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CHAPTER 7



The Institutionalization of the Yoga Tradition: “Gurus” B. K. S. Iyengar and Yogini Sunita in Britain

SUZANNE NEWCOMBE

The guru-*śiṣya* (guru-disciple) relationship is often considered an essential aspect of the transmission of yoga. Yet at the beginning of the twenty-first century, intense one-on-one yoga tuition from master to pupil is exceptional. There are now millions who describe themselves as practicing yoga, the majority of them in group classes (Carter, 2004). Is it possible to have transmission of an authentic yoga tradition without an immediate guru-*śiṣya* relationship? In this chapter I will argue that an important characteristic contributing to the successful popularization of Modern Postural Yoga (De Michelis, 2005: 188) as a global phenomenon has been the institutionalization of charisma away from a direct guru-*śiṣya* interaction. My argument is based on a comparison between two key figures in the spread of yoga in 1960s Britain: B. K. S. Iyengar and Yogini Sunita. Both cases are examples of how personal charisma in teaching yoga were incorporated into a highly bureaucratic, state-funded adult education system. I will argue that the way Iyengar institutionalized his charisma was a direct contributing factor to his system's worldwide popularization. In contrast, Sunita's exceptional charisma was not successfully institutionalized into a globally known system and has now been virtually forgotten. In the 1960s the British adult education system was faced with a demand for yoga teaching, but without any established means of assessing the quality or qualifications of a yoga teacher. As early as 1965,

Birmingham City Council was concerned about the proper qualifications for yoga practitioners. In an article reported in the *London Times*, the Council was said to be concerned about the “hundreds” who had enrolled for yoga in adult education venues. Apparently, there had been an attempt at “methodological investigation” of yoga, but this was found to prove “an irritating business” (“Birmingham Tries to Size Up All This Yoga,” 1965). The article described how one popular Birmingham yoga teacher had Keep-Fit qualifications but had learned yoga from books, while another teacher was a woman of Indian origin who “appeared to know quite a lot” but had not “graduated from a yoga academy” (likely Yogini Sunita). The article questioned, however, “If there were yoga graduates, would they, on the whole, be quite the sort of people one really wants?” (ibid.). Both Sunita and Iyengar were able to convince the local educational authorities in Birmingham and London, respectively, that they had the necessary skills and expertise to be a safe choice for state-funded yoga. From reading contemporary reports, both Sunita and Iyengar had an exceptional ability to give an almost immediate experiential understanding of what they termed *yoga* to many with whom they interacted, although the means to obtain this aim were somewhat different for each. According to Max Weber’s (1947: 328) theories, this type of authority could be termed *charismatic*. Weber characterized charismatic authority as the motivating force for change in society, an inherently unstable, potentially revolutionary force that is “foreign to everyday routine structures” (ibid.). For any lasting organization to be created from charismatic authority, Weber argued that charismatic authority must be “radically changed,” and he termed this process the “routinization of charisma” (ibid., p. 364).

In this chapter I focus on the importance of the routinization of charisma for creating global Modern Postural Yoga. However, this discussion is not intended to deny that the charisma of a guru remains an important reference point for many yoga practitioners. The transformative potential of an intense teacher–student interaction remains an integral aspect of many people’s experience of yoga. But by drawing attention to the process of how charisma was routinized (or not), the tension between the emphasis on yoga teaching qualifications and the transformative experience of a guru–*śiṣya* relationship can be better understood.

THE POPULARIZING CHARISMA OF YOGINI SUNITA IN BIRMINGHAM

The majority of yoga practitioners in Birmingham in the early 1960s were inspired by a woman called Yogini Sunita (1932–1970). Sunita dedicated herself to popularizing yoga between her arrival in England in 1960 and her death in 1970. As she is now an unknown figure, it is necessary to briefly outline



Figure 7.1: Portrait from Yogini Sunita's self-published *Pranayama Yoga*, 1965. (Photo courtesy of Kenneth Cabral.)

her background. She was raised with the name Bernadette Bocarro in Bandra, a wealthy Catholic suburb of Bombay. English was spoken at home, and the family described itself as devoutly Catholic and of Brahmin caste (Robins, 1961). Rejecting an arranged marriage at the age of sixteen, Bernadette Bocarro joined a Franciscan order of nuns. She explained to a newspaper reporter in 1961 that at first she idealized religious renunciation. However, when she refused to keep writing to her mother for gifts of antique furniture for the convent (the Bocarro family ran an antique shop in Bombay) she became suddenly unpopular. The sparse food and rigorous discipline began to affect her health. Eventually, she walked out of the convent without permission, returning to her parents' home (Robins, 1961).

