule conducted at Gita International.

The members at Gita International give great importance to this format and to the study of the ancient wisdom tradition through a focus on the study of the writings of Alice Bailey and other New Age writers such as David Spangler. I argue that this is one of the ways in which Segesman narrowed the cultural distance between the Yoga tradition and the Australian socio-cultural setting with the use of Western occult sources. This movement away from traditional Indian textual sources is one facet of the hybridisation of Yoga. However, hybridisation does not affect the importance of the antiquity of Yoga.

2.5: The Growth of New Forms of Spirituality

The fashioning of the Indian Yoga tradition as a spiritual practice and not a religion is another important way the Gita International members promote Yoga. Yoga, as a spiritual tradition, becomes a lived experience with an ethical dimension and not a religion, and this narrows the cultural distance between Yoga and Australian lifestyles. Gita International emphasise the fact that Yoga is not part of the Hindu religion even though it is grounded within Hindu culture. Hence, Yoga can be a legitimate spiritual entity rather than presented as a religious entity. As a

spiritual entity it is then able to transcend cultural distance by becoming a universal practice. Yoga is a method for developing one's inner or spiritual potential within a "health and well-being" paradigm.

For the members, Yoga is experiential, not a "blind-faith" belief system of acceptance in the religious sense. Instead, they are encouraged to explore all aspects of the Yoga teachings relating this to their spiritual development. For this reason, Yoga has become part of a diverse range of forms of spirituality found in Australia and Gita International and its members are embedded in this Australian socio-cultural setting. The Australian social environment appears to be conducive to the growth of new forms of spirituality.¹⁴ Bouma (2006) highlights Australian society has opened itself up to new experiences by exploring new forms of spirituality which appear to have flourished, demonstrating the religious plurality of Australia within a secular political framework (Tacey, 2000).

Tacey has traced developments in Australian spirituality over many years highlighting that this transformation has not been an easy one. He asserts that spiritual movements were repressed with many considering them to be other-worldly, anti-social, irrational and unscientific.¹⁵ But since the 1960s, spirituality has been reasserting itself in a variety of forms, especially linked to the Australian landscape, nature, indigenous spirituality and creativity. Tacey (2000) observed that Australian spirituality is more about connectedness now. It has become a quest for the sacred that links Australians to Nature and the Cosmos. In this manner, Tacey's (1999, p: 3)¹⁶ earlier observation is quite prophetic when he asserts the importance of connectedness:

"Spirituality is not beyond our grasp, but is our normal way of being. Its rise in this country signifies not only the end of secular Australia, but the end of modernity as we know it because the key feature of modernity is alienation. Our contemporary experience of alienation is so relentlessly

¹⁴ See the broad range of religious groups, beliefs and practices in Australia in; Humphreys, Robert and Rowland Ward 1988. *Religious Bodies In Australia*. Melbourne.

¹⁵ For example, see Ben Hills (2014): <http://benhills.com/articles/scams-scoundrels/the-hilton-fiasco/> (viewed 7 February 2015), about the Ananda Marga movement's bombing of the The Hilton Hotel, Sydney in February 1978, Hills's article, "The Hilton Fiasco", outlined what happened and referred to the Ananda marga movement as a "whacky religious cult". He also referred to this incident as Australia's first act of terrorism.

¹⁶ David Tacey presented a talk at the 1999 convention of the Theosophical Society entitled, 'Australians in Search of a Soul.' A full outline of the talk was published in *Theosophy in Australia* magazine June, 1999.

overwhelming that it has activated the desire for belonging or interconnectedness as a counter response.”

Bouma’s (2006) research confirms Tacey’s observations. However, Bouma (2006, pp: 7-16) in searching for an “Australian Soul”, observed a distinction between religion and spirituality for Australians when he writes:

“Religion refers to more traditional, socially organised and structured ways of being spiritual.” Alternatively, “...spirituality refers to an experiential journey of encounter and relationship with otherness, with powers, forces and beings beyond the scope of everyday life.... Spirituality has come to be associated with movements and groups that are not seen as religious.”

Bouma found that spirituality in Australia is thriving, but adds that Australian spirituality is

“An amalgam of imported streams and strands which are constructed and reproduced in distinctly Australian ways”

(Bouma 2006, p: 31).

The “distinctly Australian ways” of spirituality is what Bouma calls “a shy hope in the heart”. In other words, Australian spirituality is a private and personal concern and not necessarily linked to a large religious organization. Bouma also highlights that sources of Australian spirituality are diverse as it is widely explored and not bound by religious identification or religious affiliation. Australians even engage, participate and identify with more than one religious group (Bouma 2006, pp: 51-64). Bouma found that an inclusive, experientially-based spirituality is what is important to Australians. These findings point to the possibility of Australians embracing Yoga as a dimension of their spirituality while still maintaining a Christian or Jewish identity, for instance. This eclecticism and spiritual seeking among Australians is reinforced by Lovat.

Lovat’s (1997) research, has strongly cautioned against making specific statements about Australian religiosity. For example, Lovat observed that Christian Australians, disenchanted with

their religion, are increasingly in search of different religious experiences yet still call themselves Christian. They are attracted to and have an increased interest in new spiritualities such as Yoga. Therefore, Yoga is encountered by the Gita International members as a spiritual practice. They do not follow Yoga as a religion because as a prerequisite to studying Yoga at Gita International the members are not expected to follow any belief systems or dogmas. Yoga is then conceptualised by the members in a way which brings it more into line with it being a spirituality. Its focus is on the individual and his/her spiritual development.

According to Carrette and King (2005), spirituality is a broad term which is vague and ambiguous with a focus on a “search for meaning” and “self-transformation”. This definition encompasses the mind, body, spirit and personal development spectrum within modern society and they argue that it is tied to capitalism. They contend (2005, p: 1) that now:

“Spirituality is big business...Spirituality as a cultural trope has also been appropriated by corporate bodies and management consultants to promote efficiency, extend markets and maintain a leading edge in a fast-moving information economy. For many people, spirituality has replaced religion as old allegiances and social identities are transformed by modernity.”

In other words, spirituality is commodified within the process of the privatisation of religion. Old wisdoms have been repackaged and sold in the spirituality marketplace on a global scale which began in earnest in the 1950s and 1960s. Furthermore, Carrette and King argue that spirituality has no universal meaning. And yet, the meaning has changed over the years and is now a ‘brand’ that includes, “undefined ideas of one’s inner self, wholesomeness and quality of life (p: 53).” For this reason, I agree with Carrette and King, that as a spirituality, Yoga has been commodified - as in the case of Gita International who charge a fee to learn Yoga.

2.6: Yoga and New Religious Movements

Historically, Yoga has never been considered to be a NRM. It arose within India in a Hindu socio-cultural context as a world-rejecting practice before its contact with the West. Alternatively, Clarke’s (2006) research into the emergence of NRMs found that globalisation and

the hybridisation of religious practices played a role in the formation of NRMs including a number of Yoga groups. These groups became NRMs because of their missionary activities. Examples include the Brahma Kumaris (Rāja Yoga), ISKCON (Bhakti Yoga), Sahaja Yoga (Bhakti Yoga) and Ananda Marga (Karma Yoga), to name a few. According to Clarke (2006, pp: 3-21), NRMs arise because they combine religion and spirituality with an emphasis on self-transformation and world-transformation. People are attracted to and join because these movements offer ways that include the “true path” to salvation, a means for achieving salvation, immediacy and certainty, charismatic leadership, alternative to traditional religious forms, and offer highly eclectic, pluralistic and syncretistic doctrines and practices.

Nevertheless, Barker (1989, 1999) cautions that it is difficult to define what an NRM is due to their variety. Many are labelled NRM due to their “newness”. They are highly adaptable into the culture in which they establish themselves. Wallis’s (2003) typology of defining NRMs as “World-Rejecting”, “World-Affirming” and “World-Accommodating” I find useful because this typology highlights the “fluidity” [my word] of NRMS and spiritualities. For example, as a spirituality, a Yoga movement, can start off as a world-rejecting practice and in its assimilation into a host culture becomes a world-affirming practice. This example has already been highlighted above with the case of Gita International and the Brahma Kumaris.

On the other hand, Tripathi (2004)¹⁷ highlights that traditional Yoga in India today, is practised according to the order or *sampradāya* (religious community) that a Yoga practitioner belongs to. These *sampradāyas* belong to three main sects found within Hinduism - Shaivism (The God, Shiva, and his manifestations), Vaishnavism (The God, Vishnu, and the various manifestations) and Shaktism (The Goddess and her manifestations). Also, many of the practices found within Yoga (Appendix 5) are also practiced in Hinduism and in a broader sense, Buddhism and Jainism.

In addition, even though Yoga shares some similarities and socio-cultural settings with these three religions, historically it is more ancient. What separates Yoga as a distinct tradition is the focus on the individual practitioner; the world-rejecting element of renunciation and worldly pleasures to pursue the perfection of the self. Alternatively, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism are

¹⁷ To highlight some of the variety Tripathi (2004, pp: 321-328) lists 66 contemporary orders or *sampradayas*, the founders, the Hindu sect they belong to, whether Shaivite or Vaishnuites, the deities worshipped, the jurisdiction of the order, the nature of the order, whether they are orthodox, reformist or radical and who is recruited into the respective order. These orders are also grouped by the type of Yoga they practise, either Rāja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Tantra Yoga or Karma Yoga.

social, institutionalised forms of spirituality, world-accepting and congregation-based. Many of the practices of Yoga have been absorbed into Hinduism because Yoga is one of the six philosophical schools of Hinduism. The other five are *Mīmāṃsā* or Hermeneutics; *Nyaya* or Logic; *Samkhya* or Dualism; *Vaisheshika* or Science; and *Vedanta* or Monism (Feuerstein 2002, p: 97).

2.7: Yoga Migrates to the West

Singleton (2010) argues that much of what we know about Yoga and its divisions today is an “anglo-phone phenomenon” that favours the Hatha Yoga style. This emerged from the time when one of the first popularisers of Yoga, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902),¹⁸ went to America in 1893 to participate in the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. At the time he went to America, there was a climate of suspicion built up around Yoga by Westerners. The *fakirs*¹⁹ and Hatha Yogis²⁰ created much of this suspicion due to their voyeuristic or public displays of self-mortification. This distorted the real goal of Yoga practice (Eliade 1990). They only emphasised the extremes of the Hatha Yoga style. Some were even seen as “militant marauders”, attacking and robbing like bandits, creating problems for the British Raj.

Western scholars of the colonial period reinforced these prejudices against Yoga. They were highly critical of Yoga and Yoga practitioners because they only focused on the Hatha Yoga style and the ascetic practices within Yoga. I argue that this narrow focus of their research into the ascetic, other-worldly and austere aspects of Yoga devalued Yoga, the diversity of the

¹⁸ According to Singleton (2010), Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was a prominent Bengal religious figure who rose to fame at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, America in 1893. Whilst in America, from 1893-96, he spread the teachings of Vedanta and is credited with propagating Yoga in the West in an easy and practical way, stripped of Yoga’s ascetic practices. What made Swami Vivekananda unique was his ability to tailor the depth of Yoga teachings for Western audiences Swami Vivekananda was one of the foremost disciples of Swami Ramakrishna and he also went on to found the Ramakrishna Mission (in honour of his guru) to promote Vedanta (see Appendix 1) around the world.

¹⁹ A fakir is a Muslim ascetic in India who practises Hatha Yoga. The name is often applied erroneously to Hindu ascetics and yogis. However, strictly speaking only Muslim ascetics are designated as fakirs.

²⁰ A Hatha Yogi is a Hindu Yoga practitioner and is usually male. Their main Yoga practise is centred on meditation, asanas, breath control and austerities.

Singleton (2010, pp: 35-53) provides an overview of the problems that fakirs and Hatha Yogis created for the British in colonial India. Both fakirs and Hatha Yogis were accused of black magic practices, perverse sexual practices and extreme mortification of the body. The differences between fakirs and Hatha Yogis are minimal and are only differentiated by their respective religious affiliation they belong to and this is why they were considered one and the same by westerners.

full range of existing Yoga styles and the reasons for which Yoga practitioners practice Yoga. They overlooked the fact that Yoga can be used in a number of ways depending on the ideological preference of the Yoga practitioner. For example, van der Veer's (1988) study of the Ramanandi Sect (a world-rejecting Yoga sect In India) in Ayodhya, India, rejects such claims as those that focus on Yoga as being ascetic and other-worldly. Van der Veer found the Ramanandi yogis in India have a "this-worldly" emphasis. They use their status in Indian society for both political and economic reasons to enhance that status and amass wealth and property. They would go to such lengths as to invent a tradition in their bid for respectability (1998, pp: 98-101).

Furthermore, van der Veer (1994) argues that Yoga was used by Bengali intellectuals of the colonial period as a means for implementing the political and spiritual reforms taking place in India. These reforms also coincided with the rise of Hindu nationalism. Bengali intellectuals activated specific programs of religious reform and spread these reforms India-wide via their Bengali networks. One of the key figures of this reform program was the young and talented Bengali intellectual, Swami Vivekananda. As van der Veer (1994, p: 69) writes: "Swami Vivekananda came to personalise the transformation of Hindu tradition in its encounter with western thought." Swami Vivekananda's extraordinary talent was the ability to systematize and connect the disparate set of Hindu religious traditions, scriptures and ascetic practices (especially yoga practices) and meld them into a notion of "Hindu Spirituality". Later, "Hindu Spirituality" was to later India's main export and contribution to, what van der Veer calls, the "spirituality market" arising in the West.

Invited to speak at the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago, America, in 1893, Swami Vivekananda introduced to the West this reformulated "Hindu Spirituality" for the first time. His main emphasis was on Yoga teachings (specifically Rāja Yoga) with a central theme of healthy body, mind and spirit. After the World Parliament of Religions, Swami Vivekananda remained in America until 1896. It was during his stay that Swami Vivekananda further refined Hindu spirituality and Yoga teachings, tailoring them to Western audiences. I argue, Swami Vivekananda was one of the first pioneers to narrow the cultural distance between Yoga and Western cultures. Yoga became a fusion of ideas and practices, emerging as a global spiritual movement.

Likewise, De Michelis (2004) highlights that Yoga practitioners practise Yoga for a variety of reasons. No longer do they practise Yoga for doctrinal reasons. Instead they practise

Yoga for better health, meditation, stress-release and well-being. De Michelis argues that Swami Vivekananda's reformulation of Yoga teachings became the "Modern Yoga" as it is commonly known today. De Michelis found that, over time, the "Modern Yoga" expounded by Swami Vivekananda divided into four types of Yoga; Modern Psychosomatic Yoga (MPsY); Modern Denominational Yoga (MDY); Modern Postural Yoga (MPY); and Modern Meditational Yoga (MMY). The MPsY is described as having a focus on Yoga practice with few normative doctrinal restrictions and a privatized religion/cultic milieu. An example of MPsY is Swami Sivananda (1887-1963) and his disciples (Divine Light Society).

Following on from MPsY is the MDY which De Michelis characterises as those groups who have a focus on neo-gurus and their teachings. There is an adherence to the Yoga school's particular doctrine, the rules and sources of authority. Examples of this Yoga type are the Brahma Kumaris and Sahaja Yoga movements. Emerging in parallel with the MPsY is the MPY. Examples of the MPY are those groups that promote the Hatha Yoga style including Ashtanga Yoga, Iyengar Yoga and Gita Yoga, just to name a few. De Michelis used Iyengar Yoga for her 2004 case study. The final type De Michelis delineates is MMY. Examples of MMY are those groups that place greater stress on mental practices, for example, Transcendental Meditation (TM). I found these Yoga types of De Michelis to be useful in highlighting the transformational process as Yoga transferred from India to Australia. I argue that the reformulation of Modern Yoga outlined by De Michelis has enabled Yoga to be successfully established in Australia through the hybridisation process. Therefore, the hybridisation of traditional Yoga practice as it emerges outside of the lived reality of India informs and supports Yoga as having universal appeal.

From the 1900s, the Yoga tradition continued to transform from a patriarchal male-dominated practice to a much more universal, inclusive practice open to men and women of all races and creeds. Yoga was to spread from its cultural base in India to become a global phenomenon. For the next 200 years, Yoga was influenced by a fusion of body-building, Christian values of health and well-being (YMCA), the counter-culture movement, gymnastics and calisthenics, health and well-being, industrialization, modernity, nationalism, new age thinking, philosophy, politics science, Theosophy, urbanization, western values and education, and wrestling (Alter, 2004; Singleton, 2010). These influences reveal Yoga to be a fusion of practices and not a static unchanging tradition. At the forefront of this trend was Swami

Vivekananda and the rise of Yoga in America (Love, 2006).²¹ Following the establishment of Yoga in America, Yoga came to Australia through the Theosophical Society in 1895.

2.8: Yoga Arrives in Australia

From 1895, the growth of Yoga in Australia (Appendix 6) was slow for the first 60 years. The introduction of Yoga to Australia did not appear to be affected by the White Australia Policy and the 1901 Immigration Act,²² nor the Australian Constitution²³ as it was presented within the broad context of the Theosophical Society and its teachings. Also, the proponents of Theosophy were Anglo-Australian and not Indian. The White Australia policy discriminated against all Asians including Indians. Therefore, the emphasis of Theosophical teachings focused on the masters, the occult and Yoga. When promoting the study of Yoga, the Theosophical Society focused on the meditative form of Rāja Yoga. The popular form of Yoga practiced today, Hatha

²¹. Love's research points to the earliest interest in Yoga in America as beginning in 1805 with William Emerson, father of the famous Ralph Waldo Emerson. Love refers to the fact that American's love affair with Yoga began as a 'bumpy' ride. There were a number of controversies beginning with members of the Theosophical Society in the 1890s and an early yogi, Pierre Bernard, known as the 'Omnipotent Oom'. Love calls Yoga, 'a cultural survivor'. "Yoga is the survivor of the culture wars: unbloodied, unmuddied, unbothered by the media's slings and arrows, its leotard still as pristine as its reputation...Yoga has been feared, loathed, mocked, kicked to the fringes of society, associated with sexual promiscuity, criminal fraud, and runaway immigration. Really!" (Love 2006, pp: 80-81).

²². The White Australia Policy and the 1901 Immigration Act was the culmination of hostilities between unionized white miners and labourers of English descent and Asian (Chinese) miners and Pacific Island contract workers. The White labourer resentment led to the government legislating to restrict migrant workers and migrants into Australia. This legislation led to Australia being labeled as 'racist'. However, this was an economic move rather than a racist move. It was feared that Asian and Pacific Island migrants would not contribute to the Australian economy as they would send their earnings back to their home countries.

For a more detailed account see,

Abolition of the 'White Australia' Policy, Australian Government,

<http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheet/08abolition.htm> (viewed 12 January 2012).

The White Australia Policy.

<http://www.convictcreations.com/history/whiteaustralia.htm> (viewed 12 January 2012).

White Australia Policy

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Australia_policy (viewed 12 January 2012).

Immigration Restriction Act 1901:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_Restriction_Act_1901 (viewed 12 January 2012).

It is very difficult to assess whether the White Australia Policy had any effect on the establishment of Yoga in Australia. Many Asians could not enter Australia easily until the restrictions of the Immigration Act were lifted during 1958-1964. If there were any restrictions they may have been applied to Indians who potentially may have brought Yoga to Australia. Instead, Yoga was brought to Australia by Yoga pioneers of European descent until the 1960s, whereas in America, Indian yogis were restricted from entering the country from 1923 onwards, until the 1960s. An example is Swami Mastamani who came to America in 1919, founded a number of yoga schools and stayed for three years. He then returned to India but was not allowed back into America.

²³. The Australian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and belief, Article 116, therefore Yoga is not restricted as a spiritual practice.

Yoga, was considered inferior to Rāja Yoga. In fact, Hatha Yoga was severely criticized by the Theosophical Society, who referred to it as “false” Yoga. Theosophists maintained an attitude similar to the colonial attitude of the British Raj towards Hatha Yoga that was deemed to be the practice of fakirs, sadhus and a militant type of mendicancy (Singleton 2010, pp: 39-44).

Moreover, for Theosophists, Hatha Yoga practice emphasised extremism with intense focus on the cleansing and the perfecting of the physical form (see appendix 1), the subjugation of desire and the attaining of spiritual powers called, *siddhis* (Ryan, 2006; Besant, 2008; Blavatsky, 2008; Burnier 2008; Olcott, 2008; Shearman, 2008; Wells, 2008). Theosophists promoted Rāja Yoga, especially the Rāja Yoga of the Yoga Sutras written by Patanjali, to bring about what Burnier calls, “the transmutation of consciousness” (Burnier 2008, p: 4). The Hatha Yoga forms had not emerged in any discernible way in Australia during this period. Although the Theosophical Society led the way in introducing Australians to the ancient wisdom teachings and Yoga, according to Roe (1986) and McFarlane (2012), by the late 1930s the Theosophical Society had lost its dominance and popularity due to scandals and in-fighting, and the death of its charismatic leaders. It was not until the mid-1950s that the Hatha form of Yoga opened the way for the popularising of Yoga in Australian society.

Five Yoga teachers²⁴ pioneered this popularity, Michael Volin/Swami Karmananda (1914-1998, who started teaching yoga in Sydney when he arrived in 1949 from China); Margrit Segesman/Swami Gitananda (1905-1998, who started teaching yoga in Melbourne in 1955 when she arrived from India. See Chapter Three in how she obtained her initiation to become a swami); Roma Blair/Swami Nirmalananda (1923-2013, who started teaching yoga in Sydney in around 1958-59 when she arrived from South Africa); Vijayadev Yogendra (1930-2005, who started teaching Yoga in Melbourne in 1963 when he arrived from India); and Swami Saraswati (DOB unknown-current, who started teaching Yoga in Sydney in 1966 when she arrived from India). Nevertheless, in this thesis I am only focusing on Margrit Segesman for her role in narrowing the cultural distance between Yoga and the Australian socio-cultural context. However, with the growth in the popularity of Yoga and it being alien to the Australian socio-cultural context, how was Yoga regulated?

²⁴. I am only highlighting five Yoga pioneers to give the reader an overview of how Yoga was established in Australia. There were a number of other figures, but their influence was much less influential than the five I am focusing on.

2.9: The Regulation of Yoga in Australia

According to the Australian government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website,²⁵ Australia is a secular country with a multi-cultural population and the assorted pluralism of beliefs. Freedom of belief is enshrined in the Australian Constitution (Article 116). People have the right to practise their beliefs and spirituality in the way that they wish to, with the law. However, one of the major problems of this freedom of belief is the formation of new religious movements, Yoga groups, guru leadership, personal-development-based movements, and cults. There is very little government control and regulation of these groups. Samways's (1994) research found that groups, in their attempt to assimilate into a host society such as Australia, become very good at the hybridising and adapting process without any government regulation, potentially becoming adept at manipulating their members, new recruits, the legal and tax systems.

Also, Samways highlighted the lack of appropriate standards and qualifications for teachers, gurus and facilitators within such organisations created by the vacuum in the government regulations. Samways says that this scenario has led to so-called spiritual organizations having no or little accountability. However, Samways's research is not completely negative. Many of the NRMs and Yoga groups are trustworthy and have succeeded in assimilating into Australia. Many of these groups are also self-regulating. What Samways recommends is tighter government control and regulation to meet appropriate government standards.

Samways (1994, pp: 133-136) recommended that there be strong government policy and regulation in relation to these organisations. Government legislation should be put in place to make these movements accountable and more transparent. People would then be able to know what kind of group they are becoming involved with and hence be able to protect themselves legally. Thereby new recruits would be able to give informed consent to their involvement. However, these recommendations have not yet been adopted into government policy in Australia.

²⁵ For a more in-depth overview, see Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, <http://www.dfat.gov.au> (viewed 27 September 2014), and follow the prompts to People, culture and lifestyle. This website highlights the multi-cultural population of Australia, their main beliefs along with mainstream Australian values.

However, I acknowledge Samways (1994) to be lacking in an academic approach. In spite of Samways best intention, researchers such as James Richardson (1996) noted that Samways book and insights are problematic in a number of ways and are tied to an Australian journalistic bias towards new religious movements. Firstly, Richardson noted she claims her book to offer information, practical help and advice to victims and families whilst failing to cite available scholarship into cults and personal development groups. Second, she took a subjective approach. Third, her book became a vehicle to be used by the media to promote their chosen perspective of their bias towards new religious movements. Fourth, Samways makes unsubstantiated claims that the groups in her book were doing all sorts of things under the rubric of “mind control” to trick people into participating.

Contrary to Samways’s view, Gita International opposes the government regulation of Yoga, believing it difficult to police across the broad range of Yoga styles and would be against the government’s secularist standpoint. Where they do agree with Samways is that if people are paying for services, a certain standard should be upheld which includes a level of accountability. Gita International achieves this by training qualified Yoga teachers via their code of ethics, the Gita Teachers Guild Code of Ethics (see below Table 2.1).