After leaving the convent, Bernadette described her only comfort as solitary walks by the seashore. On one of these walks Sunita claims that she encountered a yogi, apparently well-known locally, named Narainswami who was believed to have cured leprosy, tuberculosis and many other diseases; he offered to teach Bernadette yoga (Robins, 1961). Through the practice of what Narainswami called "Pranayama Yoga," Bernadette reported that confidence and peace of mind returned (Cabral, 2002a: 67; and personal interview with K. Cabral, July 17, 2007). I have not been able to trace any sign of Narainswami in the public record, and there is no outside source of confirmation for this period of Bocarro's life. But whomever taught her and whatever the method of transmission, by the time Bernadette reached England she felt

confident teaching Pranayama Yoga as well as Japanese massage (ibid.). Sometime after she left the convent, the Bocarros were able to arrange a marriage for Bernadette to Roydon Cabral, another Catholic Indian of Portuguese ancestry, who worked as a printer for *The Times of India*. Bernadette accepted this marriage and had two children while in India. She took employment as a secretary for the Italian Embassy in Bombay and also claimed to have taught yoga in schools (Cabral, 2002a: 57). During the 1950s, the Cabrals began to think that the situation for Anglicized Indians was becoming precarious and felt their children would have a better education abroad; the family decided to emigrate to England.¹ In late 1959, Roydon Cabral found work as a printer in the North Birmingham area. Bernadette initially attempted to return to a career as a pianist, and casually taught yoga to a few friends. These friends encouraged others to try yoga, and Bernadette found that her knowledge of yoga was in more demand than her skill on the piano (Robins, 1961; personal interview with K. Cabral, July 17, 2007).

By mid-1961, Bernadette Cabral, a Westernized Indian, had transformed into Yogi Sunita, a sari-clad Indian yoga teacher. As Sunita, she became a living promotion for Pranayama Yoga. Her dress and manner excited curiosity from onlookers and encouraged interest. An interviewer described meeting Sunita in September 1961:

I met Yogi Sunita at a smart West End hotel. She was wearing a flame-coloured sari, sandals and long silver earrings with her dark hair swept back in a chignon. She was young and attractive and as she took off her sandals and sat cross-legged on the floor, I wondered how she had become interested in yoga (Cabral, 1961).

Dressed characteristically in a sari, Sunita usually squatted or sat on the floor for her media interviews, which increased her intrigue. Having got her audiences' attention with her unusual appearance, Sunita impressed her listeners with a calm authority and skill in guiding them into an experience of relaxation ("Talk on Relaxing Yogi Style," 1963; "Yogi Sunita Visits Rotarians," 1967).

Especially considering that she was a newly arrived immigrant, Sunita's activities in establishing yoga in England were impressive. In August 1961, Bernadette Cabral registered a business in the name of Yogi Sunita Clinic in central Birmingham (Cabral, 1961; Business Registration Certificate 1168078). In autumn 1963, Sunita began yoga classes in the Women's Section of the Birmingham Athletics Institute (BAI), a kind of subsidized health club for Birmingham residents. These classes proved very popular, and she continued to teach classes at the BAI, some with hundreds of pupils, throughout the 1960s (BAI 1963–4). Also during 1963, Sunita "beat the panel" in the popular BBC television program "What's My Line?" in which a panel attempts to guess the profession of a guest (BBC Television Diploma, 1963).

When Sunita was interviewed for the BBC Radio in 1961, the interviewer commented, “I had always thought of yoga as mind over body, you know, the practice of physical exercises to achieve complete control of the body” (Cabral, 1961). However, the interviewer went on to explain, “Yogi Sunita teaches only relaxation of the *mind* and has made a record of the relaxing formula.” While the transcript does not record Sunita’s words, it is likely that she repeated her “slip second” on the radio. This is a mental exercise, which should take a minute and a half to perform, in which all those people and situations that require personal attention and involvement are brought to mind. Then one tries to let all of these attachments and worries go—just for one second. According to Sunita this practice will relax the mind and allow one to engage with all the demands of life more effectively. Sunita claimed that one slipped second was equivalent to eight hours of perfect sleep. Sunita advocated that her students practice this exercise thrice daily: upon waking; between noon and 2 p.m.; and before sleep at night (Cabral, 1961; Cabral, 2002a). She also maintained that hearing the teacher’s voice was necessary for beginners to learn this method and made **audiocassette** recordings for this purpose (Cabral, 1961; Cabral, 2002b).

An important part of her charisma for the middle-class women who attended her classes was her ability to “do it all” and stay relaxed and **calm**. Sunita worked in schools, tutoring immigrant children who spoke no English. She taught yoga and Indian dance in some of the schools of the area, in addition to the evening yoga classes at the BAI. Her oldest child, Kenneth, recalled Sunita’s hectic schedule during his childhood, which he estimates would have meant she rose at 5:30 a.m. and often worked on the typewriter well past midnight (Cabral 2007). Sunita’s heavy workload and apparently successful negotiation of her responsibilities as a wife and mother, combined with a presence that inspired calm and relaxation in those around her, were an important part of her charismatic authority. Her personal example was both pedagogically important and an inspiration to her students.

The *āsanas* that Sunita taught consisted of movements, which were a series of interconnected *āsanas* flowing from one posture to the next. The idea of movements might relate to musical conventions, and Sunita had a keen interest in piano and classical Indian dance, which she taught in Birmingham schools (Cabral, 2002a: 61). Sunita illustrates only two movements or sequences of postures and *prāṇāyāma* in her self-published book, although she implies that there are many more movements to Pranayama Yoga and that more exercises could be attempted with personal instruction. The first movement of Pranayama Yoga relies heavily on variations of *padmāsana*, commonly known as the lotus pose, where the legs are folded at the knee so that the foot is in the opposite groin. The relative difficulty of this position for average Western hips might also account for the limited popularity of this sequence of *āsanas*. However, Sunita did not emphasize the flexibility so evident in her

surviving photographs but taught that it is the slip second and a full experience of the present moment that contains the essence of Pranayama Yoga (and yoga more generally). According to Sunita, “A moment of complete peace” is what marks the essence of yoga—but notes in capital letters that this experience “CANNOT BE TAUGHT” (Cabral, 2002a: 51).

Stemming from her resounding popularity at the BAI and other Birmingham venues, Sunita trained a group of about twenty pupils to become Pranayama Yoga teachers within the adult education course structure in 1969 (“Further Steps in Yoga”, 1964). Unfortunately, little remains of her notes from this course, and there are no class plans that could have been used for future training courses. Her son explained that she was more interested in nurturing the holistic understanding of each individual than in developing an articulated proficiency that could be measured by external assessors (personal interview with K. Cabral, July 17, 2007). Sunita did not intend that her course would provide an automatic qualification for her students to teach yoga in adult education:

Assuming a student takes the Teachers’ Course, and a Yogi is confident that some of the students will be able to teach, it may well be that the Education Authorities do not select a single one from this group to teach for them. In this case a teacher will teach privately . . . on average, one in every thousand is chosen to work for Education. (Cabral, 2002a: 57)

She expected adult education officials would choose from among Pranayama Yoga teachers those that had the characteristics necessary to transmit the tradition of Pranayama Yoga in this context. This method of integrating yoga within adult education was very dependent on the personal charisma of future teachers. Yogini Sunita’s means of transmitting her knowledge ensured a continuation of the tradition of Pranayama Yoga as a tradition but not its popularity.

It is hard to know if Sunita’s system of yoga might have become more influential, had she lived longer. In 1970, at the age of thirty-eight, Yogini Sunita was hit by a car and killed as she crossed a road on foot (General Register Office, 1970). Her son believes that at the time of her death, Sunita had concrete plans with television producers and contacts in the United States to further popularize her yoga teaching (personal interview with K. Cabral, July 17, 2007).² But best-selling books and TV contracts alone do not make for a lasting method of transmitting yoga, as the cultural forgetting of Richard Hittleman—whose series on yoga was syndicated on over forty U.S. television channels by 1970—demonstrates (Kent, 1971).

Immediately after Sunita’s death, the teachers she trained were able to carry on the established classes at the BAI, which continued to be popular through the 1970s (BAI Annual Report 1970–71: 2). Sunita was influential

enough to create a tradition that continues to this day—as of 2006, there were between fifty and sixty Pranayama Yoga teachers (personal interview with K. Cabral, July 17, 2007). Pranayama Yoga does continue to be taught, but it remains uninstitutionalized and, therefore, less visible than other forms of yoga. Sunita taught that Pranayama Yoga was a way of life, of doing one thing at a time, in the present moment, without anxiety. It was never her intention to make yoga teacher training fully integrated into a bureaucratic qualification. During Sunita's lifetime, she judged whether the student had embodied the yoga enough to be able to transmit the tradition to others. However, there is perhaps a sense in which a person's competency to transmit a yoga tradition is not easily judged. The ability to impart an experience of a kind of personal transformation, which Sunita's students clearly reported in their comments about her teaching (Cabral, 1965: 17), is perhaps the essence of the yoga tradition. Is it possible to package this experience of yoga away from the personal interaction with the master?