Figure 2.1: The Gita International Yoga Teacher's Guild Code of Ethics

Source: Compiled by the author from the Gita International Yoga Teacher's Code of Ethics leaflet.

The Guild is an association of people sharing the common interest of Yoga, who have trained as *Teachers of Yoga* at GITA.

The Guild exists for the mutual aid and protection of its members; for maintenance of standards and to provide a forum for matters of mutual interest.

The Guild is dedicated to the service of humanity, to the integration of the individual, and to the development of consciousness through the practice of Yoga.

The Guild maintains a Register of Diplomates and Teachers who have trained at GITA and who wish to be registered with the Guild.

As a member of the Guild, I strive:

1. To teach Yoga competently and with integrity.
2. To respect the rights of others to hold opinions which may be at variance to my own.
3. To retain a strict code of confidentiality in all dealings with students' personal affairs.
4. To encourage students to seek assistance from other qualified practitioners of their own choosing, e.g. doctors, complimentary therapists.
5. To discourage the use of alcohol and drugs as a means of avoiding responsibility.
6. To live in accordance with the laws of the country in which I reside providing they are in accordance with the Articles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
7. To conduct all aspects of my business affairs honestly.
8. To provide collegiate support for fellow teachers; to consult other Guild members on matters of mutual concern; and to be available if such consultation is sought of me.
9. To live in harmony with the natural environment.

As a member of the Guild, I undertake to:

- Adhere to the Law of Truth
- Practise the Law of Love
- Live in the Light

Thus, striving to create the conditions in which souls may grow.

As stated in the preamble, membership of the Guild is open to all teachers of Yoga who have trained at GITA.

Membership implies willingness to abide by the Code of Ethics and to participate in some form of Post-Graduate Course each year (one day, two day or major courses).

Gita International developed the Code of Ethics to embody their core values. The directors of Gita International, Wood and Lucas, place great importance on adherence to these ethics as their Yoga teachers represent the organisation. The Gita Yoga-trained teachers are expected to follow the Code of Ethics if they want to remain in the Gita International as teachers teaching within the organisation. I argue that the Code of Ethics is a hybridisation of the *Yamas* and *Niyamas* (see Appendix 1) found within traditional Yoga practice and is another way in which Gita International have drawn from elements of previous religio-spiritual heritages to strengthen their organisational structures. In this manner, upholding the Code of Ethics narrows the cultural distance of the Yoga tradition by connecting it to values found in mainstream Australia.

Similarly, Yoga Australia (the peak Yoga organisation in Australia) employs a Statement of Ethics²⁶ standard with reference to the traditional Yoga *Yamas* and *Niyamas* (Appendix 5). They combine with this Statement of Ethics a Code of Professional Conduct.²⁷ In the case of both Gita International and Yoga Australia, these are guidelines and not rules. It is left up to the individual Yoga teacher's integrity to implement these guidelines in his/her daily life. The Gita International members feel that by imbibing the Code of Ethics into their daily lives they further enrich Australian society by adding to its socio-cultural context and Australian values. An outline of the Australian values are posted on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) website²⁸ which include; respect for the equal worth, dignity and freedom of the individual; freedom of speech and association; freedom of religion and secular government; support for parliamentary democracy and the rule of law; equality under the law; equality of men

²⁶ See Yoga Australia website, www.yogaaustralia.org.au (viewed 3 October 2014), go to Statement of Ethics.

“This Statement of Ethics guides yoga teachers in their work of supporting students' yoga practice. It is based on the traditional yogic ethical principles, the *yamas* and *niyamas*, as outlined in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. This Statement of Ethics reflects the timeless, living principle that our essential nature is awake, aware, compassionate and peaceful. This Statement of Ethics underpins the Yoga Australia Code of Professional Conduct which contains more specific guidance.”

²⁷ See Yoga Australia website, www.yogaaustralia.org.au (viewed 3 October 2014), go to Code of Professional Conduct.

“The Code of Professional Conduct makes explicit the standards of ethical and professional behaviour expected of Yoga Australia teachers by their peers and the community. This code is a practical application of Yoga Australia's Statement of Ethics. It offers guidance to teachers in their role of supporting students in their practice of yoga. This Code applies to all members of Yoga Australia. The Code also informs yoga students and the community of the level of professional behaviour required of Yoga Australia members.”

²⁸ For a more full account of the Australian values and what these relate to within the Australian socio-cultural heritage see DFAT website, http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/people_culture.html (viewed 3 October 2014).

and women; equality of opportunity; peacefulness; a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces tolerance, mutual respect and compassion for those in need.

Table 2.1: The Comparison of Yamas and Niyamas with the Australian Values

Source: Iyengar's (1993) *Light on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* and the Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website; http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/people_culture.html (viewed 28 July 2014)

Australian Values	Yamas*	Niyamas*
Respect for equal worth, dignity, and freedom of the individual.	Ahimsā (non-violence/ reverence for all life)	Śauca (cleanliness/ purity)
Freedom of speech and expression.	Satya (truthfulness)	Santoṣa (contentment)
Freedom of religion and a secular government.	Asteya (non-stealing)	Tapas (zeal/enthusiasm)
Support for parliamentary democracy and the rule of law.	Brahmacharya (self-control/ celibacy)	Svādhyāya (self-study)
Equality under the law.	Aparigraha (non-ownership)	Íśvara Praṇidhānāni (surrender to the Divine)
Equality of men and women.		
Equality of opportunity.		
Peacefulness.		
A spirit of egalitarianism that embraces tolerance, mutual respect and compassion.		

*Refer Appendix 5.

However, I acknowledge that the Australian values which are outlined on the DFAT website may be a problematic indicator because they are promoted by the Australian government as

timeless when in fact they have been developed over time and are used for the purpose of facilitating immigration. In other words, these values are government policy and may be subject to change or flouted by the government. Nonetheless, I argue that the fusion of Australian socio-cultural values, combined with the values of the Gita International Code of Ethics and the values of the Yoga tradition, the *yamas* and *niyamas*, is another way in which cultural distance is being narrowed enabling Yoga to be successfully established in Melbourne.

2.10: Conclusion: The Hybridisation Process Begins

The aim of this chapter has been to present the way in which Yoga as the ancient wisdom tradition of Yoga, as conceptualised in the traditional Indian Yoga philosophical sources, was de-emphasised and replaced with an emphasis on Western occult philosophical sources. This became one of the dimensions of the hybridisation process. I have illustrated how the importance of learning about the antiquity of Yoga as presented in the Western occult tradition is central to the Gita International members experience for their spiritual development. This is a way in which Gita International sustains its members at the organisational level. This began with Segesman who customised the ancient wisdom tradition, enabling Yoga to be more accessible to Melbourne Yoga practitioners in a philosophical context that they were familiar with.

I presented an overview of the antiquity of Yoga and compared this to the earliest known spiritual tradition, Shamanism. Shamanism is related to the rise of the tribal system some 25,000 years ago in the Stone Age period. The proto-typical forms of Yoga emerged at this time, revealing Yoga to be as old as Shamanism. But, when comparing Yoga to Shamanism it appears they share a number of similarities and yet are different, that is, traditions in their own right. However, when comparing Yoga to other spiritual and religious traditions, I have shown that Yoga is not a static tradition which has remained unchanged throughout history, but a vibrant tradition incorporating a fusion of ideas and practices. I have argued that the plasticity of the Yoga tradition is central to the hybridisation process. Yoga has enthused other religio-spiritual traditions as well as infused elements of these traditions. For example, Yoga has been absorbed into Hinduism and is considered one of the six schools of Hinduism even though Yoga pre-dates Hinduism. Hinduism and Yoga share many practices and so are difficult to separate.

Finally, I argued when Yoga arrived in Melbourne by way of Margrit Segesman, she made Yoga accessible to Melbourne residents by hybridising the Yoga practice and lifestyle. Her arrival coincided at a time of the arising of new forms of spirituality in Australia. Australians began to seek out spiritual traditions outside of the mainstream Australian Christian context. Along with Segesman's arrival and the introduction of an alien culture (Yoga tradition), I have emphasised the importance of regulation and how an organisation can invent its own regulatory process by borrowing from existing elements of the Indian Yoga practice tradition to create a modern-day code of ethics. The hybridisation process in the establishment of Yoga in Australia not only involved the de-emphasising of the traditional Yoga philosophic sources, but also involved the recasting the roll of the guru.

In the next chapter, Chapter Three, I will focus on the life of Segesman. I will introduce what a guru is and the irony of how she became a guru in her own right even though she never considered herself to be one. I will explore how Segesman, beginning in the 1960s, was able to recast the role and the representation of the guru, part of the process that allowed Yoga to be established in Australia. I will discuss how she was able to re-interpret this guru tradition by combining western occult sources with astrology. Furthermore, I will outline why Gita International and its members reject the traditional representations of the guru and why this is important to Yoga practice in Australia.

Chapter Three

Gurus Without Gowns: Recasting of the Role of the Guru

The Age of Aquarius

When the moon is in the seventh house

And Jupiter aligns with Mars

Then peace will guide the planets

And love will steer the stars

This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius

The Age of Aquarius

Aquarius! Aquarius!

Harmony and understanding

Sympathy and trust abounding

No more falsehoods or derisions

Golden living dreams of visions

Mystic crystal revelation

And the mind's true liberation

Aquarius! Aquarius!

Let the sunshine in, let the sunshine.

(By: 5th Dimension and the Age of Aquarius lyrics, 1967)

This chapter begins with the opening verses to a popular song written in 1967, “The Age of Aquarius”, sung by the group, the 5th Dimension, for the musical, “Hair”. The lyrics of the “Age of Aquarius” encapsulate the qualities of life in the Age of Aquarius (Oken, 1988).²⁹ Oken

²⁹ The Age of Aquarius is one of the twelve Ages that are part of an astrological cycle called the “Great Year”. According to Oken, these twelve Ages of the Great Year represent the spiritual development of life on Earth

(1988, pp: 511-537)³⁰ presents the Age of Aquarius to be one of the twelve ages that make up the astrological “Great Year” or “Platonic Year”. According to this philosophy, these twelve ages represent the evolution of humanity. Oken highlights the characteristics of the Age of Aquarius to include the personal and social transformation of humanity leading to inclusive communities and the demise of authoritarianism (The Age of Pisces). The Age of Aquarius is the “Age” for the awakening of consciousness of mankind leading to a higher state of being, where the qualities of brotherhood, love, peace and unity are experienced, and so, this is related to the evolution of the soul.

What the song, the Age of Aquarius highlighted, was the general feeling in the West that the Age of Aquarius had arrived and with this arrival, a new-found freedom to explore new spiritual traditions other than Christianity (Chryssides, 2007). This led to an increased interest in occult teachings such as astrology and new forms of mysticism that embraced eastern spiritualities, especially Yoga. Chryssides links this interest with the rise of the New Age Movement (NAM), hippies and the Counter-Culture Movements when he writes:

“Make love, not war”, and the twin values of “love” and “peace” were declared in preference to the materialism and perceived authoritarianism of the West’s dominant culture...Men grew beards and women typically wore long dresses. Their interests included drug-taking – particularly cannabis and LSD – rock music, eastern philosophy and religion.”

(Chryssides 2007, p: 8)

This period of the 1960s onwards was the time in which Yoga expanded globally unprecedented at any time within the history of Yoga. Many pioneering Yoga teachers and prominent gurus emerged with their own “brand” of Yoga during this period. It is in this period

especially humanity. Each Age has its own quality and energy. For example, the Age of Aquarius is the Age of Humanitarianism and Brotherhood. The twelve Ages are: the Age of Aries; the Age of Taurus; the Age of Gemini; the Age of Cancer; the Age of Leo; the Age of Virgo; the Age of Libra; the Age of Scorpio; the Age of Sagittarius; the Age of Capricorn; the Age of Aquarius; and the Age of Pisces.

³⁰. The Great Year is a 25,920 year cycle caused by the gravitational relationship between the Earth, the Sun and the Moon. The gravity of the Sun and the Moon cause the Earth to gyrate like a spinning top making the Earth regress through the signs of the Zodiac. Therefore, the Great Year is an astrological term which postulates that major changes occur in Earthly evolution due to in-coming cosmic energies. These cosmic energies are filtered through the twelve signs of the Zodiac. For a fuller explanation of this process see Oken (1988, pp: 23-26).

also that we locate the emergence of the rise of Yoga in Australia with the arrival of Segesman and how she introduced her hybridised form of Yoga, Gita Yoga. As discussed above, this hybridisation of Yoga led to the successful establishment of Yoga in Australia.

In this chapter, I will explore how Segesman³¹ was able to achieve this and how she became a “guru without a gown”. I will show how this cultural change of the role of the guru was experienced by Gita International members. I will discuss what it means to be a guru and the western representations of the guru. Also, I will outline the significance of the Age of Aquarius in the role of spiritual development.

3.1: Gurus without Gowns

One day, I arrived at Gita International for my regular Yoga classes. I ran into and had a brief discussion with Lucas. I greeted her as, “Guruji”, - an honorific and affectionate title used by devotees when speaking to or speaking about their gurus. She said to me, “Oh Trevor don’t be silly, you know we have no gurus here at Gita. We are all our own guru.” I said, “Nah, not being silly. I’m just standing in the presence of greatness, in the presence of my master, my guru without a gown.” We both laughed as we both knew how silly it was to call Lucas or Wood, ‘guruji’. They would never accept that title. Lucas then said, as she was running a bit late for teaching her regular Yoga class, “Off I go to put on my gown.” I said, “What gown? You just told me you don’t wear a gown.” She said, “You know what I mean, I have to wear something.” Next thing, off she went behind some curtains to get changed into her black lycra leggings and top that she normally wore when conducting a Yoga class.

I first heard the phrase, “Gurus without Gowns”, when I started my participant observations and attended regular classes at Gita International. The directors of Gita International, Di Lucas and Lucille Wood, would, from time to time, refer to themselves in a light-hearted way as, “gurus without gowns”. I argue this is another way in which Gita International narrowed the cultural distance between Yoga and the Australian socio-cultural

³¹. I have used Margrit Segesman as an example of a modern-day guru because my research focused on the Yoga school she founded in Melbourne, the Gita School of Yoga. Interestingly, there is not much evidence about Segesman’s life. Much of what we do know about Segesman is based on the anecdotal evidence of those who knew her personally. Segesman kept the details of much of her life very private as she did not want anyone to know about it because she did not want to be the focus when people were learning Yoga. Also, she revealed nothing of her own guru. Like Segesman herself, he too said it was not desirable to reveal anything about himself. Hence, all that we know of Segesman’s life is recorded in Segesman’s autobiography, *Wings of Power* and Wood’s, *I Am A Yogi*.

context by diminishing the emphasis on the role of the guru, to enable Yoga practice to be more accessible conceptually to Australians. Gita International does not have a guru lineage tradition or *paramparā* (Appendix 5) as in the case of other Yoga schools. However, they are not against other Yoga schools having a guru tradition.

Paramparā is the guru tradition in which the occult teachings of the guru are transmitted to the disciple or *chela* (Appendix 5). This tradition extends into prehistory to the very beginning of Yoga practice. It retains the continuity and integrity of the Yoga teachings and practices which are taught by the guru, it includes and locates these teachings according to the Hindu sect or *sampradāya* (Appendix 5) that the guru belongs to. Tripathi (2004) and Bhandarkar (2001) highlight that there are three main sects that gurus belong to: Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism. Generally, Tripathi found the guru to be male and to possess sectarian markings which include the colour of the clothing, hair style, necklace, staff and *tilak* (forehead mark).

The colour of the clothing and the *tilak* are considered the most important markers. The clothing colours include saffron, maroon, or white. These colours represent purity and the renunciation of the world. The *tilak* also indicates the sect of the guru. Tripathi observed that there are 60 distinct designs for the Vaishnava sects and 24 designs for the Shaiva sects. Shaktism has only one. Female gurus are recognised in the same way as their male counterparts. What is of interest here, as Tripathi observed, is that gurus today trace their lineage back to the founder of the sect they belong to. Most of these sects arose from the 8th century CE onwards. However, very little is known of gurus before the 8th century.

According to Lucas and Wood, their organisation's emphasis on not having a guru has drawn some criticism in the Australian Yoga community. Not having a guru tradition is one feature that makes Gita International unique in the Australian Yoga community. The impact of not having to follow and bow down to a guru has great appeal for the members at Gita International. These members feel empowered by not having to accept a male-dominated patriarchal system that would control all aspects of their spiritual development. Instead, with the re-casting of the role of the guru, they are able to control all aspects of their own spiritual development.

3.2: Segesman Recasts the Role of the Guru

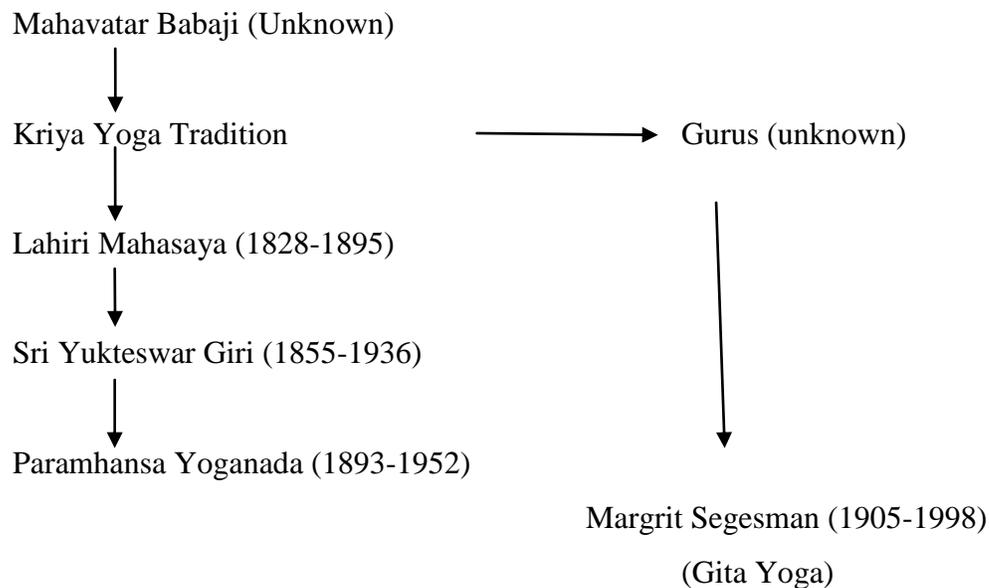
Segesman, who was originally initiated by a guru (name and ashram unknown) in India at an ashram she stayed at before meeting her main guru. She was initiated, “Swami Gitananda”. According to Wood (2011, pp: 34-35), Segesman said she was initiated into the same swami lineage of Sri Yukteswar Giri (1855-1936) and Paramhansa Yogananda (1893-1952), two famous Indian gurus of the early 20th century. This lineage was in the Kriya Yoga tradition founded by an Indian legendary Yoga master, Babaji (DOB unknown). Yogananda (2011, pp: 261-268) claims Babaji to be “deathless” and is at least 2000 years old because Babaji taught Jesus Christ, Kriya Yoga. Yogananda³² (2011, pp: 303-304) further claimed that it was the Yoga master himself, Babaji, that explicitly instructed Yogananda to introduce Kriya Yoga to the West by travelling to America in 1920. Kriya Yoga is a Yoga system that is centered in breathing exercises/*prāṇāyāma* that are intended for accelerated spiritual development.

Wood (2011, p: 50) claimed that one of the reasons why Yogananda went to America was not only to teach Kriya Yoga, but according to her, he was supposed to stop the guru lineage tradition. Instead, he chose not to. On the other hand, when Segesman’s guru sent her to Australia, he instructed her that now was the time to break with the guru and lineage tradition - especially the adoration, worship and “blind” following of the guru. If Wood’s assertion is correct, then both Yogananda and Segesman were trained in the same tradition. Both were sent to the West to introduce Yoga and break the guru tradition. However, what is unknown at this point is whether Segesman’s guru, was a guru in the lineage of the legendary Babaji and the guru lineage of Yogananda. Or, was a guru trained in the Kriya Yoga tradition and was separate from the guru lineage of Yogananda. I could not find information to substantiate either proposition.

³² Paramhansa Yogananda wrote a very influential autobiography, *Autobiography of a Yogi*. This autobiography was based in his experiences of how became a Yoga practitioner and eventually to becoming a guru when he went to live in America.

Figure 3.1: Segesman’s Guru Lineage Tradition

Source: Compiled by the author from Wood (2011, pp: 40-41) and Yogananda (2011).



When Segesman’s guru sent her to Australia, he disavowed Segesman of her “swami” status and vows, stripping her of her saffron-coloured gown, sent her back into the world from their secluded place in the Himalayan Mountains in India and told her to go to Australia. He instructed her never to act like a guru or follow a guru, ever again. He emphasised to Segesman, “follow the teachings and not the teacher”. This became the foundation of the method of teaching Yoga that she brought to Australia from India. He sent Segesman to Australia because he felt the Age of Aquarius³³ had arrived. The Age of Aquarius was now the age in which the role of the guru was to be recast and the traditional way of learning Yoga was to change as well. The new way to teach Yoga was a business. In other words, people would pay a fee to learn Yoga. According to Wood:

³³. What he knew about the Age of Aquarius is not known. Segesman revealed nothing about what her guru knew about the Age of Aquarius other than his statement that the Age had arrived.

“It was her guru telling her that. It was also, how else could she have set it up? If it wasn’t a business, then it had to be an ashram. She had been told to break that line. She had been told to stop the adoration of the guru, you know, donations and all the rest of it. It had to be business-like, clear, to be a model for what spiritual business could be in the New Age. As we are moving towards the new age, everything must be spiritualised. And so, spiritualising business was one of the tasks she was given. So, it was to be set up as a business, but it must be run on spiritual lines.”

Interestingly, the Gita International members I spoke with would not have come to learn Yoga if there had been a guru-type figure. Instead, they came to learn Yoga in a community of like-minded people and not bow down and idolise a guru. As one of my participants, a Yoga teacher of eleven years, said in relation to following a guru:

“Not now. I absolutely respect that if that’s where people are at because I believe we are all on different paths, we are all on a journey. And, my understanding of the soul’s growth, that would be a bit more Piscean, from when we used to have to go to and speak to someone like the priest, to get permission to do things, or confess or whatever. So, with the guru, just having that one leader and not the group, I would not be comfortable, no.”

Therefore, we see in this member’s experience that for her Yoga practice, a guru is not required. The guru tradition belongs to a previous age, the Age of Pisces. For her, the strength of Yoga practice is centred in the Yoga community and not on one leader. She does concede though, for other Yoga practitioners, following a guru can be important.

Similarly, in regards to the Gita International member’s comment above, Howell and Nelson’s (1997) research of the Brahma Kumaris (BKs) in Australia found a correlation of not following a guru either in Yoga practice or in the Australian socio-cultural context. Howell and Nelson (1997, p: 26) highlight that Yoga as practised by the BKs is not Hindu when they wrote:

“Distaste for this term is rooted in their theology, which contrasts the BK use of meditation and purity rules to achieve salvation with what they understand to be wider Hindu community’s “mere worship” of deities, what they call “bhakti”. “Gurus” are seen to be objects of worship or slavish devotion and hence are implicated in the “bhakti” complex.”

The example of the BKs in Australia, like Gita International, is another way in which a Yoga group narrows the cultural distance between Yoga and the Australian socio-cultural context by shedding traditional Indian Hindu devotional elements. Instead, Yoga practice becomes a focus on the teachings and not the teacher. For Gita International members, the shedding of the guru is related to the Age of Aquarius.

3.3: Segesman and the Age of Aquarius

One of the unique features of Yoga in Australia is the movement away from traditional philosophical sources. In the case of Segesman, she tied much of her Yoga philosophy and teachings to the Age of Aquarius and to the writings of Alice Bailey which had a powerful influence in the philosophical direction that Segesman took. Bailey had centred her writings in the context of the Age of Aquarius, with a focus on the role of the “ascended masters”, evolution of the soul and spiritual development. Bailey’s links to the ascended masters was through her own master, Djwhal Khul (also known as, “The Tibetan”). Over a period of 30 years, Bailey wrote many books that were “telepathically”³⁴ communicated to her by her master (Bailey 2008, p: 167). Her master was located somewhere in Tibet. Bailey went on to found the Arcane School (est. 1923) which was to become very influential in the dissemination of western occult philosophy and the establishment of the NAM. However, Bailey’s works did not try to recast the role nor influence the Western perception of the guru.

According to Bailey, the Age of Aquarius is to enable humanity to prepare for the “quantum leap” in evolution. The understanding of the Age of Aquarius became important to

³⁴. Segesman had a similar experience to that of Bailey. Segesman’s guru had been teaching her through mind to mind transmission. She discovered this when she came down from her secluded mountain cave. Her guru spoke and taught her in Hindi. Segesman thought that she was fluent in Hindi, but when she tried to speak Hindi she found she couldn’t (Wood 2011, p: 47).

Segesman because her guru gave her specific instructions in preparing for the Age of Aquarius. The methodology to be used for this preparation was a focus on personal development through the practice of Yoga. It was due to this influence that Segesman was able to tailor her understanding of Yoga practice and focus this on meditation, developing a healthy body, strengthening the nervous system and balancing the functioning of the glands, which became the hybridised Yoga form known as “Gita Yoga”. Therefore, in regards to studying philosophy, Segesman placed importance on the study of the works of Alice Bailey. This enabled Segesman to re-frame Yoga teachings within a Western occult framework.

Furthermore, Segesman was also equally aware of the importance of evolution from the Hindu and yogic perspectives. These postulate four ages or *Yugas* instead of twelve ages as in the western astrological system. These four ages are known as, *Krita Yuga/Satya Yuga* or Golden Age, *Treta Yuga/Silver Age*, *Dwapur Yuga/Copper Age*, and finally, the fourth age, *Kali Yuga/Iron Age* or Age of Darkness (Barborka 1998, pp: 12-19).³⁵ Segesman would have been taught this perspective from her Yoga training under the tutelage of her guru. However, once in Australia, Segesman did not focus too much on these Hindu and yogic notions of the Ages or *Yugas*, as these notions are culturally distant to mainstream Australian culture. Instead, the main focus of her teaching was on the use of the astrological system of the twelve ages used within the works of Bailey. The distinguishing feature of this western astrological system used by Segesman is its explanation of the evolution of humanity.

In contrast to this Western astrological system is the Yuga system of the Hindu/yogic tradition which teaches that humanity devolves. The complexity of the Hindu/yogic system is perhaps one of the reasons that Segesman used the Western astrological system instead of the Eastern system. Also, the Western system emphasises a more positive aspect to the Ages as a time of growth, whereas the eastern system places more emphasis on the ages as a time of decline. To strengthen the positive aspect of the Ages, Segesman focused her teachings on the characteristics of the Age of Aquarius.

³⁵. The four ages of the Hindu system are very complex and are the measure of the Hindu cosmology. The four ages are part of the great cycle of life/existence, “The Day and Night of Brahma”. The division of this Brahmanical cycle is in two halves called, “Mahayugas” or Periods, measuring 4,320,000 years equally for a total of 8,640,000 years. Not only do the ages divide time into four periods but also encompass the ten messianic figures who descend on Earth to restore dharma or righteousness according to the age they arrive (See Feuerstein 2002, pp: 113-117). For a more comprehensive description of the ages and their time-frames see Barborka (1998 pp: 12-19).

The Gita International members promote the Age of Aquarius as the time, now, to change, take responsibility for the self and grow spiritually and they relate this to their Yoga practice.

3.4: The Western Perception of the Guru

The mainstream Western perception of the guru still prevails: a semi-naked bearded male, sitting on a mountain top, in a cave or in a forest under a tree.³⁶ Gurus are perceived as benign, humanitarian and important authorities on all things spiritual. They are revered, worshipped and adored. Much of this image has been promulgated by the media. However, for Segesman this perception was the actual experience when she trained with her guru in India. Most Gita International members held this popularised perception of the guru before taking up Yoga.

Moreover, from about 1875 onwards, beginning with Blavatsky (1831-1891) and the founding of the Theosophical Movement, this perception has been greatly challenged. Blavatsky (1993) strongly advocated against the “blind” following of a human guru - who is considered the sole authority on all things spiritual - thus freeing oneself from the superstition that is centered on the belief of the infallibility of the traditional guru and the guru system. Blavatsky’s emphasis was on the teachings of what she referred to as, the “ancient wisdom tradition” and not the teacher. This was to be a new approach to spirituality and spiritual practice in preparation for the coming “New Age”, the “Age of Aquarius”. Even the so-called, “New Age gurus”, are not exempt from being challenged as well by feminists for having a misogynistic viewpoint.

According to Sjöo (1992),³⁷ Western New Age gurus generally promote themselves as universal, humanitarian, holistic, inclusive and an authority on all things spiritual. In fact, Sjöo found in her experience that many New Age gurus harbour views that have a hidden agenda. Sjöo (1992, p: 4) commented:

³⁶ For a range of images see Google: www.google.com.au/?gws_rd=ss#q=images-of-hindu-gurus

³⁷ Sjöo is highly critical of New Age gurus and the New Age Movement in general due to these gurus promoting a patriarchal and paternalistic system that began with Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society and their belief in the masters. What Sjöo questions is that there is a sinister agenda within the New Age movement. Sjöo’s criticism of these New Age gurus is their focus on money, wealth, and white middle-class membership (Sjöo 1992, p: 10). However, she does understand that there are many genuine people who are part of the New Age movement, do not hold all of her views nor do they subscribe to the hidden and sinister agenda which Sjöo highlights.

“They hold many covert ideas that are racist, fascist, misogynistic, reactionary and right wing, inherited from a mish-mash of both eastern and western occult sources.”

Another serious challenge to the modern-day male-dominated guru tradition is the rise of female gurus (Pechilis, 2004)³⁸ and the rise to prominence of many female Yoga teachers (see *Yogawoman DVD*, 2011).³⁹ A quote on the *Yogawoman DVD* cover that encapsulates the change and the challenge within the guru tradition with the rise of prominent female yoga teachers is as follows:

“Yoga was brought to the West from India by a lineage of male teachers. Now there’s a generation of women who are leading the way. They’re strong, they’re inspiring, and they’re radically changing peoples’ lives. From the busy streets of Manhattan to the dusty slums of Kenya, *Yogawoman* uncovers a global phenomenon that has changed the face of Yoga forever.”

Segesman was at the forefront of this modern trend leading to the transformation of the guru tradition. Significantly, I observed that 85-90 percent of the Yoga teachers today at Gita International are women.

3.5: The Definitions of the Guru

The term “guru” has entered into mainstream Australian society’s conversational usage and gained a broader definition that extends beyond the traditional usage in India. Traditionally, the guru⁴⁰ is perceived as a human being who is considered to have attained a level of high spiritual

³⁸. See Pechilis 2004. In her book she highlights the rise of 11 female gurus, Ammachi; Anandamayi Ma; Gauri Ma; Gurumayi; Jayashri Ma; Karunamayi Ma; Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati; Mother Meera; Nirmala Devi; Shree Maa; and Sita Devi.

³⁹. “*Yogawoman*”, a 2011 DVD, produced by Michael McIntyre, Kate McIntyre and Saraswati Clere. The DVD features 50 of the most inspiring and prominent female yoga teachers in the world today. Some of these female Yoga teachers are, Angela Farmer; Colleen Saidman; Cyndi Lee; Desiree Rumbaugh; Donna Farhi; Elena Brower; Judith Lasater; Patricia Walden; Seane Corn; Sharon Gannon; and Shiva Rea.

⁴⁰. Concerning the definition and role of the guru, the *Guru Gita* clearly outlines the role of the guru and the relationship to disciples. The *Guru Gita* is an important Hindu text used to define who is a guru and outlines their

development and on the basis of this, has become a spiritual teacher. The guru is considered an “enlightened being”, one who is “all-knowing”.

Alternatively, in the Australian socio-cultural context, the term “guru” has multiple meanings. For example, “guru” in an educational context simply means “teacher”. If the context changes to a trade, craft or guild then the guru becomes the “master craftsman or craftswoman”. If it changes to a religious one then the guru is a “sermoniser” or “preacher”. In an ashram setting, the connotation becomes “master” or “sage”. For those who live in an ashram and study under a guru, they will have a master/disciple relationship with the guru. The guru is the adept and the disciple the novice. If the context changes to an abbey, monastery, religious community or sectarian community, then the guru becomes an “elder” or “abbot” or “head monk” or “leader” of that community or sect. And, in the Western world the connotation of the word guru has become “mentor” or “adviser”.

In this manner, the connotation of the term guru has come to be loosely applied across a range of settings that include universities, businesses and social research organisations. Guru has been applied to those people who are leaders in their field which include “advisers”, “analysts”, “marketing strategists”, “professors” and “social policy advocates”. No longer is the “all-knowing guru” associated with the realm of the sacred, but the concept has been transferred and become associated with the secular. Therefore, the word “guru” has been hybridised in Australia to include a broad range of meanings and contexts. However, in the Indian socio-cultural context, the guru concept still embodies a number of cultural indicators. Segesman emerged from this tradition.

3.6: The Evolution of a Guru

Segesman never allowed herself to be regarded as a guru in the Indian sense. She considered herself as a Yoga teacher and her role was one of bringing Yoga to Australia. The result of this led to Segesman transforming the role of the guru and recasting it to that of a mentor. According to Wood, Segesman said one of her aims, when she arrived in Australia from India, was to break away from the guru tradition. Therefore, at Gita International, they have no guru tradition.

role. Cited from the Bluestar Canada website. Shri Guru Gita PDF – Bluestar Canada: www.bluestarcanada.org/uploads/2/8/pdf_sri_guru_gitapdf (viewed 15 June 2013).

Instead, Gita International emphasise the teachings and not the teacher (guru). Also, Gita International emphasises the no guru tradition as a means to set them apart from the Indian traditional forms of Yoga. Even though she did not consider herself to be a guru, her story parallels that of other modern gurus (Storr, 1996).⁴¹

Storr's (1996) study of the impact of gurus in modern society aimed to investigate why we, as human beings need gurus. He wanted to compare a number of gurus to find out how different they were from each other. What was of particular interest to Storr was the personalities of these gurus. Storr chose gurus ranging from saints to criminals to highlight that they have more in common than meets the eye. Storr (1996, pp: 3-19) mapped out their developmental patterns and discovered startling similarities between these gurus not only within his "guru" category, but to other types of leaders as well, especially political leaders and dictators. These developmental patterns begin in the guru's formative years. He argues that similar developmental patterning has been found in people who have been classified as insane. He likens the guru to people who suffer manic-depressive illnesses, paranoia or schizophrenia. Storr (1996, pp: 149-171) concedes that the classification of "insanity" is problematic in nature for the guru and for conceptualising mental illness in general:

However, mental illness or 'madness' is usually associated with 'breakdown', with the inability to cope with life in our society, whereas many gurus are effective social leaders, proselytisers and orators. Even if gurus are deemed to be mentally abnormal, they do not usually become psychiatric patients or end their days in mental hospitals. The phenomenon of the guru raises difficult problems about the nature of mental illness. Can people be regarded as psychotic merely because they hold eccentric beliefs about the universe and their own significance as prophets or teachers?"

(Storr 1996, p: 152)

⁴¹. Storr's research focused on 10 well-known "gurus" in the modern sense. Bhagawan Rajneesh; Carl Jung; David Koresh; Georgei Gurdjieff; Ignatius Loyola; Jim Jones; Mother Meera; Paul Brunton; Rudolph Steiner and Sigmund Freud.

Generally, Storr's main classification of gurus is that they are eccentric. However, Storr (1996, pp: 151-171) found that many tend to be self-absorbed confident tricksters, false prophets, madmen or unscrupulous psychopaths who exploit people for their own personal gain.

3.7: The Life Stages of a Guru

Storr discovered there are approximately six life-stages that gurus pass through. These six stages are what I have summarised in my words as; the mystery of the formative years; narcissistic childhood; dark night of the soul with epiphany; emergence of a new persona; mysterious travel to an exotic place; and notoriety. These six stages represent the waxing and waning of the life cycle of a guru.

Firstly, there is a mystery of the formative years. Storr observed that, in general, very little is known about the guru's early years, their formative years or their family. A guru tends to be very private and not disclose personal information.

What follows next is the second stage. Storr observed there is a tendency for the child to be introverted and narcissistic, leading to the child becoming a loner or having only a few friends. Storr writes:

“Gurus have often been isolated as children, and tend to be introverted, narcissistic, and more interested in what goes on in their own minds than in relationships with others. These traits of personality encourage the development of phantasies. Imagination flourishes best in solitude”

(Storr 1996, p: 200)

Being narcissistic in their childhood years, Storr found that delusions develop from this developmental period and support the self-esteem of gurus. This self-esteem is further enhanced by an idiosyncratic belief system which is often unique to the guru him or herself. Interestingly, it is the idiosyncratic belief system and subsequent controversy that the guru is remembered for.

Accordingly, the very qualities of an idiosyncratic belief system combined with an introverted and narcissistic nature enable the child to excel in scholastic achievement. Often, the

child will display signs of high intelligence, cleverness and be well-read. The child would have a strong interest in the world through studying various subjects, especially philosophy.

Often what follows the second developmental stage is a third stage of illness and epiphany. This period of illness is usually a physical illness which is very debilitating. Or, the illness could manifest as a mental illness of some sort. The mental illness is usually experienced as depression or psychosis. This intense period of illness can either occur in the teenage or adult years. This period Storr refers to as, “the dark night of the soul”, and is thought to be similar to a mid-life crisis. This period is very significant as it is followed by an epiphany involving the revelation of a new idea or truth. This revelation can come gradually or like a “thunderbolt”. The new idea or truth is then considered to be absolute, unshakeable and permanent, an intense conviction or absolute certainty that supports the development of a charismatic persona.

The development of a charismatic persona is the fourth stage - the emergence of a new persona. The “dark night of the soul”, coupled with epiphany, transforms the guru into a different person. The guru is no longer confused, but emerges with certainty and passion. Around the same time, the guru passes through the fifth stage. The fledgling guru will undertake a mysterious journey to an exotic place where some higher revelation, training or learning will be given for him or her to take back in order to “awaken” humanity. At this point, the guru now starts to believe totally in his or her own delusion. The fledgling guru will now consider him or herself as the “chosen one”, who has been given special or “revealed” knowledge that no one else has. On the basis of this epiphany, such gurus consider themselves as the ones chosen to lead humanity from, “the darkness of ignorance into the light of knowledge”. At this point, they then start to gather their disciples and followers. The guru will have a strong desire for adulation, adoration, recognition and acknowledgment for the new revelation.

Finally, the sixth stage, the guru making a mark on the world – the period of notoriety, either through living by example or through controversy and fading away, marked by extended periods of paranoia. After an event-filled life, the life of the guru begins to change dramatically. If all goes well he or she will be successful and respected. In contrast, Storr observed if the guru becomes power-hungry there is a descent into moral decay and an extreme self-centeredness. The guru has come to believe totally in his or her own infallibility and feels accountable to no one. Such gurus begin to accept the status and authority of their privileged position in their community – after all, they are the object of worship. They tend to gather wealth, live in luxury

and indulge in multiple sexual liaisons. During this period, many followers are abused physically, emotionally and mentally.

By now, the position that the guru holds in his or her organisation becomes warped. The guru's delusion of infallibility starts to corrupt him or her. Such gurus become dictatorial and power-hungry – leading to a dramatic increase of abuses. They start to exhibit signs of paranoia and distrust. They then see every person as a threat. Once this level of paranoia is experienced, gurus will set up a spy network within their organizations, using elite followers who act like “secret police” to spy on mainstream followers. Once the guru has reached this level of paranoia, this leads to the downfall of the organisation. At this point, the abuse of followers, usually sexually, will be widespread. Finally, society will be forced to act and close down the guru and his or her organisation. Interesting to note here, many gurus have this tendency to set society against themselves and their organisations. This ultimately leads to the demise of both. When this part of the process of decline occurs, the guru will end up dying or they will grow old and fade away, for example Rajneesh (Storr 1996, p: 63).⁴² Having provided an overview of Storr's life stages of a guru, I will now examine the life of Segesman according to this paradigm.

3.8: Segesman's Life

Segesman's life (Appendix 7) mirrors the life pattern of a guru as proposed by Storr's observations above in a number of ways. To begin with, Segesman had an aura of mystery about her, especially in relation to her formative years. Her whole life and much of what we know about Segesman is based on anecdotal evidence (Wood, 2011). As yet, no empirical evidence of Segesman's family background has been discovered or be proven. Highlighting Storr's second stage, Segesman appears to be gregarious and adventurous, rather than narcissistic and a loner. Therefore, she did not start to develop delusions from this early period although she did well academically. It was due to her social status that her father did not allow her to mix with people especially the lower classes.

The next stage Storr highlights, “the dark night of the soul with epiphany”, was significant for Segesman as she suffered severely from tuberculosis. It was during her time in a

⁴². The most famous example of this is Rajneesh. Most of the allegations and court cases are to do with sexual abuse, deviancy, promiscuity, clandestine relationships and affairs, marital breakups, amassing wealth and criminal fraud. What is of interest here is that these controversies have not impacted on the popularity of Yoga around the world.

sanatorium in Switzerland that she had the first of her epiphanies. After leaving the sanatorium, Segesman passed into the fourth stage of emerging with a new persona. However, I would argue that this could be due to her gaining in maturity.

The fifth stage highlighted by Storr was of great importance for Segesman. This was her trip to India to meet with and be trained by her mysterious, nameless guru. After this, she travelled to Australia and brought with her the teachings and practice of Gita Yoga. Once Segesman established herself in Melbourne from 1954 onwards, she became well-known in the Australian Yoga community as a Yoga pioneer. People in Australia who knew Segesman found her to be honest, articulate and a natural teacher.

In analysing Segesman's life in relation to Storr's observations, she followed the basic pattern of the first five stages. From her formative years onwards, Segesman's life remains a mystery before her arrival in Melbourne. Whatever Segesman said about her early life cannot be verified. And yet, there is nothing to prove that what she said was untrue. What is of special interest here is that Segesman did not want her life put on show. According to Wood, she did not encourage any inquiry into her personal background at all. She did not want anyone to idolise her, place her on a pedestal, even to the point of not celebrating her birthday. She firmly believed in, "following the teachings and not the teacher". If anyone was to enquire about her past, she would say simply but firmly, "What do you want to know that for? It is of no consequence." Therefore, it is at Storr's sixth stage where Segesman breaks the pattern. Her self-effacement and rejection of her role as a guru is contrary to the guru tradition of India in which she had learnt Yoga. She in effect, transferred the emphasis from the teacher to that of the teaching with the recasting of the role of the guru to that of mentor in Australia.

To contrast Segesman in her role of establishing Yoga in Melbourne, using Storr's research as a guideline, other examples of gurus establishing their style of Yoga in Australia can be found who followed the basic pattern of the six stages. These examples link the importance of the Indian guru tradition needing to be hybridised to suit the Australian socio-cultural context.

3.9: The Guru and the Australian Experience

In researching the Australian experience, Aveling's (1996) study focused on two gurus, Swami Satyananda (1923-2009) who established the Satyananda Yoga Movement and Osho Rajneesh

(1921-1990) who founded the Rajneesh Movement.⁴³ These gurus and their failed movements have done much disservice to the public image of Yoga through controversial conduct or violence. Aveling's study found that the success of a Yoga group depends on the importance of the role of the guru and its senior leaders. He discovered that Yoga movements can easily fail due to the moral failure of their leaders and their ultimate failure to meet the developmental needs of their members. According to Aveling (1996, pp: 7-10), the Rajneesh Movement failed in Australia at the time of the arrest of Rajneesh and the debacle of the 1985 collapse of his American headquarters in Rajneeshpuram Oregon, America.

In regards to the Satyananda Movement in Australia, the virtual collapse of this Movement took place in 1989 with the arrest of the Director of Satyananda Ashram in Australia on the grounds of financial misdemeanours and child sexual abuse. All of the 26 Yoga ashrams closed in Australia and most of the members or *samnyāsins* left the Movement. In the 1990s, both these Movements continued to decline. Swami Satyananda left his Movement, becoming a wandering mendicant in India. In the case of Rajneesh, he retired to his ashram in Pune, India, where he died in 1990. Since these controversies occurred, the Rajneesh Movement has almost completely disappeared in Australia whilst the Satyananda Movement has slowly but steadily continued to regenerate. As shown in Aveling's research, the controversies surrounding these two groups have contributed to the uneasy transition for Yoga's implantation and acceptance in Australian society. Aveling observed that, for a Yoga group to be successful in Australia, good leadership is central, combined with a willingness to constantly adapt to the host society and meet the needs of the members.

In the above examples of Margrit Segesman, Swami Satyananda and Osho Rajneesh, Storr's research highlights the dangers of the role of a person becoming a guru. I argue the Indian guru tradition has to be hybridised, as in the example of Segesman, to suit an Australian socio-context. She narrowed the cultural distance between the Indian guru tradition and the Yoga

⁴³ Both the Satyananda and Rajneesh organisations became global movements because they had an impetus to spread their respective teachings to a global audience. From about 1970 onwards they established their organisations in Australia. For example, in 1956 Swami Satyananda set up the International Yoga Fellowship Movement (IYFM) for the promotion of Yoga and Yoga philosophy. Swami Satyananda's motto was, "From door to door and shore to shore." See Satyananda Australia website for more information: www.satyananda.net
The type of Yoga Swami Satyananda taught was a fusion of Rāja and Hatha Yoga which became known as 'Satyananda Yoga'.

The type of Yoga Rajneesh taught was a fusion of elements of Hatha, Rāja and Tantra Yoga techniques which he called 'Dynamic Meditation'.

practitioner's Australian socio-cultural heritage. In other words, she recast the role and representation of the guru to that of mentor to meet the needs of her students.

3.10: Conclusion: The Guru Tradition Transformed

Since Segesman came to Australia, the traditional roles and representations of the guru are now mainly found in the Indian socio-cultural setting. These belong to the tradition of '*paramparā*', the guru lineage tradition which describes the transmission of yogic cultural teachings from guru to spiritual aspirant. A common saying within the Yoga community is, "Only when the student is ready will the guru appear."⁴⁴ Normally, the guru will only accept those whom he or she thinks are ready. What is of importance here is that Segesman immersed herself in the tradition of *paramparā* when she studied under her guru in India. For Segesman, she transcended the cultural distance between her Swiss socio-cultural heritage and the traditional Indian Yoga tradition by absorbing herself into the Yoga tradition. She put aside her socio-cultural heritage (familiar) to become a Yoga practitioner (foreign). She thus experienced how difficult this was and perhaps sought to soften the experience for her future students.

Consequently, having been instructed by her guru in the tradition of *paramparā*, Segesman emerged from this tradition and transformed the relationship between the roles of guru and spiritual aspirant when she came to Australia. I argue that as part of the hybridisation process, Segesman narrowed the cultural distance between Yoga (foreign) and the Australian socio-cultural heritage (familiar) to make Yoga accessible to her students. In this manner, learning Yoga becomes an interplay where cultural distance is narrowed to achieve the learning of Yoga. Her own teacher's directive, to abandon the guru model, resonated with this. In her role as a Yoga teacher, Segesman saw herself as a mentor and a guide, not as a guru in the traditional sense. She transformed the *paramparā* tradition to that of a mentoring system. Segesman shed her gown, donned her lycra clothing and became a mentor. Many of the Gita International teachers follow this example of wearing fitness-style lycra clothing today – not gowns.

Remarkably, when comparing Segesman to other founding gurus who started their own Yoga styles and organisations, they retained many of the traditional Indian yogic cultural

⁴⁴. This saying is attributed to the Buddha, but I was unable to find the reference source for this saying. However, this saying is very popular within the Yoga and New Age movements.

markers whereas Segesman did not. However, the next generation of teachers whom the founders trained, especially Western teachers, could transform this image and role entirely. Much of this transformation I argue is related to the branding and marketing of Yoga. For example, when conducting a Hatha Yoga class, these next generation Yoga teachers usually wear branded fitness-type clothing or branded yoga-type clothing. However, some western-style Yoga teachers still cling to tradition and wear clothing with the traditional colours of white, saffron, orange, ochre, or maroon depending on the Yoga style lineage they belong to. For the Gita International members, the transformation of the role of the traditional Indian guru in Australia, de-emphasises the authority of the teacher and shifts the authority to the teachings. By focusing on the teachings, Segesman's experience shows that a guru must be able to narrow the cultural distance between Yoga and the host culture to remain relevant. Also, they must be able to meet the needs of their students and provide a place where like-minded people come together and commune in their search for well-being, both physical and spiritual.

In the next chapter, I will explore how Segesman was able to make Yoga relevant in Australia by providing a place for community to come together and develop spiritually by shifting the emphasis of her Yoga school. She did not run her Gita School of Yoga as an ashram based on Hindu traditional values. Instead she ran it as a spiritual business. Segesman created a place where people could come together for the purpose of learning Yoga that was culturally relevant to their spiritual development. This led the Gita International members to idealise the Yoga centre as a "spiritual home". I will explore how this transformation was attractive to the Gita International membership and furthered the building of a Yoga community.

Chapter Four

Gita International: An Idealised Spiritual Home

The importance of the ashram setting in the Yoga tradition is not to be underestimated as this tradition still continues today. Many Yoga centres in India and in Australia are still referred to as ashrams. However, with the expansion of Yoga in Melbourne and with the growth of Gita International, the importance of the ashram setting has been diminished. For example, Gita International is no longer an ashram in the traditional Indian socio-cultural context, but now has been transformed into a spiritual business where people come and pay a fee to learn Yoga. Also, Yoga is now taught within a range of settings that include Yoga studios, community centres, Yoga centres, gym, fitness centres and municipal swimming pools.

In this chapter, I will explore how Gita International established itself as an urban Yoga centre contrary to the traditional Indian image of Yoga being practised in an ashram located in a secluded setting. I will show that location in an urban setting is important for the success of the Yoga centre and the significance of this for the members. Gita International can be characterised as an “idealised spiritual home”, a place where people can come and develop spiritually, share experiences, where they feel at ease, safe and in a community of like-minded members.

By analysing the demographic features of the membership, I will explore how members were attracted to Gita International and how their upbringing and their Australian socio-cultural heritage influenced their Yoga practice. These Yoga practitioners are no longer linked to the concept of ascetics residing in a hermitage and dwelling on the fringes of society, but are instead family-minded and career-orientated members living in Melbourne society. Therefore, I argue that the de-emphasising of the traditional Indian ashram setting and the idealisation of the Yoga centre as a spiritual home is another way in which the cultural distance of the Yoga tradition has been narrowed, leading to the secularisation of Yoga practice and the increase in its accessibility to Melbourne practitioners.

Furthermore, I will provide a brief definition of the concept of the Yoga centre as an “idealised spiritual home”. The definition of “home”, as found in the *Collins Dictionary* (1998, p: 541) entails a wide range of meanings. “Home” is defined primarily as a noun – as a place where one lives. But subjectively, I argue the definition of “home” encompasses meanings related to peoples’ experiences and is not just a place where a person lives which includes notions of a place on a sports field, a team, a community, a religion, a sacred place, a habitat, a birthplace, a homeland, a country, a nation/state, a head office, or a safe place. However, the “home” is a place and not just a building, as in the case of Gita International, which is a cultural repository, where a person has a sense of belonging, feels safe, is imbued within a culture and a way of life.

I argue this definition speaks directly to the Gita International Yoga members and is an important factor as to why they continue their commitment to their Yoga centre they belong to. Gita International becomes a place where the members develop a sense of belonging and use familial terms. For example, they may refer to each other as “sister” and “brother”. Or, they may refer to the Yoga group as the “Yoga family”, “international Yoga community” or “international Yoga family”. These are terms I regularly encountered at Gita International. At the heart of this experience is the sense of belonging, strengthened by the bonds of affection and rapport.

4.1: Gita International – “Our Own Home at Last!”

For the Gita International members, the concept of the “home” is very important to their Yoga practice. According to the Gita Newsletter Winter ’94, the purchase of 16 Hoddle Street, Abbotsford, meant they finally had a permanent place. Lucas and Wood have indicated that Gita Yoga has been taught at a number of rented premises in the Melbourne CBD from 1954-1994. For them as directors, this has seemed like “40 years of wandering in the wilderness.” They both acknowledge: “our own home was the culmination of many years of visualisation and hard work.” The grand opening took place on Sunday 31st July, 1994. However, Yoga classes were started on the 2nd July and the all important “Light Ceremony” normally conducted on the Saturday closest to the Winter Solstice, was conducted instead on the 9th July This permanent “home” became the “Light Centre”.

The “Light Centre” is an important term used at Gita International that connects the members’ understanding of the ancient wisdom and the teachings of Alice Bailey to their Yoga practice. According to the Gita School of Yoga (Newsletter No.16 July 1986), “Light” is an ancient term that has continued to be used down through the ages and represents the transmission of light and knowledge:

“Light is better, good, uplifting, beneficial...Light is the highest energy vibration...We use this symbol for the highest that we can know – Divinity, Spirit or God within...We use the term “Light” to denote that essence, that vibration, that source of all being within us ...spiritual growth...Gita is a Light Centre – a centre where people have come together to seek for and explore their own expression of the light within...a guiding light which attracts and leads other souls forward by its radiance.”

(Lucas & Wood, Gita School of Yoga Newsletter No.16 July 1986, p: 1)

Therefore, “Light Centre” is a specific term used by Gita International and is another way in which they narrow the cultural distance to hybridise the traditional ashram setting into an “idealised spiritual home” - bringing it more in line with the Australian socio-cultural heritage of the Gita International members.

As an organisation, Gita International is an owner-operated Yoga school that is neither an off-shoot of another Yoga school nor a franchise. Lucas and Wood run Gita International as a registered business. Or, more precisely, what Wood calls, a “spiritual business” that sells goods and services in much the same way that an educational institution such as a university may do. Also, Gita International members do not regard their organisation as a New Religious Movement (NRM) or a New Age Movement (NAM) nor a cult because there is no guru, no deity or any objects of worship and veneration.

However, research suggests (Barker, 1989, 2010; Robbins, 2000; Anthony and Robbins, 2003; Bainbridge and Stark, 2003; Stark, 2003; Wallis, 2003; Clarke, 2006) that the status of NRMs and NAMs are complicated due to their diversity and have a tendency to form around a leader who develops their own ideology, beliefs, practices, rituals and ceremonies, adapting these to be able to acculturate into the host society. These movements may be completely new or

borrow elements from existing religions and become globalised. According to Clarke (2006, p: vi), Yoga and Yoga movements due to their globalising characteristics and processes of domestication can therefore be classified in this way which means Gita International sharing the above-mentioned characteristics may then be likened to an NRM or especially an NAM.

Gita International could be considered as an NAM because of the following features: the leader's belief in the Age of Aquarius; their philosophical focus on Western esoteric sources and the writings of New Age authors such as Alice Bailey and David Spangler; their association with other NAM groups such as the Lucis Trust and the Arcane School founded by Alice Bailey; the development of their own rituals, ceremonies and practices borrowing from older or existing spiritual and religious traditions; their emphasis on spiritual development of the self; and, their belief in the unity of the Universe and all Life.

On the other hand, some features mean that Gita International cannot be so classified and these are: the hybridisation of the Yoga tradition to suit specifically an Australian socio-cultural context; their emphasis on developing a community of like-minded people; freedom from any religious tradition or religious dogma; focus on the ancient wisdom teachings and not on any person; and, they do not belong to any group or movement. In other words, they are an organisation with their own values, purpose and mission. According to the Gita International website, www.gita.com.au/about-us, the members promote their organisation as a: "Yoga Institute...who are a community of active, forward-thinking, awake people with a zest for life, growth and expansion."

My point of view is that the status of Gita International as an NAM depends on the definition adopted by the reader. I argue an organisation like Gita International is "context-specific" and needs to be addressed in context in ways that take into account its specific attributes. It needs to be examined in the Australian socio-cultural context and the question of whether it is an NAM or NRM is, from this perspective, not helpful. What is clear about Gita International is that their focus is on Yoga teachings that have been transferred from India which are culturally distant to the Australian socio-cultural heritage and that these teachings have been hybridised.

A more interesting question for this research is that of how it finds a place in Australian society. Wallis (1984, 2003) found that a group's status, like Gita International's, could be an indicator of its success or failure and may be attributed to the ambiguity of the group's

assimilation into the host society. Wallis's model of three types of groups, world-rejecting, world- accommodating and world-affirming, has given much insight into how groups commence and continue to survive. Groups may commence as any one of the three models, but due to the tension created in relation to the host society, the group will hybridise, adapt and change their approach to be accepted into the host society. In the case of Gita International, they have moved away from a world-rejecting stance of Yoga to become an organisation with a more world-affirming stance to achieve this. As Wallis (2003, p: 54) writes:

“The world-affirming movements could perhaps be conveniently called “quasi-religious” in recognition of the fact that, although they pursue transcendental goals by largely meta-physical means, they lay little or no stress on the idea of God or transcendent spiritual entities; nor do they normally engage in worship... As Donald Stone notes, these movements tend to prefer the term “spiritual” to “religious” as a self-description. They straddle a vague boundary between religion and psychology, and which side they are held to fall upon will depend entirely on the nature of the definition of religion employed.”

Additionally, for the members there are no promises to make, no commitments to agree to and no vows to undertake. Gita International members considering themselves to be part of a “community of active, forward-thinking and aware people” teach Yoga in forms linked to the ancient wisdom teachings in the Western occult tradition of Bailey, rather than people who focus on recruitment and conversion. In fact, Gita International members come and go as they please. Free thinking and self-exploration are encouraged. The members regard Gita International as their “spiritual home” where they come together for fellowship, personal growth and spiritual development.

4.2: The Importance of Location and Facility

Gita International is ideally located on the edge of Melbourne's CBD in the inner city suburb of Abbotsford, on the corner of one of Melbourne's major arterial intersections. This intersection is

a high density transport hub which encompasses road transport, tram, train and bus lines. Moreover, this intersection joins two major axes, north/south and east/west. The north/south axis is along Hoddle Street and the east/west axis is along Victoria Street. Gita International is within walking distance to the busy North Richmond train station and tram stop. On Hoddle Street there is a bus stop almost directly in front of the Gita International building. The success of Gita International has been assisted by the fact that it is located on this main inner city transport hub. It is conspicuous and easy to get to. Such accessibility coupled with plentiful on-site parking for the members provides a high degree of convenience for people who wish to learn and practice Yoga. No longer do people have to travel to an isolated hermitage setting in a foreign country as Segesman did.

The Gita International building is a double storey brick building from the 1970s, approximately 60 metres long and 20 metres wide. The building is ideal in its layout for a Yoga school. The ground floor consists of public and administration areas whilst the first floor is where the philosophy classes, Yoga classes and other Yoga-related events are conducted. The outside of the building is painted grey and the section facing Hoddle Street has a sign advertising “Gita International” which is positioned above the footpath next to the front door. At the rear of the building is the main car park.

Upon entering Gita International, the stark exterior changes into a warm and pleasant interior. All the walls are painted white. The internal ambience conveys a natural feeling. As one enters the foyer area through the front doors, one is greeted with a high-ceilinged open area and the stairway to the first floor. There is abundant natural light and in the centre of the foyer is a large fish tank surrounded by indoor plants.

Moving from the foyer, one enters the reception area. Here the receptionist meets all-comers. The reception area is made up of the reception counter and a small shop, beautifully decorated and containing a range of products that promote the values of Gita International. Gita International promotes only organic and natural products, and so these products range from organic foods, organic soaps and oils, to CDs, DVDs and books on Yoga. The reception and shop area play a very important role within Gita International as this area is where members and visitors meet and greet each other as well as congregate to share stories and experiences.

Proceeding through the reception/shop area, one passes by the main meeting room, the office of the directors, Wood and Lucas, along the corridor to the toilets, store room, library,

change rooms, kitchen, progressive yoga relaxation room, two alternative therapy rooms and the back office. The back office is where much of the behind-the-scenes work is done by the Gita International staff and volunteers. I found that most people who come to Gita International usually only use the reception/shop area, change rooms, the library, the classrooms, the kitchen, toilets, relaxation room and therapy rooms.

When visiting Gita International, members and visitors move to the changing rooms to change clothing and to remove their shoes (the wearing of shoes in the building especially in the class rooms is not permitted and is part of Gita International etiquette). Having left the change rooms, a person passes through the foyer and ascends the stairs where are located the Beginner's Yoga room, the philosophy classrooms and the main classroom where most of the Yoga classes, ceremonies and public events are conducted.

Overall, the building that houses Gita International is a multi-purpose space. This space provides a range of facilities and room sizes to cater for the activities conducted at Gita International. In other words, Gita International headquarters is an all-purpose Yoga centre that is able to provide a range of activities and services that cater for the needs of the people who come to Gita International. This combination of strategic location and multi-functional building has led to the success of Gita International as a Yoga centre.

However, being located in an inner city high density area means that security is important. The doors and windows have ample security bars for the protection of the property. According to Sexton (2011),⁴⁵ crime is a problem in the area where Gita International is located. Sexton's article in The Age newspaper analysed crime statistics across the various municipalities that make up Melbourne and found that the municipality of Yarra which includes Abbotsford was the second highest in crime. The main crimes were robbery, assault and theft, especially from cars. This high crime rate is said to be related to the large number of illicit drug users and late-night revellers. In my experience I found that crime was a problem with regards to cars being broken into and valuables stolen.

⁴⁵ Sexton's article is an analysis of the crime statistics for 2011 which was the second year of my research into Gita International. The Melbourne CBD has a crime rate which is more than double the crime rate when compared to any other place in Victoria, with the inner city suburbs rated second. According to the article, Melbourne had a crime rate of 26,870 per 100,000 residents or one crime for every four residents, whilst the inner municipality of Yarra which includes Abbotsford had 12,685 per 100,000 residents or one crime for every eight residents per annum. Many of these crimes are related to illicit drug users.

For example, one day in 2010 I arrived early at Gita International to attend my Yoga classes and was waiting in my parked car, catching up on some reading. At approximately 4pm, a young man aged 20-25 year came into the carpark at the rear of Gita International. He caught my attention as he appeared to be agitated and was moving in a suspicious fashion looking into the parked cars. He did not notice me in my car. Also, he entered into the doorways of some businesses in front of me. He was startled when he saw people in these businesses and so left quickly. He then attempted to enter the Gita International building from the rear and emergency exits, both of which were locked. As he was leaving the carpark, I got out of my car and followed him into Hoddle Street where he disappeared out of sight. I reported this situation to the receptionist at Gita International and she rang the police to report what had happened.

The receptionist went on to inform me that this is very common occurrence with cars being broken into. Also, she highlighted many members who come to Gita International had been approached and intimidated by young people wanting cash or cigarettes which was also a regular occurrence. She said many young people pass through the carpark who look like they may be drug users. Furthermore, she went on to say that the administration office at the rear of Gita International looks into the carpark and usually someone who is working in the office keeps a watchful eye. However, this is not always the case as one of my fellow Yoga teacher trainees found when her car was broken into one evening around 6pm. Her car window was smashed and her handbag, her wallet with bank and credit cards, a computer and other items were stolen. She found out later the credit card was used to buy alcohol at a local “Bottle Shop” later that night.

Since these types of incidents had occurred, the staff at Gita International emphasised that we had to be careful when visiting Gita International and not leave valuables in our cars. These crimes and intimidation did not stop people especially members from attending programs at Gita International. Therefore, Gita International is not just about location, building and service. For the members, Gita International is likened to a “home”, an “idealised spiritual home” where they come to experience community, to feel nurtured, where they can grow and develop spiritually.

4.3: The Concept of Home

The concept of home for the Gita International members in the Australian socio-cultural context and their notions of “belonging” to a home in relation to their spirituality, parallels Aboriginal

notions of “home” which are also tied to their spirituality (Tacey, 1999; Moreton-Robinson, 2003; Slater, 2007). However, Moreton-Robinson (2003) highlights that for the Australian Aborigines their spirituality and notion of the home is connected to the stewardship of, and belonging to the land or place, what the Aborigines call “country”. Alternatively, for the European and their colonial notions of “home”, this is tied to the nation-state, hegemony, territory, religion, citizenship, migrancy, possession and ownership. For the European colonisers in Australia, their notion of home and belonging is antagonistic to Australian Aborigines. The European notion is based on dispossession of the original owners of the land (Moreton-Robinson 2003, p: 23). Therefore, to displace the Australian Aborigines off their land is to deprive them of their spirituality.

On the other hand, Ahmad (2013) highlights that the notion of “home” is problematic when expressed in relation to nation-state. Ahmad uses the example of Muslims living in Europe and Islamophobia to highlight his case. The Euro-centric notions of home and belongingness that were pointed out by Moreton-Robinson create a duality of subjectivity realised in the dichotomies of us and them, home/inside and foreign/outside. The nation-state as home becomes “homeland” whereby hegemonic binaries create division. As Ahmad (2013, p: 250) writes:

“And this home/nation is enacted, felt and performed, for instance in the media with reigning binaries of insider/outsider, autochthonous/immigrants, and internal/external. These binaries are not bare words, they are powerful weapons which at once reproduce specific histories, emotions, sensibilities, aesthetics, memories and blueprints for the vistas of future.”

Interestingly, Ahmad argues that the nation-state as home is fragile. This is because the nation-state relies on territoriality and an “imagined community”.

Alternatively, for Douglas (1991) the home is difficult to define because it is a “realisation of ideas”. However, she does concede that the home is an “embryonic community” which is a structure in time where people live in that time and space which has aesthetic and moral dimensions. For Douglas (1991, pp: 306-307), the home is ubiquitous when she writes:

“Recognisable because it springs up, spontaneously, to meet certain recurring conditions of organisation. It is a multi-peaked, rationally integrated system which we find in villages, districts, kingdoms and empires. Highly efficient for maintaining itself in being, it is easily subverted and survives only so long as it attends to the needs of its members.”

Furthermore, Harvey (2007) in his research of Paganism, observed that an “idealised spiritual home” experience is also experienced by people who become Pagans, and so, not unique to the Gita International members. Harvey (2007, p: 180) found that for Pagans this experience is tied to the Pagan’s connection to the environment:

“Others have found that they feel “at home” or most alive while in the forest, in the sea or among the hills.”

Harvey (2007, p: 187) also observed that the “home” experience is not only outside the self, but is a celebration of the self when he wrote:

“These people call themselves Pagans and make it possible to “come home” to oneself and one’s own way of celebrating. They also permit a “coming out”, an acceptance or a celebration of having a name, a place and a voice for the imaginings.”

Nevertheless, the experience of the Yoga centre as an “idealised spiritual home” is not immediately felt by all. Yoga practitioners come to Yoga for a variety of reasons. Mainly, they come to practice yoga for health concerns or stress relief. Other reasons include seeking answers to life’s questions, accompanying a family member or friend to participate in classes, to study Yoga philosophy or out of curiosity. In my case, I came to Gita International for research purposes and initially did not have a “home” experience, nor was I searching for a place to belong to. For me as a researcher, when at Gita International, I had to maintain a level of objectivity. Gita International was not “home” even though I was made to feel very welcome at Gita International. I felt at ease here and part of the Gita International community. However, for

whatever reason a person comes to Gita International and becomes a Yoga practitioner this experience results in the emergence of a “hybrid” self - a fusion of the socio-cultural heritage and the Yoga tradition.

4.4: The Students’ Attraction to Yoga

When exploring the reasons why Yoga practitioners are attracted to Yoga, I argue that the starting point must include their cultural background and up-bringing as it is important to incorporate their socio-cultural heritage. To be a Yoga practitioner at Gita International means one has adopted a practice or lifestyle contrary to one’s culture of upbringing. There is still some cultural distance to be traversed as Yoga is a culture in its own right, no matter how hybridised, and unique as a spiritual path (Feuerstein, 2002). Modern perceptions of Yoga often include Yoga as part of Hinduism whereby the two, Yoga and Hinduism, have become synonymous (Bilimoria, 1989). Bilimoria found many Hindus in Australia see Yoga and Hinduism as one and the same. Australian Hindus do not realise just how different Yoga is from Hinduism. Australian Hindus realise there is a difference when they take up the practice in Australia.

Western approaches (Singleton, 2010; Strauss, 2005) to Yoga practice and lifestyle are very different when compared to Yoga in a Hindu context in India. Many of the devotional aspects found in Yoga have been de-emphasised or removed. This has led to the hybridisation of Yoga in the West. The Yoga tradition is defined by a number of markers. These markers include 1) starting the Yoga practice, 2) finding a guru, 3) initiation, 4) name change/new identity, 5) lifestyle change, 6) defined levels of renunciation, 7) wearing of specific clothing or lack of clothing, 8) facial markings, 9) specific hairstyles, and 10) belonging to a specific Yoga community. All these markers vary from one Yoga sect to another (Tripathi, 2004). For the Gita International members, many of these cultural markers may seem extreme and contrary to their Australian socio-cultural heritage and their notions of spirituality and spiritual practice. I found that what is important for the Gita International members is the Yoga practice and the Yoga community as opposed to the use of traditional Yoga cultural markers.

When a Gita International member first comes to Yoga, she/he usually has no idea what Yoga is or what a Yoga lifestyle involves. The reasons why they come vary from member to member and include the pursuit of health and well-being, for stress-release, looking for

something, or wanting to study the occult. Often, a member would have heard about Yoga practice being beneficial either through a friend, family member or an advertisement.⁴⁶ Most of my participants came to Yoga in this way. As one member of Gita International said, “Yoga makes sense”. For those who came for health reasons, some of the health issues the participants experienced were quite severe, ranging from debilitating asthmatic or arthritic conditions. One of my participants, a Yoga teacher of forty-five years, shared her experiences:

“So, at that time [1960s], Yoga was like a new invention in Melbourne. Margrit Segesman started it in the city and I had attended her classes. Because at that time, I was heavily medicated for the arthritic condition I had. And, of course, the medication was making me very ill and the stress that I was under of course, that all put together made me more tense, more arthritic and helpless almost. So, I had done some classes at Margrit Segesman’s and I thought that sounds like a good way of helping my arthritic condition. Because, the more I did the better I felt and so forth.”

Similarly, Wood came to Yoga in the early 1960s due to a severe health condition, chronic asthma. She had to take regular cortisone injections to experience some relief. One day her doctor said to her, “If the injections don’t kill you, the asthma will. One or the other will get you first.” Wood knew she had to do something. Someone suggested Wood take up Yoga which she did. She came across a Gita Yoga-trained teacher and started Yoga practice. As she progressed, Wood started to feel the benefits of the practice. After a while, Wood ended up at the Gita School of Yoga and learnt Yoga directly from Segesman. Wood’s condition improved dramatically and she went on to be healed of asthma. Wood’s experience of coming to the Gita School of Yoga for the first time was to have a lasting effect. She felt she had come “home”. She felt “at home”. As Wood said, “So, eventually I ended-up at Gita. The minute I walked in the door I thought, I’m home.”

⁴⁶ Gita International advertises in a range of media, both electronic and printed. Electronically, they advertise through their own website: www.gita.com.au In the printed media, Gita International advertise in the Australian Yoga Journal, the Australian Yoga Life, Living Now magazine, as well as through flyers and leaflets.

In Wood's experience, we see the importance of the encounter with Yoga as an 'idealised spiritual home'. Wood felt that this instils within the Yoga practitioner a long-lasting love for Yoga and the Yoga community, even though the philosophy of Yoga is initially alien to the members. In contrast, Howell's (1997) research of the Brahma Kumaris offers an alternative view to the idealised spiritual home experience where altered states of consciousness (ASCs), the following of organisational rules and communal living can strengthen the Yoga practitioners' ties and commitment to their group. However, the strengthening of organisational ties in this way can come at a cost to the member in that links to their family and the wider society can be eroded. Therefore, practising Yoga with meaningful experiences softens the perception of the cultural distance of the Yoga tradition and the Australian socio-cultural heritage and values. People become more willing to embrace the Yoga lifestyle in their daily lives.

4.5: The Australian Socio-Cultural Heritage and Values

The Australian socio-cultural heritage and values⁴⁷ are important to the Gita International members and their Yoga practise. I found many of the Gita International members were not required to give up their cultural heritage and values to pursue the world-rejecting and renunciate practices of the Yoga tradition as practised in India. Some of the renunciate practices include vegetarianism (no onion, garlic or eggs), early morning (4am) meditation, celibacy, no drugs, alcohol or tobacco consumption. On the contrary, since becoming Yoga practitioners the members appear to have been able to amalgamate their Australian socio-cultural heritage and values with their hybridised Yoga practise and assimilate it into their Australian lifestyle. I argue that, with this assimilation, there is the emergence of a "hybridity" of self in which Yoga provides a philosophical understanding and a spiritual practice not found in mainstream Australian society.

Furthermore, my research found that an understanding of the socio-cultural heritage into which Yoga is transplanted must include the demographic factors of the Gita International membership that includes the circumstances of their up-bringing and their social status. Being

⁴⁷ See the Australian government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website: http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/people_culture.html (viewed 28 July 2014). This website details the values that are unique to Australians as well as emphasises the importance of how Australia is a blending of diverse cultures which has led to the enrichment of Australian society as we know it today.

raised in Australia, many of the members I met had a Christian up-bringing, including both Catholic and Protestant traditions. Only a small percentage of members, one or two percent, I met came from a Hindu and Jewish up-bringing. The members I met felt their religious up-bringing played an important role in their journey to becoming a Yoga practitioner, laying an ethical foundation in their lives. To highlight the importance of the Christian up-bringing, one of my participants, a Yoga teacher of forty-five years, commented:

“What does Yoga mean to me? Well, Yoga is the way that I am. Yoga is my life. It’s not my religion. I am a Catholic. But, it just means all to me. My way of life I suppose now, I still am. No I didn’t find anything conflicting, I accept certain things. I never found anything confronting that I had to change.”

For this participant, she retained her Catholic up-bringing and combined this with her Yoga practise. However, a number of the members I spoke with changed their religious orientation to one of being more inclusive in their spiritual orientation. This occurred because they felt the Christian heritage was not able to answer all their questions, based on faith alone. Lucas’s experience emphasises this change.

Lucas was raised in a happy and loving Christian middle-class family and received a good education. The religious orientation of her family was Presbyterian. This religious up-bringing played an important role in the career path, she chose to enter the church, as she wanted to become a deaconess. She went on to study at Melbourne University and as she said, “Had a brilliant time learning Old Testament from Jesuits, Theology from Presbyterians, and Church History from Methodists. And, it was just sensational, it was absolutely wonderful.” After graduation Lucas went to work with a Presbyterian inner city church. As time passed, Lucas became more and more frustrated with Church beliefs and policies, coupled with her inquiring mind - it was said by her church members that she asked too many questions which got her into trouble. Inevitably, at some point she decided to move on, which led Lucas to meet up with Wood, and eventually she came to Gita International. Lucas, a Yoga teacher of forty years, explains her shift to a more inclusive attitude:

“I really can’t see how anybody now can possibly go inside a church and face the front row, or go to church and have somebody, you know, talk to them without a conversation. I think the psyche of the modern Australian is wanting discussion. And, I think Yoga by its very nature is non-competitive, totally inclusive and explains all to every question that can be the answer inside of me, the little kids book. And, that is what people want. They want to know what makes you tick. And for me, that’s when people even get cross, ‘And you know, what the hell makes you tick? Ahh, got it.’ Because you want to know, what is it about Yoga. Well, it just embraces all. It includes all. It excludes none. And, it answers everything. It gives you a perspective that goes over a lifetime. So, that all the inexplicable things can find their place.”

Likewise, I found other members at Gita International shared experiences similar to Lucas. The Gita International membership appears to attract members from a mainly Anglo-Australian middle-class background, who are well-educated, career-orientated and many are married with families. Also, socio-economic status is a factor at Gita International in determining if a person will become a Yoga practitioner or not.

Socio-economic status enables members to be able to afford to practice Yoga at Gita International. The evidence of socio-economic status being an important indicator of whether a person becomes a Yoga practitioner or takes up a sport is also supported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Social Trends 2011 Report.⁴⁸ The Penman *et al* 2008 survey⁴⁹ found similar results. Both surveys found higher education also plays a role. For example, one participant, a student of Yoga for thirty years, commented:

“Social status and income level do matter, yeah, I think so. I notice the people round here. You have to be able to afford it to go to this school. It’s expensive

⁴⁸ For in-depth report see Australian Bureau of Statistics website www.abs.gov.au/socialtrends. (viewed 06 October 2014). This report highlights the importance of sport in Australian lifestyle. However, socio-economic status (2011, p: 2) determines whether people become involve in sport or not.

⁴⁹ Penman *et al* 2008 survey of 4000 respondents found that Yoga students and teachers with either an income of \$50-110,000 annual gross income had the highest participation percentage. For \$50,000 household income there was 18% participation rate and for \$110,000 household income there was 23% participation rate. The lowest participation rate was 12.6% with an annual gross income of \$30,000 or less (2008, p: 139).

here. And, I think, to go to classes, for people that's, it's a luxury for people that are struggling. But, it's portable, so you could do it at home. I mean, you could get a tape.”

The experience of this member paying a higher price to learn Yoga at Gita International did not stop her from being attracted to Gita International. For example, to participate in a general Hatha Yoga class at Gita International will cost a casual rate of \$26 for a one hour Yoga or relaxation class. In comparison to other inner city Yoga centres charges, the Gita International prices are on a par. For example, the Ashtanga Yoga Centre charge \$20 casual rate; and the Clifton Hill Yoga Studio charge \$24.

Table 4.1: Comparison of Yoga Class Prices

Source: Compiled by the author from the Yoga centres' websites*.

	Ashtanga Yoga Centre	Clifton Hill Yoga Studio	Gita International
Casual:	\$20 Full/ \$18 concession	\$24 Full/ \$20 concession	\$26 No concession
Introduction:	\$185/ \$170 concession	\$150/ \$130 concession	\$235 No concession
Monthly:	\$260	\$230/ \$210 concession	\$245
3 Monthly:	\$670 No Concession	\$630/ \$570 concession	No 3 Monthly No concession
12 Monthly:	No 12 Month No concession	\$1850/ \$1660 concession	\$2335 No concession

*I chose as a comparison with Gita International (Gita Yoga) two other inner city Yoga centres, Ashtanga Yoga Centre (Ashtanga Yoga) and Clifton Hill Yoga Studio (Iyengar Yoga).

Ashtanga Yoga Centre, www.ashtangamelbourne.com.au/tuition-prices.aspx (viewed 18 October 2014).

Clifton Hill Yoga Studio, www.iyoga.com.au/prices/ (viewed 18 October 2014).

Gita international, www.gita.com.au/classes-and-services (viewed 23 September 2014).

The above socio-economic factors are not the only influence on why the members continue their Yoga practise at Gita International. I observed socialising factors play an important role as well. As my participant went on to say:

“It still attracts me because I would, I did all those other kinds, but I still come back here. The way I feel after the class, the integrity and enthusiasm and the beauty of the teachers, the thoroughness, you know, like, so thorough. And like, you know, we went, once you, you just never leave here kind of in a way. There is care about what happens to you after. The ceremonies they have, you know, that ritual, I love the ritual and the spiritual aspect. I hate that word, but that’s what I have to come back to, that spiritual internal life that’s so important to people and trying to access the invisible world you know.”

Subsequently, even though cost and socialising factors have an influence on the members’ Yoga practise, they continue to conceptualise Gita International as an idealised spiritual home. The members felt their interest in Yoga and studying at Gita International had changed their lives, developed in them a new way of being and a new way to understand the world in which they live. Nevertheless, the members’ “hybridity of self” they developed in their Yoga practise at Gita International related to their goals for spiritual development and personal change. For instance, being ethical, being less materialistic and more authentic which they felt to be different from their Australian socio-cultural heritage. By learning Yoga in this way in an idealised spiritual home environment at Gita International, the members came to feel they are part of a community of like-minded people.

4.6: The Strengthening of the Yoga Community

The large number of Yoga styles and groups in Melbourne is an indication of the growth of the Yoga community. Gita International is representative of this growth within society in general. The evidence suggests that Yoga continues to grow by offering alternative ways to health, well-being and spirituality radically different from the contemporary Australian socio-cultural heritage, leading to the enrichment of the community. Ireland and Baker (2003) argue that a key

feature of enrichment is the engagement of individuals with civil society. In fact, they argue that religious associations enrich civil society in Australia in three main ways:

“As socialising environments disposing and equipping members for civic engagement; as social units civically engaged with other social units negotiating interests, values and lifestyle; and as home bases, sustaining individual members in their own civic engagements.”

(Ireland & Baker 2003, p: 89)

Ireland and Baker’s insight mainly applies to religious associations and not Yoga specifically. I argue that the dynamic between Yoga and the Melbourne community is more complex and related to the adaptability of Yoga and the narrowing of the cultural distance between Yoga and the Australian socio-cultural heritage through Yoga’s hybridisation process. The benefits of practising Yoga experienced by the Gita International members extends out into the wider community. For example, the members conducting Yoga classes in drug rehabilitation centres and prisons.

In comparing the growth of Yoga in Melbourne, another example of its success is the growth of Yoga in America as revealed in the 2008 and 2012 Yoga Journal surveys. The Yoga Journal (2008)⁵⁰ survey conducted on Yoga organisations in America revealed interesting results. Economically, Yoga in America in 2008 generated 6 billion dollars worth of revenue for goods and services. And, regarding Yoga practitioners, the survey indicates approximately 6.9 percent of US adults, that is, some 15.8 million people were practising Yoga. The Yoga Journal conducted a parallel survey again in 2012. The results demonstrate a significant increase both in terms of revenue generated and in Yoga practitioner numbers. Economically, the amount increased to 10.3 billion dollars and the Yoga practitioner numbers jumped to 20.4 million, an increase of 29 percent within four years. The majority of the Yoga practitioners were female.

Similarly, in Australia, the Penman *et al* (2008) survey revealed corroborating results. The growth of Yoga in Australia in 2008 highlighted that Yoga practitioners were 2.9 percent of

⁵⁰. The Yoga Journal conducted two surveys in 2008 and 2012. These surveys only focused on America. Within four years the growth of Yoga, in terms of both practitioner numbers and revenue was 29 percent. In 2008, female practitioners were by far the more numerous at 72.2 percent whilst male practitioners hovered around 27.8 percent. However, in 2012, numbers of practitioners rose 82.2 percent for females and 17.8 percent for male practitioners. These two surveys reveal an increase in the growth of Yoga, with females at the forefront of this trend.

the population, ahead of other popular sports such as Aussie Rules Football 2.7 percent, dancing 2.4 percent and martial arts 1.8 percent. The average Australian Yoga practitioner was a 41 year old female who practised Yoga regularly 1-2 times a week. Also, one in seven of these Yoga practitioners worked in the healthcare industry, suggesting that people come to Yoga mainly for health and well-being and that there is an acceptance of Yoga amongst healthcare professionals. The figures from the Yoga Journal and the Penman *et al* surveys below indicate the growth of Yoga in recent years to be quite substantial.

Table 4.2: The Results of the *Yoga Journal* and the *Yoga In Australia* Surveys

Source: Compiled by the author from the *Yoga Journal* surveys conducted in America, 2008* and 2012*. And, the Penman *et al*, *Yoga in Australia* Survey conducted in Australia 2008**.

Year	USA		Australia
	2008*	2012*	Penman 2008**
Earnings:	\$5.7 billion	\$10.3 billion	Unknown
Adult Practitioners:	6.9% pop. or 15 million	8.7% pop. or 20.4 million	2.9% or 630,000
Females:	72.2%	82.2%	81%
Males:	27.8%	17.8%	19%
Average Age:	18-54	18-44	41
Main Reason for Starting Yoga:	Health and Well-being 49.4%	Health and Well-being 62.8%	Health and Fitness 70%

*In the 2008 and 2012 *Yoga Journal* in America surveys, there were 5050 participants;

www.yogajournal.com/advertise/press_releases/10 (viewed 5 December 2013).

www.yogajournal.com/press/yoga_in_america?comments=1 (viewed 3 December 2013).

**In the *Yoga In Australia* survey in Australia, there were 4000 participants.

<http://researchbank.rmit.edu.au/eserv/rmit6110Penman.pdf> (viewed 6 December 2013).

As a result, the growth of Yoga has enriched society economically by making large profits as shown above, as well as raising the health and well-being levels of the Yoga practitioners and benefitting the community.

I asked a number of Gita International members how Yoga was beneficial and why it strengthens the community. One participant, a Yoga teacher of twenty-one years, was very positive in her appraisal of Yoga and its benefits when she said:

“The proof is in the pudding, it actually works. People can see that it works and makes them feel better. But, it’s very interesting because people sometimes keep putting it off...They want to know what sort and if it’s going to be, you know, too hard or of a particular sort. And, I say no its not. It’s going at your own pace and what you can’t do, we can find an alternative.”

In other words, this participant felt that with the regular practise of Yoga the benefits begin to emerge. Other participants shared similar experiences. For them, Yoga works because it promotes health, well-being, and helps to change lives. With this in mind, the members at Gita International promote Yoga as a positive lifestyle that is good for the community. They teach Yoga out in the community and run community outreach programs. Thus, they perceive their Yoga community to be part of the greater Australian community. In other words, the benefits they achieve within their Yoga community flow outward and benefit the Australian community. One participant referred to this as the “ripple effect”. This is where the positive life-changing experiences, with an emphasis on spiritual development in the Yoga practise, flow out beyond the self and into the community. This participant, a student of Yoga for ten years, went on to say:

“I think Melbourne, people are just, there are just a lot of different cultures in the arts and stuff, right. So, wherever you go, I’m finding there is some form of, there is always someone or something visually or verbally that talks about spirit. I don’t know whether it’s because I am more aware of it, there’s that. But, I also think that Melbourne people are now looking for a better way and probably always have.”

This participant's insight of Yoga benefitting Australian society is because she found it gets people talking about or focusing on spirit in their search to better their lives. Additionally, another participant, a student of Yoga for eleven years, felt that the more self-responsible we become by developing a spiritual approach to life that this flows out into helping the community when she said:

“Oh no, I think it promotes, benefits the community because the more conscious you become the more in your community you want to help, help the environment and help the people. And, there's, and there's a, you can't leave things to go undone because it's not just about your own personal practise in Yoga, it's more about the whole. So, if in your community you see something needs to be done, you are more conscious of the thinking, 'Well, I have got to jump in and help as well'. It's just an attitude.”

For the members, Yoga is not just helping the community outside of the organisation, but helping the Yoga community within the organisation. One of my participants, a student of Yoga for three years, went on to say:

“So, as a community, we can all become more aware and grow as a whole, as a community. It certainly does get better. So, if you look at all these individual selves that lift their energy by doing Yoga by getting all their awarenesses, their levels raise as a community, a whole level will raise. So, as a community, I think the benefits are just enormous.”

Another participant, a student of Yoga for fifteen years, offered an alternative viewpoint, but still with the emphasis on the importance of community when he said:

“Yes, at Gita definitely. But, anyone coming to Gita generally would have been referred to Gita by somebody because it suits, because somebody would have thought that this person would suit Gita. But, if Gita is not from what I see, from what I see at Gita and what Gita is, is the network of, of, and

that sense of community, is not really what you get everywhere else because yoga is taught in gyms, Yoga is taught in that, in community centres. Most people would just see Yoga as, they can go down the street and not have to interact with anybody. They can just sit in a room and do what the instructor says and then go home. It's not necessarily that Yoga forms the community, but people form a community around Yoga.”

For this participant the experience of coming together as a community is important because practising Yoga in a group became an interactive experience. However, the development of the community of Yoga practitioners is nothing new. Historically, even though Yoga is an ascetic practice, for centuries a spiritual community of Yoga practitioners has always developed around Yoga practice.

On a more practical level, the members were emphatic about the benefits they received from practising Yoga. For them, Yoga is about inspiring others to become fitter, healthier and stronger in body, mind and soul. Yoga is not about achieving enlightenment or *samādhi*. Yoga is about changing lives, getting people to think differently, holistically and not only for themselves, but for the greater good of the community.

4.7: Conclusion: A Hermitage becomes a Home

In this chapter, as I have argued the concept of learning Yoga in a traditional Indian ashram setting (hermitage), when transferred to Melbourne, was re-configured into an idealised spiritual home by the Gita International members. I argued that this re-configuration occurred because the traditional ashram setting was de-emphasised and re-emphasised as a Yoga centre located in an urban setting of Melbourne. This is another dimension of the hybridisation process whereby Yoga practitioners make Yoga practice meaningful when learning Yoga in an Australian socio-cultural setting. The spiritual home becomes transformed into a “Light Centre” – a place of community and spiritual development. Many of the members I spoke with said they came and stayed with Gita International because of the openness and genuineness of the people they found at Gita International. Gita International was like a “family”.

Next, I have demonstrated that the location of the centre and ownership of the building have led to the success of Gita International, by providing a permanent base which strengthened the idealised experience of the Gita International members as finding a spiritual home. To them, Gita International is an organisation, a community (spiritual family) but not a NRM, NAM or a cult. The members said Gita International was not a religion and so they were not bound – as in a religious sense – to a structured, institutionalised form of experience. This was reinforced by the fact that there were no religious leaders or a guru.

Therefore, I have argued that the members were able to amalgamate the values of their Australian socio-cultural heritage with their Yoga practice. With the fusion of these two distinct cultures, Yoga (foreign) and Australian heritage (familiar), the members emerged with a “hybrid” self. Moreover, Segesman encouraged this approach in her students and that was intrinsic in her advice to focus on the Yoga teachings and not on the teacher. In this way, the members were encouraged to form a community of like-minded people who were sustained by spiritual study, who were not afraid to explore and question spirituality and who developed integrity. For the members, Gita International became an “idealised spiritual home” with a “family” where the members could learn, grow and share together.

In the next chapter, I will discuss how Segesman was able to create a Yoga community. I will show how she was able to enact the changes to the Yoga tradition in which she was trained and to narrow the cultural distance that facilitated the growth of interest in Yoga in Melbourne and allowed people to take up Yoga practice despite it being alien to their socio-cultural heritage. The changes Segesman implemented did not take place all at once. Over a period of time, Segesman introduced a number of changes to meet the needs of interested people. This led to Segesman hybridising Yoga here in Melbourne. For example, Segesman did not teach the ascetic practices of her training. Instead, her focus was more on health, well-being and the Western occult version of the ancient wisdom teachings.

Chapter Five

“Off the Mountain”: The Hybridisation of Yoga Practice

In this chapter, I will explore how Segesman took Yoga “off the mountain” and out of the ashram setting in India in order to establish it in Melbourne, Australia. This has led to the hybridisation of Yoga practice in Melbourne. So far I have touched on aspects of hybridisation of the context in which Yoga is taught at Gita International, 1) the shift from Indian philosophy to Western occult philosophy – the “ancient wisdom tradition” of Blavatsky and Bailey in (Chapter Two); 2) gurus without gowns, the recasting of the role the teacher from wearing a gown to the wearing of secular clothing, practical clothing, and emphasising the teachings rather than his or her special role (Chapter Three); 3) non-ashram setting, off the mountain and the daily regime, the re-conceptualisation of the Yoga centre as an idealised spiritual home and the change in the teachers identity and persona (Chapter Four); and 4) Yoga as a business, advertising, health, the style of the classes and philosophy classes – return to the Western occult philosophical foundation (Chapter Five). This chapter will now focus on the new approach to the teaching Hatha Yoga pioneered by Segesman at Gita International.

Hence, I discuss what parts of Yoga practice Segesman hybridized leading to the organisation being able to reinvent itself in the context of the changing times in Australian post-war society. I argue that hybridisation occurs when the Yoga teacher narrows the cultural distance by altering the Yoga tradition in which he/she was trained to make it more accessible to students, in particular, the de-emphasising of the renunciate and ascetic aspects of the Yoga tradition. I use the term “off the mountain” to highlight the fact that Segesman had received her training under her guru’s tuition in the Himalayan Mountains in India. When her training had finished and her guru saw that she was ready, he sent her “off the mountain” to return to the world and establish Yoga in Australia. Having settled in Melbourne, Segesman began teaching Yoga, but not in the way that her guru had trained her. She tailored her teachings to meet the

needs of her students, and so, narrowed the cultural distance between the Yoga tradition and their Australian socio-cultural heritage and made it accessible to Melbourne Yoga practitioners.

5.1: The First Innovation

When Segesman began teaching Yoga in Melbourne in 1955 (Newsletter April 1980), very few people came to learn from her. She was teaching Yoga in her small apartment and not in an ashram setting. As time passed, Segesman realised very quickly that the tradition that she had learnt under her guru's instruction in India could not be taught the same way here in Australia. The way she had learnt in India was much too ascetic for Melbournians. For example, according to Wood (2011, p: 35) when Segesman lived in India she practiced austerities that included fasting, the performance of ritual cleansings, meditation and chanting (Appendix 5) for many days in preparation for her initiation as a swami.

Whilst studying with her guru Segesman had taken the vows of poverty and silence and followed a daily regime of rising early for meditation and long hours of study. She lived in the traditional way of a swami by following a celibate and vegetarian lifestyle and was sustained from the generosity of others for her dietary requirements. During her training, Segesman would have followed the traditional Indian yogic prohibitions of no sex/celibacy, no gambling, no alcohol, no drugs and hallucinogens, no meat, onions, garlic, eggs (*sattwic* diet), no tobacco or cigarettes. All these prohibitions are contrary to the Australian socio-cultural heritage.

Moreover, the indulging in these prohibitions in Australia is socially acceptable. To impose these prohibitions on Segesman's Australian students, I argue would be culturally too distant for most of them. These students lived in Melbourne society in the 1950s, had to fulfil their social engagements and family commitments, work to earn a living, and so, therefore they could not devote long hours for the learning of Yoga in the way Segesman had done. This, movement away from ascetic practices was the first innovation that led to the hybridisation of the Yoga tradition in Melbourne. This was combined with the fact that her guru had commanded her not to set herself up as a "guru" even though she had qualified under his instruction and received the title Swami Gitananda within the full Inidan yogic tradition. This gave her confidence, perhaps, to make further adaptations to the tradition. What Segesman had discovered at this early stage in bringing Yoga to Australia and introducing this new form of spiritual

practice, which was alien to the socio-cultural heritage of Melburnians, was that it had to be adapted.

Similarly, Aveling (1994) discovered this in his research of the Satyananda Yoga movement and the Rajneesh movement in Australia. He found that both these organisations modified the austere, isolationist forms of yogic practice based in the tradition of renunciation or *samnyāsa* and adapted them to cater for the needs of western Yoga practitioners - many of whom were householders. Segesman was trained in the *samnyāsa* tradition. However, Aveling comments that *samnyāsa* is adaptable when he says:

“Externally, the status of renunciate is marked by the insignia of his order (clothing, hairstyle, sect marks, a staff, pot etc); by the charismatic quality of “holiness” (*sādhu* means one who is ‘accomplished’, ‘virtuous’); knowledge of Sanskrit texts and the teachings of more recent religious leaders; some skill in ritual performance or devotional leadership; and the leading of a distinctive lifestyle based on asceticism and religious devotion, such austerity normally including physical self-control, celibacy, poverty, vegetarianism and the avoidance of intoxicants. Internally, the Bhagvad Gita suggests, *samnyāsa* is an attitude of detachment and tranquillity, in which not action but the ‘fruit’s of ones’ actions are renounced...Although *samnyāsa* is rooted in Indian beliefs and social practices, there have been many attempts since the time of Swami Vivekananda of the Ramakrishna Mission to make this way of life available to Europeans as well as Indians and to women.”

(Aveling 1994, pp: 54)

Even though the Satyananda and Rajneesh movements collapsed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, this was not due to the hybridisation of the *samnyāsa* tradition. These two organisations failed due to corrupt leadership. Therefore, Aveling confirmed what Segesman already became aware of, that is, adaptations of the yogic lifestyle are inevitable when it is transferred to a western environment and are a result of the interaction with the socio-cultural heritage of the Yoga practitioners.

Another major change Segesman undertook was the modification of the traditional daily regime of the yogic lifestyle (Appendix 5 and Table 5.1 below). Segesman would have encountered a similar regime to these in her stay at the ashram in India and when she studied with her guru. However, she did not impose this daily regime upon her Melbourne students. In Table 5.1, I compare the daily regimes of three Yoga groups to give an indication of the traditional ashram daily cycle. I have chosen these three because they represent three styles of Yoga and are groups that people in Melbourne are familiar with: the Brahma Kumaris Movement (BKWSU) (Rāja Yoga); the Hare Krishna Movement (ISKCON) (Bhakti Yoga); and the Satyananda Yoga Movement (Hatha Yoga). Even though they are three different Yoga styles, the similarities between ashram life and their daily routines are striking.

Table 5.1: The Ashram Lifestyle Daily Routines in Three Yoga Movements

Source: Compiled by the author from Brahma Kumaris, Hare Krishna Movement and Satyananda Yoga websites.⁵¹

Routine:	Brahma Kumaris	Hare Krishna	Satyananda Yoga
Wake up:	3-3.30am	3-3.30am	4am
Meditation and/or	(Meditation only)		
Chanting/ <i>Kirtan</i> *:	4-4.45am	3.30-5am	4-5am
Early Morning			
Class/ <i>Satsang</i> **:	5.45-7.30am	7-8.30am	5-7am
Breakfast:	8-9am	7.30-8.30am	7-8am
Ashram duties/ <i>Karma Yoga</i> ***:	9-10am	9.30am-12.30pm	8-10am
Morning Class:	10.30am-12.30pm	9-10am	10am-12.30pm
Lunch:	12.30-1.30pm	12.30-1.30pm	12.30-1.30pm
Afternoon Program/ <i>Satsang</i> or Ashram			
Duties:	1.30-4.30pm (Rest)	1.30-5.30pm	1.30-5.30pm
Late Afternoon Program			
Class/ <i>Satsang</i> :	5-6.30pm	5-8pm	3.30-5.30pm
Dinner:	7.30-8.30pm	5-6pm	6-7pm
Evening Program/ <i>Satsang</i> and <i>Kirtan</i>	8.45-10pm	6.30-8.30pm	6.30-8.30pm
Lights out/Rest:	10pm	9pm	9pm

**Kirtan* – Communal chanting, mantra, or singing.

***Satsang* – Includes discourses, discussions and philosophy classes.

****Karma Yoga* – Also known as *seva* or *Seva Yoga*. In the ashram sense, this includes the participation in the performance of all ashram-related duties that include administrative duties, cleaning, food preparation and cooking, gardening, general maintenance and up-keep of ashram, advertising and publications, etc.

The ashram residents are also expected to observe a number of prohibitions which include, no eating of meat or meat-related products, no consuming of eggs, onion and garlic, no sex/celibacy, no consuming of intoxicants such as alcohol, drugs and hallucinogens, no gambling and no smoking of tobacco or tobacco-related products. All meals are vegetarian.

⁵¹ BKWSU daily regime cited in a student diary given out by the BKWSU.

ISKCON daily regime, <http://harekrishnaculturalcenter.org/temple/daily-temple-schedule.htm> (viewed 8 February 2015).

Satyananda Yoga daily regime, www.satyananda.net/mangrove-nsw_daily-timetable/ (viewed 8 February 2015).

In these ways, Segesman modified her teaching style. Hours of daily Yoga practice spent with her guru had now been reduced to a one hour class per week targeted at the level of ability of her students. Segesman first taught a beginner's Yoga class which was an introduction to Yoga. Then, as her students progressed, she introduced intermediate and advanced Yoga classes.

The development of these Yoga classes did not occur at the beginning, but happened over a number of years. Many people she met in mainstream society knew little of the benefits of Yoga as they were quite ignorant of Yoga practice, and as Segesman (1987, p: xxiv) said:

“Knew very little about relaxation, Yoga and positive thinking and most considered her a sort of crackpot.”

However, being unconcerned by being regarded as a “crackpot”, Segesman started teaching to a generation of Yoga practitioners who knew little or nothing of the depth of Yoga teachings, but were to become leaders in the field both in Melbourne and Australia.

5.2: The Business of Yoga

Another innovation that Segesman introduced was teaching Yoga as a business and charging a fee for services rendered. When Segesman started teaching Yoga in Melbourne, she intended to teach free of charge in the same way that she had learnt under her guru. In Segesman's (1987, pp: xxiii-xxiv) own words:

“As I intended to teach free of charge, I needed a source of income and I found work as a sales-manageress...I had only a few irregular students till John joined up. He was a very popular, dynamic radio-announcer...His enthusiasm brought me a lot of his friends, and one of them, a psychoanalyst, suggested full-time teaching and charging a minimal fee. I took his advice after my first radio interview. There was such a response that I had to give up my job and devote myself entirely to the teaching of healthy, positive living with only the sky as a limit.”

Segesman's guru gave her no instruction about how to teach Yoga in Australia or whether to charge a fee or not. In Australia there was no tradition of giving alms to those on a spiritual path based on asceticism and renunciation. This innovation was thus necessary for Segesman's economic survival and it was to have enormous consequences for the teaching of Yoga in Australia. From this time, the late 1950s, until today, Yoga in Melbourne has been taught with a fee charged for Yoga classes at Gita International. Thus, Yoga was commodified. However, the commodification of Yoga did not diminish people's attraction to Yoga. On the contrary, one participant, a Yoga teacher, commented that with the charging of a fee, Yoga increased in importance. She explained that in Melbourne, if people pay for something they tend to learn more deeply. The participant, a Yoga teacher of forty-five years, went on to say:

“I have always felt that this is the case. If it [Yoga] is free, it doesn't seem to go deeply. If people have paid for something, they are more inclined to work at it to get their return. Understand that! I don't think anyone, but I just had to control myself recently from giving a lady who, she had written to me a letter about using, she got cancer, and she has been using my tapes. And, I wanted to give her the tape, but I had to keep holding myself back. And then, eventually I gave in and just gave her the tapes because she is doing such a good job with it. That's not something I publicise. It just how, when you know, see someone really working hard at it, you know that they will use it whether they have paid for it or not. But, generally speaking, I think it is a mistake to give it away too freely because the attitude is different.”

Also, because Yoga was run as a business this meant that accounts had to be kept, income and expenditure recorded, bills had to be paid and running costs met. Wood highlights the fact that, due to her family background in banking, Segesman was a natural business-woman who was very astute, kept impeccable, accurate and up-to-date records.

Contrary to this innovation of running Yoga as a business, Yoga was traditionally conducted in an ashram setting under the authority and instruction of a guru. The traditional ashram was a combined residential and school setting in which the guru trained his disciples. Training tended to be ascetic in nature and rigorous, involving physical exercises and breathing

techniques (Hatha Yoga), meditation practices (Rāja Yoga), the study of philosophy and sacred texts (Jñāna Yoga), recitation and chanting (Mantra Yoga), devotional practices (Bhakti Yoga) and service to the guru and the ashram (Karma Yoga). Gurus were not paid for the training they provided, but did accept donations at the end of the training. Thus the guru did not operate his ashram as a business. The disciple in return for his instruction would “pay” the guru with maintenance of the ashram, keeping it clean and tidy, cooking, washing and tending to the guru’s needs. Segesman’s new model was a radical departure this. Running Yoga as a business was another major aspect of the hybridisation of Yoga in Australia.

5.3: The Importance of Advertising

Another innovative feature added to the phenomenon of Yoga as a business was the use of advertising, which became an important feature in the promotion of Yoga. Because Hatha Yoga was new to Melbourne, most of the people Segesman taught came to her organisation through word-of-mouth recommendations. Segesman’s new circle of friends and work colleagues would tell their friends and relatives about the benefits of Yoga and gradually more and more new students came. This is why, after the first couple of years when Segesman taught in her small apartment in Melbourne, her reputation as a Yoga teacher grew and spread and by 1960 she needed to rent a bigger place to cater for the growing numbers of Yoga students. Sometime during this period she was interviewed on the radio. For the first time, Yoga was promoted through being broadcast over a radio network. During the interview Segesman not only talked about the benefits of Yoga, but also advertised her classes. Many interested people who had been inspired by her interview started to come to the Yoga classes. Print media and radio became the new way to promote Yoga in Australia (see Figure 5.1). According to Wood (2011), by the time Wood and Lucas had taken over the directorship of the Gita School of Yoga in 1983, Segesman had taught around 50,000 students.

By 1960, Segesman was earning enough income to be able to make a living from teaching Yoga. Segesman finished working for her employer in retail and went on to open the first full-time Yoga school in Australia and run it as a successful business. Segesman’s reason for opening her Yoga school appears to be twofold. Firstly, she was now able to make a living out of teaching Yoga. Secondly, as Segesman had more and more people learning Yoga she needed a

bigger place to teach. To promote Yoga, Segesman advertised more frequently. Instead of advertising Yoga as the path to transcendence and enlightenment (Eliade, 1990), Segesman advertised Yoga practice with an emphasis on developing a calm mental outlook, having a healthy beautiful body, looking younger and for relaxation.

Figure 5.1: The Grand Opening Advertisement of Gita School of Yoga – September 21st, 1960

Source: Compiled by author from a leaflet given out in 2010 by Gita International to celebrate 50 years of Gita Yoga in Melbourne.

50TH ANNIVERSARY



2004 marks 50 years since Margrit Segesman's arrival in Australia and her beginning teaching the unique style of yoga that is Gita.

That makes Gita one of the longest established yoga styles in Australia and a huge influence in the life of Melbourne and Australia.

Since the first classes, given in the front room in St Kilda Rd, to Alfred Place to Flinders Lane, to our own premises in Hoddle St, it has been quite a journey – especially as the teaching has been continuous since this time. In 1960 Margrit opened the leased and newly renovated premises in Alfred Place and since then, Gita has never closed its doors (even in commercial business terms, 40 plus years is quite a record!)

The suitability of Gita Yoga for our modern lifestyle has been demonstrated a million times over and is constantly reinforced by medical and scientific research findings. We are indeed blessed to be part of all this.

As 2004 is the commencement of a Teacher Training Course year, with its considerable time and energy commitment, we have decided to celebrate next year in 2005, as this will also be 25 years of Lucille & Di's involvement and input, and 21 years of our Gita Teachers Guild – so we will have...

- 25 years of Lucille & Di
- 50 years of Gita
- 21 years of Guild.

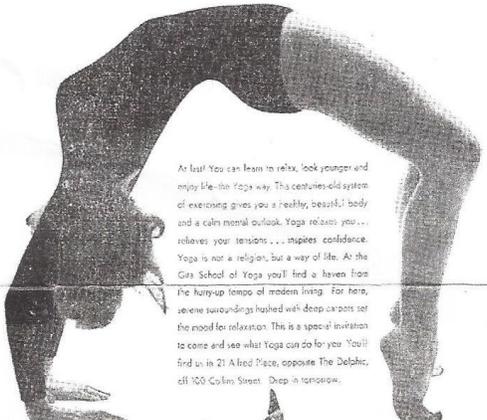
We have already quite a few suggestions and ideas on how to celebrate these exciting events, but please, add yours to the pile and we'll process them all as we refine the plans. If you would like to be involved in some way – please let us know!

21-9-60.

Opening today!

a haven away from the tensions of modern living

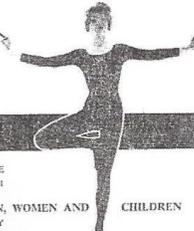
THE GITA SCHOOL OF YOGA



At last! You can learn to relax, look younger and enjoy life the Yoga way. The centuries-old system of exercising gives you a healthy, beautiful body and a calm mental outlook. Yoga relaxes you... relieves your tensions... inspires confidence. Yoga is not a religion, but a way of life. At the Gita School of Yoga you'll find a haven from the hurry-up tempo of modern living. For here, serene surroundings hushed with deep carpets set the mood for relaxation. This is a special invitation to come and see what Yoga can do for you. You'll find us in 21 Alfred Place, opposite The Delphic, off 100 Collins Street. Drop in tomorrow.







GITA SCHOOL OF YOGA

21 ALFRED PLACE, OFF 100 COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE
 PRINCIPAL: MARGARET SEGESMAN. PHONE 43 9381, 43 9382, 43 9381

MIXED CLASSES — ALSO SEPARATE CLASSES FOR MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN
 OPEN 9 A.M.—9 P.M. MONDAY TO FRIDAY, 9 A.M. TO NOON SATURDAY

The advertisement for the opening of the new Gita premises at Alfred Place, 21 September 1960

NB: The text in the middle of the picture reads, “At least you can learn to relax, look younger and enjoy life the Yoga way. The centuries old system of exercising gives you a healthy beautiful body and a calm mental outlook. Yoga relaxes you, relieves your tension, inspires confidence. Yoga is not a religion but a way of life. At the Gita School of Yoga you’ll find a haven from the hurry-up tempo of modern living. For here, serene surroundings hushed with deep carpets set the mood for relaxation. This is a special invitation to come and see what Yoga can do for you. You’ll find us in 21 Alfred Place, opposite the Delphic, off 100 Collins St. Drop in tomorrow.”

When I questioned Wood about the direction of this type of advertising, Wood explained that it was very much in keeping with the times when Segesman was trying to reach a greater audience. Wood said:

“She [Segesman] was trying to break into society of the 1960s which was terribly church-going, and terribly proper and terribly society. And, the Myers, Bailieus and all of those, were all terribly interested in how good they did or did not look. So, health and beauty was the way to get their attention. You know, to become more beautiful for your husband and you know, become more calm for your husband, and become more loving and all the rest of it. That was the way she captured their attention.”

Many of Segesman’s students at this time were well-to-do members of Melbourne society. Therefore, keeping up appearances by being in the “public eye” was very important.

Interestingly, Segesman’s method of advertising was only to gain people’s attention because when they came to the Yoga class everyone learnt the same classical Yoga postures she had learned in India. These postures have continued to be taught at Gita today. During the time of the 1960s, it is unclear whether Segesman taught any hybridised forms of the classical Yoga postures. Wood explained that the difference in Segesman’s teaching in the 1960s compared to how Wood and Lucas teach Yoga now lies in the emphasis placed on various aspects of Yoga outcomes within the class environment. In Segesman’s time, she focused on beauty, elegance and good health. On the other hand, Wood and Lucas may focus on health, well-being, stress-release, building confidence or recovery from cancer. As Wood commented:

“Each person does the same thing, but they see it from their perspective. So, health and beauty was definitely the one of the ‘60s.”

5.4: The Hybridisation of the Style of the Yoga Classes

Yoga classes play a central role within Yoga practice. Traditionally, Yoga classes were organised according to the time of the day (see Table 5.1). The day would begin with early

morning meditation, usually 4am, followed by spiritual study classes, housekeeping of the ashram, through to afternoon classes, dinner, evening meditation and philosophical classes conducted by the guru and then rest at 9am. This daily regime is not compulsory, but there is a great expectation for students to attend. This format of the daily times and the syllabus is regulated by the guru. In contrast, at Gita International, the traditional daily regime is not followed. The Yoga classes today are conducted in the Gita International method of teaching introduced by Segesman, which is different to the Indian traditional way and scheduled to cater for the needs of the students and are not compulsory. Gita International set their own times and syllabus which has a Western occult influence.

When Segesman started her Yoga classes she did not follow the traditional daily timetable of her training in India. Instead, she initially focused on the Hatha Yoga practice by offering 30 x 1 hour lessons over the period of one year. According to Wood, Segesman conducted her Yoga classes in this way so her students could arrange their daily schedules to include Yoga practice. Apparently, people in the 1960s planned their lives throughout the year to encompass all the family commitments, social engagements, festivals and holidays they would partake of. In this manner, many of her students would organise a year of Yoga classes.

What Segesman initiated in Melbourne was the regularity in the study of Yoga. It was through this establishment of regular patterns of study that her students were able to develop in their Yoga practice and incorporate that practice into their lives. What appears to be minimal practice when compared to students' patterns of attending classes at Gita International today, 30 classes a year was considered to be a big step in the 1960s. This approximates to 2 to 3 classes a month. In comparison, during my research in 2010 and 2011, I found that many students at Gita International would easily experience 10 to 20 classes a month, much more than 30 classes a year. When I was attending my Yoga teacher training at Gita International, the class attendance requirements meant that I would attend 10 or 12 Yoga and philosophy classes per week which are compulsory as well as the weekend classes for the teacher training.

The hybridisation of the traditional daily regime of how Yoga classes are conducted at Gita International is to suit the Australian socio-cultural context of their students. I argue that to follow the traditional daily regime could lead to hardship for the student in meeting their family, work and social commitments and responsibilities in Australia. The adaptations of the traditional daily regime and making it non-compulsory to follow the regimented timings has enabled Yoga

classes to be accessible to Australian Yoga practitioners and is another form through which the cultural distance between the Indian traditional Yoga class context and the Australian socio-cultural context has narrowed.

5.5: The Incorporation of Western Esoteric Classes

Segesman's other innovation in the 1960s was to include the teaching of western-based esoteric philosophy classes. She combined the teachings of her guru with the writings of Alice Bailey. Bailey, writing in the tradition of Blavatsky, had de-emphasised much of the Sanskrit terminology and re-framed the ancient wisdom teachings in an English-language medium. Segesman felt that by incorporating Bailey's writings into her teachings, would allow her students to understand more easily the depth of the Yoga tradition. Also, Segesman felt she was connecting with the Aquarian energies, a central theme of Bailey's writings, that she believed were manifesting at the time (Wood 2011, pp: 40-41). Segesman offered a re-interpretation of the ancient yogic truths framed in the new context of Western occult philosophy which had itself been linked to revelations from disembodied masters within an Eastern supra-religious context. During this period, she also de-emphasised a number of yogic practices such as the celibacy, vegetarianism and cleansing techniques which were foundational to Yoga practice in India (see Appendix 1). Wood and Lucas continue with this teaching style today. According to Wood, Segesman presented spirituality in a fresh new way outside of the cultural heartland of India. As Wood explained:

“It was like a fresh audience in that sense. So, it was possible for her to shape it and teach it in a new way. You know, you couldn't have done that in India because the whole culture is so steeped in expectations and what the thought forms are. I think when you come to a new place like Australia, it doesn't have any of those. So, it was possible to present it in a fresh new way. And, I think that was, you know, incredibly important. I mean, that's what the Christian Fathers left England and Europe for, to go to America to be able to worship in a fresh clear way without all of the junk, you know, the politics they left behind. I think to some degree that's

what she was sent to do.”

Therefore, by 1965, Segesman began to expand her esoteric classes to include more public participation. She began to advertise esoteric classes and opened these up to the public, not just her Hatha Yoga students. Wood said that by around 1965, Segesman deemed that people were ready to hear about the more spiritual aspects of Yoga. And so, her regular Saturday afternoon esoteric classes were offered to the public focusing on and broadening the appeal of Western occult themes. Even though the themes of these Western occult classes were Theosophical in nature, Segesman was not part of the Theosophical Society movement. However, she was connected to the Theosophical Society due to their common interest in Western occult and Yoga teachings.

5.6: Meeting Peoples' Needs: Health and Beauty

Another significant feature that Segesman introduced through advertising Yoga was the focus on specific health issues. According to Wood, during the 1960s there was a sharp rise in health concerns such as respiratory related illnesses. A large number of people were recorded as suffering from hay-fever, asthma, sinus trouble and nervous tension. Also, Wood remembers at this time there was a financial crisis to some degree, and as she explained, this was probably the cause of the rise in nervous tension related illnesses. Segesman rose to the challenge of this public health crisis. She incorporated a greater focus on health and well-being in her advertising to raise awareness of the benefits of Yoga. Segesman also began to cater for specific health issues in her Yoga classes. In this way, Segesman responded quickly to the needs of the people who came to learn Yoga. Wood went on to explain that it is no use promoting beauty and elegance when people are coming with asthma and diabetes. Segesman's success with health-related issues began to increase. Responding to people's needs became an important feature of Gita Yoga's success in Melbourne which is another way the cultural distance was narrowed. Wood commented:

“In response to what people were coming in with, you know, it's no good saying Yoga for health and beauty if everybody is coming in with asthma

or diabetes. You know, so the more people coming in with diabetes, so okay you emphasise the glandular balance that will help you to control your diabetes. So, you know, you give the public what they want, in the sense that it's the way the Yoga we teach is structured. It can be, how can we say, emphasised or directed to what's needed most for somebody. Like, if you come in with asthma then you would most likely focus more prāṇāyāma (breathing exercises) and some stretching exercises and some relaxation. Whereas, if I come with stress, then you would probably focus on the relaxation and some strong physical work to unlock muscles. So, it is a case of where you put the emphasis or where you put the main directive for the time.”

5.7: The Medical Association

The results of Gita International's success in using Yoga practice for health-related issues did not go unnoticed in Melbourne medical circles. Segesman had established her Yoga school in the Melbourne CBD where a number of prominent doctors also had their clinics and consulting rooms. These doctors became very interested in the health benefits of Yoga. However, they initially remained quite sceptical of Yoga practice even though they could clearly see the benefits at first hand. A number of these prominent medical practitioners had private lessons from Segesman and experienced the benefits for themselves. They were also impressed with Segesman's knowledge especially about the physiology and glandular systems of the body. Despite the benefits they were experiencing, the doctors who came to Segesman's Yoga classes remained sceptical and would question her by saying: “This is not known scientifically.” Segesman would reply: “It is known yogically and has been known for centuries.” Her experiences with medical practitioners are now among the legendary anecdotes at Gita International. Wood and Lucas referred to many of these anecdotes in their classes to highlight the many benefits of Yoga which cannot be medically proven, but nevertheless are positive and observable outcomes of the practice.

One of the medical practitioners who came to Segesman's Yoga classes was a well-known psychologist, Dr Ainslie Meares (author of the bestseller “Relief without Drugs”), who

went on to champion the benefits of Yoga, meditation and relaxation. However, it must be emphasised that Segesman was not the first to use Yoga in more holistic ways with an emphasis on health. Other great Yoga masters in India such as Sri Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888-1989), Sri Yogendra (1897-1989) and Swami Kuvalayananda (1883-1966), had pioneered using Yoga as a healing practice. Segesman's contribution was to teach this aspect of Yoga in Australia.

5.8: The Classes Continue to Change

From the 1970 onwards, Segesman became more progressive and structured in what she offered to her students. Not being satisfied with only offering traditional Yoga classes, Segesman branched out into starting a healing group and meditation sessions. This too was quite radical for its time because Yoga was not used in this way. Thus, Segesman opened up a new application for Yoga practice to meet, as Wood says: "The awakening and changing societal values and expectations." The healing group was run every Sunday night and was free of charge.

Furthermore, in 1971, Segesman offered a Yoga teacher training diploma for the first time. Up to this point, Segesman had trained Yoga teachers, but not in a structured way. It had been more of an apprenticeship style. According to Wood, when Segesman found that students were ready to teach, she would say to them: "Okay, you know, you take tomorrow night's class for me." Wood said that this was the way in which she was trained. When Segesman approached her, Wood would say: "Me? Now?" Segesman would reply: "You, you know the posture. You can go and do this." Wood further commented that offering a diploma course for Yoga teacher training was Segesman's direct response to the changing values of this time. People wanted some acknowledgement and recognition of their training.

Consequently, when Wood and Lucas took over the running of Gita International from Segesman in 1983, they transformed the whole Yoga teacher training into a fully certified diploma course that met the standards set by Gita International, but not necessarily those of any other Yoga group or government organisation. Lucas drew upon her years of working in the Education Department and structured the teacher training course in a way which reflected the standards and the goals to be achieved at Gita International. At this time, Segesman was not the

only Yoga pioneer to train Yoga teachers in Australia. Other pioneers such as Volin, Blair and Saraswati also trained Yoga teachers in their traditions.

5.9: Creative Dance, Tai Chi and Astrology

Through the '70s, Segesman continued her innovations in the teaching and practice of Yoga. In 1973, Segesman introduced Creative Dance into the Gita Yoga classes. One of Segesman's students was a dance teacher before coming to Gita Yoga. Segesman allowed her to combine Yoga with dance. This student became quite proficient and went on to establish a very successful Yoga and dance school in Melbourne.

By 1976, Segesman was offering a full range of classes as part of Yoga practice at her Gita School of Yoga. She offered beginner Yoga classes, advanced Yoga classes, esoteric and philosophy classes, creative dance classes, relaxation classes, meditation classes, study groups, healing group, Yoga teacher training diploma courses and in 1977, she further allowed one of her students to combine Yoga practice with Tai Chi. Tai Chi was growing in popularity and because this student had a martial arts background, Segesman allowed him to teach combined Tai Chi and Yoga practice.

Also, another one of Segesman's senior Yoga teachers who was proficient in Astrology gave regular talks on Astrology at Segesman's Gita School of Yoga. Segesman felt astrology was an important component in learning about Yoga as it was linked with the Aquarian Age energies. This senior Yoga teacher went on to open a very successful Yoga school in her own right in Melbourne. In traditional Yoga practice, creative dance, Tai Chi and astrology are not used.

Thus, when Segesman started teaching Yoga in Melbourne she introduced a number of classes and events not found in traditional Yoga practice in India. She expanded her classes and courses to meet the needs of her students and their socio-cultural heritage. Segesman in doing so hybridised the Yoga tradition in which she had been trained in India. Therefore, the evidence indicates that Segesman was quite progressive in her thinking and not bound by tradition. She paved the way for innovations in Yoga that narrowed the cultural distance within an Australian socio-cultural setting. Wood and Lucas have continued on in the same way as Segesman. What Segesman had started they either added to (such as the Yoga teacher training course) or

discarded when it became relevant (such as the Gita groups e.g. Amnesty, Arts and Culture, and Science groups etc), further refining the classes and courses available at Gita International.

5.10: The Role of Activities and Events

Segesman continued her trend of innovation into the early 1980s until she handed over the running of the Gita School of Yoga to Wood and Lucas in 1983. Many of the innovations Segesman pioneered were promoted in the quarterly newsletter published by the Gita School of Yoga. The first Gita newsletter was printed in April 1980. It had taken 25 years for the first newsletter to appear. In this way, Segesman began to promote the organisation's activities in a more public way. According to Newsletter Issue No 4 July 1981, Segesman was promoting a number of activities which included study groups such as a Science Group, Gita Education Group, Gita Arts and Culture Group, Gita Philosophy, Psychology and Religion Group, and the Gita Amnesty Group. The responsibility for running these groups was taken on by Segesman's regular students and teachers. The diversity of the activities included Yoga classes, Yoga training sessions, Full Moon Meditation, healing sessions, lectures and the celebration of festivals such as Christmas.

However, when Wood and Lucas took over the running of the Gita School of Yoga in 1983 a number of these groups disappeared. Instead, Wood and Lucas focused on activities rather than groups. Many of the activities centred on personal development, self-responsibility and spiritual growth. For example, Wood and Lucas increased the number of activities to include classes for children, pregnancy classes, breathing classes, post-graduate courses, personal development courses (e.g. Transforming Human), parenting courses, overseas Yoga retreats, Gita Yoga Teachers Guild, the celebration of the Sacred Light Ceremony and the Full Moon Meditation. The most important of these activities conducted at Gita International is the celebration of the Sacred Light Ceremony. The Sacred Light Ceremony is used at Gita International to sustain and refresh itself at an organisational level. Also, within this ceremony we see one of the clearest examples of Gita International's hybridisation of the Yoga tradition by fusing it with western occult practices. In this ceremony Wood, Lucas and the Yoga teachers at Gita International re-dedicate themselves to teaching Yoga and to spreading the "Light".

The Sacred Ceremony of Light is conducted at the Winter Solstice (21st June) or on the Saturday that is the closest to the Winter Solstice. Saturday is chosen because it allows for the Gita International teachers, members, family, friends and guests to come together on a day that is convenient for this event. According to Wood and Lucas, they renew their vows at this time of the year to continue to teach the “Light” whereby they create conditions in which, for members, the soul is able to grow, they are able to live in truth and be truthful in all their dealings and actions. The Gita International teachers also re-dedicate themselves to teaching “light”, and promise to adhere to and maintain the values of Gita International for the next twelve months. This ceremony has continued since 1983 when Wood and Lucas took over from Segesman. Before this, there was no such ceremony conducted at the Gita School of Yoga. Therefore, the Sacred Ceremony of Light is an innovation in which the Yoga tradition continues to be hybridised at Gita International.

In analysing this ceremony, the strategic use of English and Sanskrit becomes apparent. Most of the ceremony uses English language as the medium of communication – in other words, the socio-cultural heritage of the participants. However, the opening chant uses the Sanskrit term “Om” (I am spirit, I am the Light). In the “Peace Welcome”, the Sanskrit term “*Om Shanti*” (I am peace) is used three times. The ceremony finishes with the reciting of the Great Invocation (see Ch 2) – a Christian-themed invocation. Wood and Lucas finish the recitation by speaking, ‘*Hari Om Tat Sat*’ (the Divine, is the one true reality) – a Sanskrit affirmation. Therefore, it is obvious that to sustain the organisation Wood and Lucas still use a minimal amount of Sanskrit terminology to keep the Indian connection of the Yoga tradition alive. Also, with the use of spiritual terms such as “light”, “love”, “God”, “Christ”, “evil”, “peace”, “creator” which are relevant to the majority of members’ and visitors’ Australian socio-cultural heritage, this enables Wood and Lucas to create an accessible and familiar experience. Therefore, the invention of a ceremony which is important to sustaining the organisation and its members is another way in which the narrowing of the cultural distance between the Yoga tradition and the Australian socio-cultural heritage is achieved.

Furthermore, another innovation by Wood and Lucas that began in 1983 was the Yoga retreats. The first of these were held overseas in Egypt. At first, these Yoga retreats were more like an organised tour of Egypt for Gita Yoga teachers and students conducted by Wood and Lucas. When I asked Wood: “Why Egypt?” She said that these early retreats were tours that

enabled the wisdom and energy flow of ancient Egypt to connect with the new Aquarian energies. However, Yoga retreats continue and are conducted as part of the regular Gita Yoga activities. Nowadays, these retreats are in Bali, Indonesia and are no longer organised as a tour, but as a focused time for Yoga practice.

From 1986, Wood and Lucas went on to establish a non-profit foundation called, “The Khuti Foundation” with a large donation from one of the Gita Yoga students. This Foundation promotes outreach in the community and raises funds for Gita International projects. It sponsors a range of programs that include children’s programs, teacher training scholarships, seminars, publishing and fund-raising events. The motto of the Khuti Foundation is, “Blueprints for the peaceful evolution of Humanity.” Therefore, establishing the Khuti Foundation is another way in which Gita International has hybridised the Yoga tradition to enable Yoga to become a means for working in the community and increasing its accessibility to people who may not be otherwise able to learn Yoga. I argue that this allows Gita International to reinvent itself and makes it relevant within the host community.

5.11: The Reinvention of Gita International

The reinvention of Gita International is a process by which the organisation renews itself to keep pace with modernity. The changes Segesman implemented to hybridise Yoga in Melbourne to enable it to be accessible and culturally assimilated appear to require refreshment every 20 years. This can be tracked in their newsletters which are a rich source of information about the changing nature of their activities. The newsletters, started in 1980 by Segesman, have come to play an important role at Gita International. They opened up a new method of communicating to both regular students and members of the public new ideas and activities being conducted at Gita International. The newsletters provide up-to-date information about recent programs and celebrations, photographs, advertising of products, courses and future events, insightful articles, class timetables and fees. Newsletters are not a special innovation by Gita International as many organisations have newsletters. But, for Gita International, their newsletters are a way of portraying the cohesiveness of the Gita Yoga community and how they keep pace with the changing times.

For example, in 1996 Gita International underwent a major reinvention of itself to become, “Gita International - University of Light”. The motto became, “Transform your thinking, transform your life, transform the world.” Gita International was thus preparing to step into the 21st century. According to the newsletter (Gita News, Summer 1996/97) at this time, Wood and Lucas launched a grander vision and a new direction for Gita International at an organisational level. To quote from the newsletter:

“Transform your thinking - Transform your life – Transform the world.

Gita International: University of Light.

Gita Stepping into the 21st Century: Bridging the millennium and heralding the Age of Synthesis, to be the visible, accountable inspirational centre for on-going learning and education, demonstrating how to live a spiritual life, providing spiritual leadership.

Gita’s University of Light will provide: Pathways of Light and Circuits of love, providing the City of Melbourne with a Spiritual Centre with programs of inspiration from pre-birth to death and all stages in-between with Hatha Yoga as the foundation. Education/Light, Service/Love & Health/Power: Enhancing and building on what Gita already is and acknowledging the increasing, expanding role of education and inspiration in World Evolution.”

*“There will be a time and a freedom for a soul culture which will supersede our modern methods of education and the significance of soul powers and the development of the superhuman consciousness will engross the attention of educators and students everywhere.”*The Tibetan, *White Magic* page 34. *“Live joyfully – For joy lets in the light”*.

(Gita News, Summer 1996/97, p: 1)

This reinvention of Gita International as a “University of Light” I argue is another way in which the cultural distance is narrowed between Yoga tradition and the Australian socio-cultural heritage by focusing on themes of education, self-development and service to the community. The ideological thrust of Gita International was their preparedness to move into the 21st century. Gita International transformed the organisational structure of the ashram where Yoga was

traditionally learnt and turned it into an educational institution similar to that found in mainstream Australian society. They were then able to offer their members and the public a range of courses and post-graduate courses where the participants receive certificates and diplomas. Many of these courses focus on spiritual and personal development. This is in stark contrast with the traditional ashram setting which was a place of quiet and introspection, where the disciples completed their training under their guru, but they received no certificates or diplomas. The guru saw the disciple was ready and sent him or her out into the world to teach and train others. Therefore, in comparing Gita International with the Indian traditional ashram, one could say that Gita International focuses on the spiritual development of the individual whereas the traditional ashram system focuses on the maintenance of the guru/disciple lineage or *paramparā*.

5.12: Conclusion: The Consequences of Hybridisation

In this chapter I have shown the process whereby Segesman, in bringing Yoga to Melbourne, was able to adapt the Yoga tradition in which she was trained in India, to enable it to be accessible to students in Melbourne. I argue that the adaptations Segesman made were deliberate as she sought to narrow the cultural distance between Yoga and the Australian socio-cultural heritage of her students. She de-emphasised the ascetic and renunciate aspects along with the prohibitions and the daily regime of the Yoga tradition as these were culturally distant from her students' Australian socio-cultural heritage. There are thus many dimensions of the hybridisation process through which a Yoga teacher has the opportunity to adapt the Yoga tradition to meet the needs of students outside of India. The evidence suggests that this generally occurs over time as Yoga teachers such as Segesman adjust the adaptation to make Yoga practice accessible.

I have also shown how Segesman commodified Yoga practice and turned the learning of Yoga into a business. In this way, by charging a fee for learning Yoga the Yoga teacher could make a living from teaching Yoga in Melbourne. This became a movement away from the Indian traditional system where Yoga was taught for free or by donation. The business of Yoga included the use of advertising, promotional and marketing strategies. Therefore, the commodification of Yoga projected Yoga into what Bilimoria (1989) has called “the spirituality marketplace”.

Finally, I have shown that the hybridisation process depends on what attracts the students to Yoga. The style of Yoga classes plays a central role in this process. Also, along with the classes, courses and events become important as a way in which, at an organisational level, Gita International was able to strengthen the group and legitimise its existence. In this process, Gita International invented processes borrowed from elements of existing religions and religious practices to gain validity. For example, the invention of the Sacred Ceremony of Light combining Christian ritual and Western occult themes such as the use of the Great Invocation of the Alice Bailey and her Arcane School tradition with the concept of “Light” and Sanskrit chants.

In the next chapter, I will conclude this dissertation, outlining the consequences of the hybridisation process and the narrowing of the cultural distance between Yoga and the socio-cultural context of its Australian practitioners. I will discuss how the adaptation process led to the reinvention of Gita International into a “University of Light” and what this means for Melbourne society. With this reinvention, I argue that Wood and Lucas have continued on as Segesman did with the hybridisation of Yoga in Melbourne. Segesman took Yoga “off the mountain” and brought it to Australia. She adapted Yoga practice to the Australian socio-cultural environment and made it accessible to the general public.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

I will conclude with a summary of the different chapters focusing on how they answer my research question: How and why an Eastern spirituality such as Yoga which is culturally distant to the Australian socio-cultural heritage, was able to be successfully established in Melbourne, Australia. Using the evidence presented from the previous chapters, I will reiterate my argument that for Yoga to be accessible to Melburnians the cultural distance from its cultural heartland of India into the Australian socio-cultural context had to be narrowed through a hybridisation process that encompassed four dimensions, each dealt with in a separate chapter and using the voice of the members' experiences.

Firstly, in Chapter One, I introduced the topic and outlined my research methodology. I demonstrate that in the researching of Yoga in Melbourne by using an ethnographic case study of Gita International, I have provided a valuable insight into the dynamics of cultural fusion, between a "home" Australian socio-cultural heritage, and a "foreign" Yoga tradition. This insight highlights the role of the narrowing of cultural distance for the acculturation process of Yoga and allows us to view the stages of the process. Using "cultural distance" as a macro-theoretical overview provided this ethnography with a unique perspective and makes a contribution to anthropological research into Yoga in Australia, as I have not found this approach within previous research on Hatha Yoga organisations.

Subsequently, having appropriated the concept of cultural distance from research on management, more specifically, international Management, meant that I was able to use the tools of cross-cultural analysis to examine the Yoga tradition from India and its subsequent hybridisation as a Yoga tradition in Melbourne. This allowed me to explore the dimensions of the hybridisation process more clearly and answer succinctly the central research question of my project.

The evidence of my research reveals how the hybridisation process is central to the narrowing of the cultural distance between Yoga as traditionally taught in India and the socio-cultural heritage of Australian students. When Margrit Segesman (1905-1998) brought Yoga to Melbourne in 1954, she managed to transfer thousands of years of the Yoga tradition that had been developed in India and adapt it to suit the Australian socio-cultural heritage of her students and to make it accessible for them to practise in their daily lives. She revealed that the Yoga tradition is not institutionalised with rigid doctrines, but is diverse, fluid and able to be modified according to the discretion of the Yoga teacher. Segesman adapted the Yoga tradition in which she had been trained and called it “Gita Yoga”. She presented an approach whereby Melburnians were introduced to a new way of health and well-being. In the learning of Yoga, she allowed her students to develop their own interpretation of Yoga in ways that were meaningful to them. Using one of my participant’s experience, a Yoga of Yoga for six years, commented:

“Well, Yoga is, it’s a way of life I guess, as it implies the word union, body, mind and the spirit, it’s very much that. And it’s, look I mean, I’m constantly finding new meaning to the word Yoga, what it’s all about. For me, whether that’s an evolving of my understanding, I don’t know. But, so, I suppose it’s yeah, really your approach to life and the way you live. And so, the way you treat yourself is very much the *yamas* and *niyamas* sort of aspect, the way you treat yourself and the way you interact with the world around yourself. And, the enquiry aspect, inquiry into who we are and why we are here. And, then of course the physical aspect, maintaining the healthy physical body, the vehicle through the *asana* and *prāṇāyāma* and meditation.”

Segesman tailored her classes and courses to meet the needs of her students. She shed the Indian ascetic and renunciate aspects of the Yoga tradition as well as the Sanskrit terminology. Many of her classes became focused on health, well-being and spiritual development. No longer was the emphasis on traditional concepts of freedom in life/*jivanmukti* and enlightenment/*samādhi* (Eliade, 1990). In transferring Yoga from India to Melbourne and by implementing the adaptations in the hybridisation process, Yoga lost much of its traditional ethos.

In Chapter Two, I discussed in detail one of the dimensions of the hybridisation process of Yoga in Melbourne, the de-emphasising of Indian traditional Yoga philosophical sources and a transferral of emphasis to a Western occult philosophical approach which was potentially more familiar to Segesmans' students. The knowledge of Sanskrit was no longer a pre-requisite for learning Yoga. Instead, Yoga could be studied in English in Melbourne. This narrowed the cultural distance between Yoga philosophy and the mainstream Australian socio-cultural heritage. Even though Segesman veered away from the Indian traditional Sanskrit philosophical sources, this did not detract from the fact that Yoga still retained its ancient tradition heritage. Therefore, Segesman was able to validate her approach with an emphasis on the Western occult philosophical sources by stressing to her students that the Yoga they were learning was part of the "ancient wisdom tradition" which emphasised Yoga as spiritual development. Segesman developing a philosophical base that was familiar to her students was able to provide a cohesive conceptual structure to her classes and this became the foundation of building an organisation and community around Yoga practice.

Furthermore, in Chapter Two, I also demonstrated that the origins of Yoga pre-date all religions except for Shamanism and that Yoga has contributed to the subsequent development of other religious elements such as meditation, mental exercises, ascetic practices, ethics and breath control techniques. However, I have shown that Yoga is not a religion, nor do Yoga practitioners consider it to be a religion. Yoga is a spiritual practice and a way of life. Since the spiritual practice emphasis is consistent with the fact that the Yoga practitioner is not required to convert, there are no dogmas to adhere to, no creed of faith and no institutional authority.

Additionally, I have argued that Yoga does have its own history, tradition, textual sources and practices, but because these are not institutionally determined. When Yoga was transferred from India to Melbourne, it was able to be tailored to suit the Australian socio-cultural context and meet the needs of Segesmans' students. They came to seek benefit, not hardship or enlightenment. In the process of its transference to the host culture of Melbourne, Yoga became commodified. Therefore, Yoga was shed of a number of elements of its traditional ethos and its Hindu characteristics to make it accessible to Melburnians. Yoga came to be perceived as an activity that could be practised by Australians irrespective of their socio-cultural heritage, creed or socio-economic status.

Moreover, Segesman did not want to create a “blind-faith” following whereby what she taught was the gospel. She wanted to create a community of like-minded practitioners who were willing to have a strong philosophical base not bound by tradition. As one of my participants, a student of Yoga of five years, commented:

“And, I probably had some questions as well, but to me Yoga was in the beginning more of an exercise, stretching, in which I did try different styles of Yoga which I found. It was through my partner that I actually came here for the first time to do a beginner’s class and realised that there was so much more to Gita, as in their classes, there’s so much more wisdoms woven into their classes. It really appealed to me. And, that was probably something that really drew me to Gita, as such, there was that questioning and when you did a class there was a deeper sense of actually doing a Yoga class. But yeah, for me, the Yoga was more the actual questioning the esoteric wisdoms.”

Also, she did not want Gita Yoga or her Gita School of Yoga to become an institutionalised organisation where people were bound by beliefs, creeds and vows. In this regard, many of her students retained their socio-religious heritage and yet became Yoga practitioners whereby a new hybrid self emerged.

However, this came at a cost to the Yoga tradition. Yoga lost many of its world-rejecting ascetic practices and its culturally specific values to become commodified. Yoga became a “product” to be paid for. Carrette and King (2005) argue that this is a global social trend that accelerated and became wide-spread in the early 1960s around the time Segesman founded her Gita School of Yoga. In other words, the privatisation of spirituality grew quickly from this time onwards. Bilimoria (1989) called what happened to Yoga in Australia, “a false system”. The traditional ethos and spirit of Yoga practice was de-emphasised. Nevertheless, Segesman was adamant about charging a fee for learning Yoga. The fee charged for learning Yoga was to cover the costs of paying rent and the utilities. Segesman felt that starting a spiritual business to teach Yoga was to bring her teachings in line with the Aquarian energies of the emerging Age of Aquarius at this time.

In Chapter Three I highlighted the second dimension of the hybridisation process, that is, how Segesman broke with the guru tradition and created her own approach to the teaching of Yoga. Effectively, she re-cast the role and the representation of the guru to that of a mentor. I argued that the guru tradition of Yoga is alien to the Australian socio-cultural context and so, for the successful establishment of Yoga in Melbourne, it was necessary for Segesman to change this tradition, despite the fact that she herself had been immersed in this tradition during her own training. What may seem confusing here is the fact that Segesman was said to have obeyed her Indian guru's instructions to break with the guru tradition. On the one hand, there is the importance of following the guru (his instructions) and on the other hand, the instruction not to follow a guru (break the following of the guru tradition). Segesman, as the Yoga teacher, became a self-styled source of authority in this hybridisation process. She became a guru without a gown. In other words, with Segesman bringing Yoga to Melbourne she became an authority on how Yoga was to be taught. Therefore, I argue, this is an important component in the narrowing of the cultural distance between Yoga and the Australian socio-cultural context. The responsibility of teaching Yoga in Melbourne was placed in the hands of the teacher and not a higher authority embedded within an ancient tradition.

Also, by lifting Yoga out of the context of the Hindu guru tradition, Segesman was able to re-focus the importance of Yoga practice onto the teachings and not the teacher. As one of my participants, a student of Yoga of forty-five years, commented:

“I only thought about going back to Gita really. I've never really been, I've never really explored other schools of Yoga and I'm not attracted to the “Indianness” of Yoga. Like a few times, I have been to Ashrams and enjoyed going, enjoyed the foods, and enjoyed the people I met. But, I'm not attracted to the guru-type of Yoga. And, I'm not really attracted to the physical type of Yoga, like Iyengar. I have a daughter that goes to Bikram Yoga, it's just a bit too strenuous for me. And, they don't have that philosophy, they don't have all those lovely little understandings that come out in the Gita class. So, the Gita class suits me, I enjoy it, and you know, it's just for me.”

Segesman shed the Hindu devotional aspects which were focused on the guru and transferred the focus to the practice of Yoga. Yoga practice was supported by a focus on the Western occult ancient wisdom teachings which advocate the taking of responsibility for one's own spiritual development. Thereby, Segesman transcended the limitations of the Hindu guru tradition to empower her students as individuals by making them aware of their responsibility for their own spiritual development. Consequently, she developed a new teaching method that became highly successful.

When Segesman arrived in Australia from India this coincided with the social changes of the 1960s and 1970s whereby Australians began to move away from traditional Christian forms of religiousities to alternative forms of spirituality like Yoga. But, the shift in emphasis away from Yoga's traditional Indian sources to the Western occult tradition as a foundation for Yoga practice, through explaining the aspect of the teachings which identified Yoga as spiritual development, was a way in which Segesman linked Yoga to a more Western context. The popularising of this tradition had begun with Madame Blavatsky and the founding of the Theosophical Society in 1875 as well as the writings of Alice Bailey and the Arcane School (est. 1923).

In addition, according to Segesman, the energies of the Age of Aquarius were also related to the transformation of the Indian guru tradition. Yoga had now to be popularised with the focus on the teachings, not the teacher. The guru tradition is highly hierarchical and sectarian (Tripathi, 2004) and culturally very distant from the egalitarian Australian socio-cultural heritage. Segesman felt she had been sent by her guru to Australia for the specific purpose of deconstructing the guru tradition. Her guru had disavowed her of her swami status.

As a result, when Segesman began teaching Yoga in Melbourne in her black lycra clothing she transformed the guru tradition, through the shedding of the guru's gowns and accoutrements into a mentoring tradition. She effectively became a guru without a gown. Segesman had successfully recast the guru's role, whereby her students were guided to learn and explore the Yoga practice for themselves. They no longer had to rely on a guru-figure to tell them what to think, what to do and what to believe. For the Gita International members, Yoga is not a personality-focused practice, nor is it hierarchical in structure. Yoga is an egalitarian practice and for the Gita International members, this approach is very appealing. The ethos of Gita International, to placing of responsibility for spiritual development into the hands of its

members, means that the members perceive their organisation as strong and secure and they idealise it as a “spiritual home”.

Consequently, in Chapter Four, I explored the third dimension of the hybridisation process in which the Indian traditional ashram setting has been re-conceptualised into an ‘idealised spiritual home’ in Melbourne. The cultural distance of Yoga’s traditional ashram setting is narrowed through this re-conceptualisation process. Traditionally, a Yoga centre is an ashram which is both the residence of the guru and a school for his disciples. The ashram is a place for Yoga practice and spiritual development. The ashram is located within a quiet setting outside the boundaries of a city or town. The ashram is a sacred place and it functions outside of the materialistic aspects of society. However, when Segesman brought Gita Yoga to Melbourne, the traditional ashram was transformed into a Yoga school which was located in the CBD area of Melbourne. Yoga no longer needed to be learnt in an isolated hermitage setting. The traditional ashram setting is culturally distant from the Australian socio-cultural heritage. Therefore, the factors of location and facility became important in the hybridisation process. Melbourne Yoga practitioners required accessibility of place to continue in their practice.

For Segesman, this was another way in which she narrowed the cultural distance of learning Yoga for Australian practitioners from a sacred environment to a secular environment. She shed the traditional rules of ashram life and created her own rules for operating her Yoga school. She invented a way in which her Yoga school became a reflection of the norms and mores found within Melbourne society. To do this, she made good use of elements of older religions with the mixing these elements into creating an eclectic, aesthetically pleasing environment. Segesman also redefined the emphasis of the ashram into a “Light Centre”, a place where like-minded people come together to seek spiritual development. This “Light Centre” evolved for the Gita International members into an idealised spiritual home.

In this third dimension of the hybridisation process, I argue that the concept of the “home” enabled Segesman to cultivate an attitude of community amongst her students. Even though Segesman never called her Gita School of Yoga “home”, the evidence presented suggests that she did allow this awareness to develop among her students. As one of my participants, a Yoga teacher of ten years, commented:

“Gita is my spiritual home. So, I’m also very connected to the people here. I have been with them in past lives. I have come back with them and I feel that very strongly. The minute I walked in the doors, it was like, “Oh, I have come home.” It’s a real, yeah, I know this, it’s a knowing. There’s a real familiarity, you know, the link with Egypt, just everything. I feel more drawn to this than the Indian style, the, you know, venerating the guru has never really worked for me.”

In doing so, she was able to create a sense of belonging whereby her students developed loyalty and commitment. Many of Segesman’s students came seeking health and well-being. They did not come seeking institutional forms of spirituality. They came for healing, stress-release and guidance. I argue that the re-conceptualisation of the Yoga centre as a home has led to the expansion of Yoga in Melbourne and the economic well-being of Gita International as a Yoga centre. The Yoga centre became a place in which a Yoga community developed around Yoga practice and furthermore, by benefitting themselves Yoga practitioners bring benefit to the host community of Melbourne.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I presented the final dimension of the hybridisation process. I have shown that for Segesman to succeed in establishing Yoga in Melbourne, she had to create an organisational tradition of inventing classes and groups to sustain her organisation, the Gita School of Yoga. Segesman shed the Indian traditional ascetic and renunciate aspects of Yoga practice along with the Yoga lifestyle prohibitions to enable her students to attend her classes within their normal daily lives. This was highly effective and again, the cultural distance of traditional Yoga was narrowed to make Yoga practice accessible to new Melbourne Yoga practitioners. Her first step was to register the Gita School of Yoga as a business. This new direction of charging a fee for Yoga classes was in order to make a living from teaching Yoga and be able to advertise and to promote the benefits of Yoga in the community.

Furthermore, when Lucas and Wood took over the ownership and management of the Gita School of Yoga in 1983, they continued what Segesman had started. In 1985, they changed the name of the Gita School of Yoga to Gita International and took the classes and services they provide in a new direction. They expanded the classes on offer and included a number of events and celebrations of their own making. By 1996, they recreated the organisational structure and

transformed the direction and purpose of Gita International. They designated Gita International as a “University of Light” with the sole purpose of developing programs for spiritual development into the 21st century. Why Wood and Lucas reinvented Gita International as a “University of Light” I was unable to ascertain clearly. Or, whether they modelled this reinvention on the Brahma Kumaris use of, “World Spiritual University”, to encompass a global context for their organisation is also unclear. But, what is clear is that this reinvention has had a modernising effect on Gita International. Their focus was more targeted to developing Yoga programs that can be taught to a wider audience out in the community. The Gita International members for the first time began to teach Gita Yoga in schools, prisons, drug rehabilitation centres, community centres and to conduct public events. This has developed into a greater awareness of Yoga practice as well as its benefits within Melbourne’s wider community. As one of my participants, a student of Yoga student of twenty-two years, commented in regards to Yoga benefitting the community:

“It does. But then again, I feel it is a bit hidden because the values of society, perhaps don’t really gel in what we value in Yoga. But, I guess at the level of well-being, if you can instil that in people then they are going to be more creative, less self-orientated and community minded, I would think that then has benefit. So yeah, I would probably say very broad in that sense, making people who feel good about themselves has this ripple of positivity through society.”

In this way, Wood and Lucas continue to raise the profile of Yoga, enabling Yoga to be more accessible to people who wanted to learn.

In conclusion, this thesis has focused on what happens when Yoga, which is alien to mainstream Australia, was introduced into Melbourne. The Indian socio-cultural heritage of Yoga is so distant to the mainstream Australian socio-cultural heritage yet despite this cultural distance people became Yoga practitioners. I have highlighted how and why Yoga was able to be transferred from India and became established within Melbourne.

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Appendix 1 – MUHREC Certificate of Approval



MONASH University

Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC)
Research Office

Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

Date: 7 December 2009
Project Number: CF09/3151 - 2009001725
Project Title: Yoga in Melbourne
Chief Investigator: Dr Thomas Reuter
Approved: From: 7 December 2009 to 7 December 2014

Terms of approval

1. The Chief investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to MUHREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. **Failure to provide permission letters to MUHREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.**
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must contain your project number.
6. **Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel):** Requires the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. **Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. **Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. **Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. **Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
11. **Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.


Professor Ben Canny
Chair, MUHREC

Cc: Mr Trevor Walsh

Postal – Monash University, Vic 3800, Australia
Building 3E, Room 111, Clayton Campus, Wellington Road, Clayton

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Appendix 2 – Gita International Permission Letter



GITA INTERNATIONAL PTY. LTD.

Directors: Lucille Wood & Di Lucas ACN 006 909 726

www.gita.com.au

16 Hoddle Street, ABBOTSFORD VIC 3067

6 April, 2010

Researcher: Trevor Walsh
10th Floor, Menzies Building
Department of Anthropology
Faculty of Arts
School of Political and Social Inquiry
Clayton Campus
Monash University VIC 3800

Dear Trevor Walsh,

RE: Yoga in Melbourne! How is this possible?
Research Project No: CF09/3151 - 2009001725

Thank you for your request to seek our participation in the above-named research project. We hereby give our permission to participate, and to allow you to be involved in all the activities of our yoga centre, and also, to recruit participants from Gita International Yoga for the above-named research.

We have read and understood the Explanatory Statement regarding the research **CF09/3151 - 2009001725** and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted.

Lucille Wood and Di Lucas
Directors, Gita International Pty Ltd

Appendix 3 – Explanatory Statement

MONASH University



Explanatory Statement

Title: Yoga In Melbourne! How is this possible?

Masters Research Project No: CF09/3151 - 2009001725

This information sheet is for you to keep.

My name is Trevor Walsh and I am conducting a research project with Dr. Irfan Ahmad from the School of Politics and Social Inquiry, towards my Masters degree (MA) at Monash University, Clayton Campus. I am researching yoga in Melbourne and this means that I will be writing a thesis which is the equivalent of a 300 page book.

Why did you choose this particular person/group as participants?

I selected you and/or the group that you belong to, to participate in this exciting research project as I am researching all the different types of yoga groups/schools and styles, as well as the yoga practitioners in Melbourne who belong to these various yoga groups/schools and styles. This research project is to study how yoga groups/schools and styles established themselves here in Melbourne, and why people become yoga practitioners.

The aim/purpose of the research

I am conducting this research to find out why an eastern spirituality such as Yoga has succeeded in being transplanted from its cultural heartland of India and establishing itself here in Melbourne, Australia.

Possible benefits

The main benefit of you and/or your yoga group/school for participating in this research project is the sharing of your insights, attitudes and lifestyle to gain a broad range of experiences to further enhance the practical benefits of being a yoga practitioner. Furthermore, the contribution and significance of this Masters project is to increase our understanding of spirituality in contemporary Australia by attempting to explain why yoga has succeeded in establishing itself here as a widely accepted practice. My research will be filling a gap in the research literature given that Yoga continues to remain largely below the sociological radar screen. There is a lack of in-depth studies into the impact of Yoga on Australian society. What little research has been done is mainly focused on the health and well-being benefits of yoga. However, I propose that yoga in Australian society is a quiet achiever. This quiet achievement is mainly due to Yoga being a private and personal experience enabling yoga practitioners to develop long-term goals for their inner development over many years of practice.

What does the research involve?

This research project involves the gathering of data about the different yoga groups/schools and styles, and also the experiences of yoga practitioners found in Melbourne. This is a comprehensive research project which means that I will be visiting your yoga centre to participate in all your yoga centre's activities, record experiences and talk formally and informally with you and other members of your group.

How much time will the research take?

The amount of time required for your participation in this research project is approximately one hour and fifteen minutes to carry out the formal interview. More of your time may be required later when we meet and chat informally.

Inconvenience/discomfort

For the purposes of this research project, there will be a minimum of inconvenience due to the time that it takes to participate in the interview sessions. There may also be a level of mild discomfort experienced by the participants when questioned about their yogic lifestyle as some of the information given will be personal in nature (e.g. name, age, gender, occupation, ethnicity etc).

Payment

In regards to this research project, there will be no financial rewards at all. All information will be given voluntarily.

Can I withdraw from the research?

Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. Also, you can withdraw at any time.

Confidentiality

The confidentiality and anonymity of you the participant/s in this research project is safe-guarded by the use of pseudonyms or codes. All personal data will only be known to this researcher. The identity and personal information of you the participant/s will not be published. All the data collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and this researcher will have the only access.

Storage of Data

Storage of the data collected will comply with Monash University regulations and be kept on University premises in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for 5 years. After the five year period, all data will be shredded and the audio-taped data erased.

Use of data for other purposes

The data collected in this research project may be used for other research purposes as this Masters project may be upgraded to a PhD doctorate.

Results

If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact the researcher, Trevor Walsh [redacted].
The findings are accessible for viewing at the completion of this masters degree.

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:	If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research <insert your project number here > is being conducted, please contact:
<p>Dr. Irfan Ahmad Lecturer Monash University School of Political and Social Inquiry Caulfield Campus Department of Politics</p> <p>[redacted]</p>	<p>Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800</p> <p>[redacted]</p>

Thank you.

Signature

Trevor Walsh

Appendix 4 – Consent Form

MONASH University



Consent Form

Title: Yoga In Melbourne! How is this possible?
Research Project No: CF09/3151 – 2009001725

NOTE: *This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records*

I agree to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that:

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| I agree to be interviewed by the researcher | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I agree to make myself available for a further interview if required | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I agree to the data collected about myself from the interview to be only used in this Masters project | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I agree to the data collected about myself from the interview to be used in PhD research if undertaken by this researcher | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

and

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am under no obligations. I can choose not to participate in part or in all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

and

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interview for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics.

and

I understand that any information I provide is confidential and anonymous, and will only be known to the researcher, Trevor Walsh. Any information I provide will not be disclosed to any other party.

and

I understand that data from the interview will be kept in a secure storage and accessible to the researcher, Trevor Walsh. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period unless I consent to it being used in future research.

Participant's name

Signature

Date

School of Political and Social Inquiry/Department of Anthropology

Faculty of Arts

Postal: Anthropology, School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University, Victoria 3800

Address: School of Political and Social Inquiry, Anthropology, Monash University, Clayton Campus, Victoria 3800

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ABN 12 377 614 012, CRICOS provider number 00008C

Appendix 5

List of Key Practices and Roles in the Indian Yogic Tradition

Ashtānga Yoga: The eightfold Yoga expounded by Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras. The Yoga Sutras are one of the primary Yoga texts. Ashtānga Yoga includes *Yamas* (ethics), *Niyamas* (observances), *Āsanas* (postures), *Prāṇāyāma* (breath control), *Pratyāhāra* (sensory inhibition), *Dhāraṇa* (concentration), *Dhyāna* (meditation) and *Samādhi* (ecstasy/absorption).

Āchārya: Preceptor or teacher. An Indian traditional title for a guru.

Āsana: Posture, are the most popular aspect of the Hatha Yoga teachings, especially in the Western world. The *āsanas* are for developing strength, flexibility and are deceptively powerful and far ranging in their healing benefits. The third limb of Patanjali's Ashtānga Yoga.

Āshrama: Residence of a guru, hermitage, place for learning Yoga.

Bandha: Stomach lock, compliment the practice of *prāṇāyāma* by locking the *prāṇa* in certain areas of the body and in the etheric field of the energy body.

Bhakti: Devotion, Love.

Bhakti Yoga: Yoga of Devotion. One of the principle branches of Yoga.

Brahmacharya: Abstinence, self-control, celibacy, chastity, sexual propriety. One of the five *Yamas*.

Chela: Disciple, an initiated pupil of a guru, adept, sage, spiritual preceptor or teacher.

Dhāraṇā: Concentration, mental development, which is the process of focusing one's energy and slowing the thoughts, before entering into meditation. The sixth limb of Patanjali's Ashtānga Yoga.

Dhauti: Cloth Swallowing Practice. *Dhauti* refers to a process whereby a practitioner swallows a piece of cloth that is about as wide as one's tongue and up to 1.5 meters in length. This practice is said to cleanse the entire alimentary canal, including the mouth, the food pipe, the stomach, the intestines, and the rectum to remove phlegm, bile, and other impurities within the stomach.

Dhyāna: Meditation, contemplation. Meditation is fundamental to all branches of Yoga and there are many types of meditation methods that use breath control, chanting, sacred objects, silence and visualization techniques. The seventh limb of Patanjali's Ashtānga Yoga.

Fakir: A Muslim ascetic. One who has a similar lifestyle to traditional Indian Yoga renunciates in India. One who has taken the vow of poverty and renunciation of the world and worldly pleasures.

Guru: Spiritual preceptor, adept, master, sage, siddha, teacher.

Japa: Recitation of mantras.

Jñāna/Gñāna Yoga: The Yoga of Wisdom, knowledge and intellect.

Kapālabhātī: Nasal Passage Cleansing Practice. This technique is for the removal of phlegm and cleansing the sinus cavities. One of the six Kriyā or cleansing practices of Hatha Yoga.

Karma Yoga: Yoga of Action. Selfless or altruistic service, serving and helping others.

Kīrtan: Group devotional chanting, mantra and/or singing.

Kriyā/Shatkarma/Shatkriyā: Cleansing Practices. Many of the subtle benefits of the following practices will truly take place only when physical purification has occurred to an advanced degree. There are six *kriyās* which are practiced within Hatha Yoga and these *dhauti*, *kapālabhātī*, *nauli*, *neti*, *trātaka* and *vasti*.

Kuṇḍalinī: Serpent power, mysterious psychospiritual force.

Mantra: Incantation, chant, invocation, sacred formula.

Mudrā: Seals or Hand Gestures. The *mudrās* are for sealing the *prāṇa* (universal energy) into the body and the etheric field of the energy body.

Naulī/Laulikī: Rolling Stomach Muscles Practice. In this practice, the rectus abdominal muscles are strongly involved. In *nauli* the abdomen is drawn in, projecting the rectus abdomen muscles forward and expanding and contracting them in such a way as to resemble the waves of the sea. The technique provides a powerful massage of the intestines and digestive organs to increase metabolism.

Neti: Nasal Cleansing Practice. The process of *neti* is pulling a string through the nose and mouth that cleans the nasal passages, the pharynx, and the sinus cavities. One of the six *kriyā* or cleansing practices.

There are two types of *neti*: *Sutra* (using string) and *Jala* (using water).

In *Sutra Neti* the practitioner keeps hold of one end of the thread while passing the other up through one nostril at a time and pulling it out through the mouth.

In *Jala Neti* the practitioner sucks water through the nose and out through the mouth. Or, alternatively, uses a *neti* pot – he or she uses a small vessel with a spout to pour water into one nostril. The water then pours out of the other nostril or the mouth.

Nirodha: Restraint, cessation, restriction.

Niyamas: Fixed Observances/Rules. There are 28 rules for the *niyamas*. The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali only emphasise five. The 28 *niyamas* are: *archanā*/worship; *archarya sevana*/service to one's teacher; *arādhana*/adoration; *āstikya*/belief; *atithya*/hospitality; *audāsinya*/indifference; *dāna*/charity or giving without reward; *ekāntavāsa*/living in solitude; *guru charana avarūdhātva*/following in the teacher's footsteps; *homa*/sacrifice; *hrī*/remorse or modesty; *īśvara praṇidhānāni*/surrender to God; *japa*/recitation; *mati*/conviction; *mauna*/observing silence; *nihsangatā*/non-contact or non-familiarity; *parārtheha*/working for the good of others; *santosha*/contentment; *shaucha*/cleanliness or purity; *shravana*/listening to all things spiritual; *snāna*/bathing or personal hygiene; *svādhyāya*/study; *tapas*/austerity or ascetic practices; *tirthātana*/pilgrimage; *upastha nigraha*/control over one's genitals; *upavāsa*/fasting; *vairāgya*/dispassion. The second limb of Patanjali's Ashtānga Yoga.

Paramparā: From guru to disciple, from one to another, transmission of sacred lore or Yoga.

Prāṇa: Universal energy, primary life force, breath of life, life principle. *Prāṇa* is the energy, the life principle that supports all life. Without it life will die. It is an energy that attaches to sunlight, air, water and food. In this way it is absorbed into the bodies of all living beings in one form or another.

Prāṇāyāmas: Breathing Techniques. *Prāṇāyāma* aims at capturing the *prāṇa* from its main vehicle, the air. Then the *prāṇa* is controlled and directed in certain areas of the psychic system where it is manipulated as well as stored for future use. The fourth limb of Patanjali's Ashtānga Yoga.

Pratyāhāra: Withdrawal of the senses, sensory inhibition. The fifth limb of Patanjali's Ashtānga Yoga.

Rāja Yoga: King of all Yogas, Yoga of meditation.

Samādhi: Ecstasy, absorption in the Divine or Absolute. The final and eighth limb of Patanjali's Ashtānga Yoga.

Samnyāsa: Renunciation of the world and worldly pleasures with a focus on spiritual endeavour.

Samnyāsīn: A renunciate, a practitioner of samnyāsa, a Yogi, one endeavouring to achieve spiritual attainment.

Sampradāya: Spiritual community, cult, sect, religious community.

Samyamana: Binding together, relating to self-control or restraint, confinement, holding in, bringing to rest.

Samyoga: Union, union or absorption with, synthesis.

Satsaṅg: Gathering of Yogis for the purpose of expounding philosophical discourses and discussions.

Sādhaka: A Yoga practitioner, spiritual aspirant, one who is performing *sādhana* or means of attainment/spiritual practice.

Sādhana: Means of attainment, spiritual practice, means of realization.

Sādhu: Virtuous one, accomplished. An ascetic who has renounced all worldly desires, comforts and materialism to seek enlightenment and occult powers (*siddhi*).

Swāmi/Svāmi: Lord, holy person, master, sage, spiritual teacher. This title is applied to initiates into religious orders in India who have taken the vows of *samnyāsīn*. The suffix *ānanda* is common among swāmis who belong to monastic orders. Both Indian and Western Yoga practitioners who have been initiated by a guru take on this title.

Siddhi: Spiritual power, attainment, perfection.

Tīlak: Forehead mark, sign of renunciate sect a yogi belongs to.

Trātaka: Trātaka means 'gazing steadily at one point without blinking'. *Trātaka* improves mental focus and increases the supply of blood to the eyes as it cleanses and strengthens them. A popular, pleasant *trātaka* technique is to gaze at the naked flame of a candle.

Vasti: Colon Cleansing Practice. One of the six kriyā or cleansing practices of Hatha Yoga. A method of using an enema via the rectum for cleansing the colon into the large intestine. There are two types, *Jala* (water) *Vasti* and *Shushka* (dry) *Vasti*.

In *Jala Vasti* a practitioner sits in a tub filled with waist-high water and draws water through the rectum and into the colon. The practitioner creates a vacuum in the rectum and lower colon through *Uddiyana Bandha* (stomach lock) and *Nauli*. After sufficient water is drawn in, the practitioner expels the water through the anal canal.

In *Shushka Vasti* stomach contractions are used instead of using water.

Yamas: Moral Observances, restraints, guidelines for living ethically. These are said to be essential to all Yoga branches. Also, the first limb of Patanjali's Ashtānga Yoga. There are ten traditional *yamas* although the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali list only five. The ten traditional *yamas* are, *ahimsā*/non-violence or non-harming; *aparigraha*/non-covetness or greedlessness; *arjava*/honesty or straightforwardness; *asteya*/non-stealing;

brahmacharya/chastity; *dayā*/compassion; *dhriti*/steadfastness; *kshamā*/patience; *mītahāra*/moderate appetite and vegetarian diet; *shaucha*/purity or cleanliness; and *satya*/truthfulness.

Yoga: Union, communion, the spiritual system of uniting the self with the Divine. The practice of liberation from the limitations and the suffering of Life through meditative and ecstatic experiences.

Yogi: A practitioner of Yoga. A spiritual aspirant, a *sādhaka*, however, strictly speaking a Yogi is a follower of Yoga, but this title is often loosely applied to any ascetic in India.

Appendix 6

The Timeline of Yoga in Australia

- 1895:** Theosophical Society (TS): Establishes branches in Australia which encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy, science and provide a range of information which introduces Yoga and other types of esoteric philosophy to Australia.
- 1922:** Jiddhu Krishnamurti (1895-1986): Visits Australia bringing the wisdom of Jñāna Yoga.
- 1950:** Michael Volin (1914-1998): Establishes the Sydney Yoga Centre.
- 1954:** Margrit Segesman (1905-1998): Arrives from India and begins to teach Gita Yoga classes in Melbourne.
- 1958:** Roma Blair (1923-2013): Establishes the Sydney Yoga Club.
- 1960:** Segesman opens the Gita School of Yoga, Melbourne's first full-time Yoga school.
- 1961:** Fred and Vera McCardell and Lionel Drummond: Set up the Yoga School of Perth.
- 1962:** Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1918-2008): Founder of Transcendental Meditation. First visit to Australia to spread Transcendental Meditation teachings.
- 1964:** Vijayadev Yogendra (1930-2005): Establishes the Yoga Education Centre in St Kilda, Melbourne.
- 1964:** Ailsa Gartenstein: Opens the Ailsa Gartenstein Yoga School in Brisbane and also establishes the Queensland Yoga Fellowship.
- 1966:** Swami Satchitananda (1914-2002): Establishes Integral Yoga in Australia.
- 1966:** Swami Sarasvati: Emigrates from India to Australia and begins teaching Yoga in Sydney. She became famous through her regular Yoga class show on television.
- 1967:** International Yoga Teachers Association: Formed by Roma Blair in Sydney with Margrit Segesman as its head in Melbourne.
- 1968:** Swami Satyananda (1923-2009): Founder of Satyananda Yoga, first visit to Australia. Guest of Honour for the first Australian Yoga Teachers' Conference in Richmond, NSW.

- 1968:** Maharishi Mahesh Yogi: Returns to Australia and establishes the Transcendental Meditation group.
- 1969:** Acharya Upenda Roy (1942-2006): Establishes the Yoga Meditation Centre in Sydney.
- 1972:** Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar (1921-1990): Establishes the Ananda Marga movement in Australia.
- 1972:** Sri Chinmoy (1931-2007): Establishes the Sri Chinmoy Centre in Australia.
- 1974:** Swami Satyananda (1923-2009): Founder of Satyananda Yoga establishes first ashram established in Sydney.
- 1974:** Swami Muktananda (1908-1982): Founder of Siddha Yoga. Opens Siddha Yoga in Fitzroy, Melbourne.
- 1974:** Prajapita Brahma (1875-1969): Founder of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University and their style of Raja Yoga (established 1936). First centre established in Fitzroy, Melbourne.
- 1975:** A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (1896-1977): Founder of ISKCON, that is, the Hare Krishna movement (a Bhakti Yoga movement). First centre established in Australia.
- 1975:** Harbhajan Singh Yogi aka Yogi Bhajan (1929-2004): Founder of 3HO (Happy Healthy Holy Organisation) and Kundalini Yoga. Establishes first center in Australia.
- 1975:** Satya Sai Baba (1926-2011): Founder of the Satya Sai Baba Organisation (a Bhakti Yoga movement) establishes groups in Australia.
- 1975:** Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902): Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Victoria: Established their first branches in Australia.
- 1980:** Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi (1923-2011): Founder of Sahaja Yoga: Establishes centers in Australia.
- 1985:** BKS Iyengar (1918-current): Based in Pune, India. Founder of Iyengar Yoga. Establishes centres in Australia.
- 1985-Current:** Various other styles of Yoga are established in Australia including: Astanga Yoga, Bikram Yoga, Dru Yoga, Okido Yoga, ViniYoga, Yoga in Daily Life.
- 1999:** Establishment of Yoga Teachers Association Australia (YTAA) by an inspired group of Yoga Teachers in Melbourne. YTAA is now known as Yoga Australia (YA).

Appendix 7

The Timeline of Margrit Segesman's Life (1905-1998)

22 April, 1905	Born in Berne, Switzerland. She grew up in a village on the banks of Lake Thun (pronounced 'toon'). She is believed to have been born into an aristocratic Swiss family, bearing the name Von Segesman. Her father owned a Swiss bank. She was one of two children. Segesman grew up in a strong Christian family environment.
1913-14	Family Tragedy. Her brother dies of pneumonia. This had a major impact on Segesman throughout her life.
1914-18	World War I.
1921-22	Engaged to be married to her childhood sweetheart. Fiancé dies suddenly after contracting meningitis.
1922	Segesman placed in a Swiss sanatorium after contracting tuberculosis, from 1922-28. The illness is so severe that Segesman loses the function of one lung and half of the other. During her stay at the sanatorium she develops the prototype of what was to become her Progressive Yoga Relaxation (PYR) technique. This relaxation technique was later to become part of her Gita Yoga system.
1928	Left the sanatorium and returned to her home in Switzerland. Travelled with her aunt and uncle on a world tour, especially through the Middle East. It was during this tour that her uncle showed her a number of breathing techniques that helped her to breathe more easily.
1929-30	Went to Paris to live and work as a house model for Lucien Lelong and Dior. Whilst living in Paris, she met a Polish diplomat and became engaged. However, Segesman broke off this engagement and returned to Switzerland.
1930-31	Travelled again with her aunt and uncle on another world tour.
1931-32	Upon returning home from this world tour, Segesman went back to live in Paris. Met Carl Jung (the famous psychologist who was a close family friend) on one of her return visits to Switzerland. He suggested Yoga philosophy and he gave Segesman her first book on Yoga, <i>The Science of Breath</i> , by Yogi Ramacharaka. This meeting kindled Segesman's interest in the study of Yoga. At this time, Jung probably introduced Segesman to Western occult philosophy through his own interest.
1938-39	World War II declared. Segesman returns to Switzerland to live and becomes involved with the Swiss Underground Movement and a Swiss Border Guard welfare organisation.
1942	Hospitalised with osteo-arthritis.

- 1943-47** Searches for a cure, nothing is effective except the progressive relaxation technique she developed.
- 1947-48** Relaxation breakthrough. Segesman claimed she had a profound experience of love and of God.
- First experience of learning Hatha Yoga. Segesman joins the Elizabeth Haich and Selvarajan Yesudian Yoga school in Zurich which opened in 1946. Haich and Yesudian were influential in deepening Segesman's interest in Western occult studies.
- Aspires to travel to India. Segesman contacted a number of ashrams in India where she could potentially stay and study Yoga.
- Sets off on her search for a Yoga guru and arrives in India. During a short stay (length of stay unknown, possibly several months) in one ashram in the Himalayan foothills (place unknown), Segesman is initiated into the swami order by the presiding guru of the ashram. It was during her stay in this ashram that she finds her guru. She journeys with him into the Himalayas (place unknown) to learn Yoga under his guidance.
- 1953** Segesman's guru gives Segesman specific instructions to travel to Australia.
- 1954** Arrives in Melbourne, Australia. Works as manageress in a fur salon and teaches Yoga part-time in her small apartment.
- 1960** On 22 September Segesman opens The Gita School of Yoga at 21 Alfred Place, Melbourne. This Yoga school is Australia's first dedicated, full-time yoga school.
- 1973** Publishes her book "Wings of Power," – part biography, part philosophy, part guided relaxations.
- 1983** Publicly passed on the responsibility of running of Gita School of Yoga to Lucille Wood and Di Lucas. After Wood and Lucas take over the Gita School of Yoga they change the name to Gita International in 1985.
- 1983-98** Retires, but she still continues to teach despite her declining health.
- 1998** Sunday, 24th May, 1998, Segesman dies peacefully. Her favourite saying was, "Follow the teachings and not the teacher."