THE CHARISMATIC POPULARIZATION OF YOGA BY B. K. S. IYENGAR

In contrast to Pranayama Yoga, a yoga tradition as taught by B. K. S. (Bellur Krishnamachar Sundararaja) Iyengar (1918–) is now globally recognized. In 2004, Iyengar was one of *Time* magazine's one hundred most influential people in the world, and Iyengar Yoga entered the Oxford English Dictionary. Iyengar Yoga could be characterized by its attention to anatomical detail and precision in the placement of the body in various *āsanas*, perhaps epitomized by Iyengar's *Light on Yoga* (1966). However, Iyengar Yoga is very much a living tradition. Much of Iyengar's teaching (and that of his children) since the 1960s has focused on making the postures in *Light on Yoga* more accessible for those with limited physical ability. In Iyengar Yoga, the teacher's instructions are concentrated on positioning the body into correct alignment and on directions of actions (e.g., rotation and extension). In Iyengar Yoga, movement between postures is less standardized than in Pranayama Yoga or in Pattabhi Jois-inspired "Vinyasa" sequences (see Burger, 2006) and does not involve the verbatim scripting of a Bikram Yoga franchise (see Fish, 2007). Nevertheless, Iyengar Yoga places great attention on sequences of postures and how actions and movements link postures together. In the Iyengar Yoga tradition, attention toward and research into the physiological effects of the practice on the physical body is connected with an observation of the effects of the practice on the mind. The ultimate goal for Iyengar, the "cessation of the fluctuations of the mind" (see Patañjali's *Yogasūtras* I.2), is essentially the same as Pranayama Yoga's cultivation of a "moment of complete peace" (Cabral, 2002a: 51).

While in many ways Iyengar has created a new Modern Postural Yoga tradition (to use the typology of De Michelis 2004), Iyengar very much attributes his authority in teaching yoga to study of the *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali (see Singleton, 2008) and to the instruction of his personal guru (and brother-in-law), Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888–1989), who lectured in Indian philosophy (yoga, *sāṃkhya*, and *mīmāṃsā*) and taught *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma*, under the sponsorship of the Krishna Raja Wadiyar IV (1884–1940), Maharaja of Mysore (Sjoman, 1999). Iyengar's understanding of yoga was developed within a traditional guru–*śiṣya* interaction, but he was also taught in a yoga school (*yogaśālā*) inside the Jaganmohan Palace in Mysore (Singleton, 2010; Sjoman, 1999: 175–210).

B. K. S. Iyengar was born the eleventh of thirteen children to a poor Tamil-speaking Brahmin family in rural Karnataka. Iyengar's mother was affected by the worldwide influenza epidemic at the time of his birth. Iyengar believes that his mother's illness while she was pregnant weakened him physically and slowed his mental development (Iyengar, 1988: 2). Iyengar was a sickly child who was not able to concentrate on his studies. After his father died when Iyengar was nine years old, the financial and practical responsibility for the younger children was split between the elder siblings. In spring 1934, Krishnamacharya (Iyengar's brother-in-law) asked B. K. S. Iyengar, then sixteen, to go to Mysore and stay with his wife (Iyengar's sister) during Krishnamacharya's absence on a short trip (Iyengar, 1978: 113). This temporary visit extended to three years.

Krishnamacharya had a traditional authority over Iyengar as his brother-in-law and benefactor, but he also had considerable personal charisma. Krishnamacharya trained Iyengar, who was living in his home, to obey his commandments unquestioningly. On his seventieth birthday Iyengar recalled:

My Guru is a man of unpredictable knowledge with unpredictable moods. It was not easy to read his mind. If he said one thing at one time, he used to contradict the same at other time [sic]. We were made to accept and obey him without questioning. If I sit in the ordinary cross legs with the left leg first, he would say, take the right first. If the right is placed first, he would say, take the left first. If I stand, he would say "is that the way to stand?" If I change, he would say "who asked you to change?" . . . Life became perplexing to me. Difference in age set fear in my heart and his presence was like a frightful nightmare. (Iyengar, 1978: 5)

Similar to Yogini Sunita's experience, the guru's instruction in yoga was not about religious dogma or specific beliefs but rather an approach to life. Krishnamacharya pushed Iyengar into a physical practice and a way of dealing with his ego that eventually led into the zeal of self-discipline.

Iyengar has claimed that personal instruction in *yogāsana* with Krishnamacharya was limited to three intense days, but Iyengar also practiced regularly in the *yogaśālā* with the other students (Iyengar undated: 1–2). By October 1935 Iyengar reported that he was judged to have given the best performance of all of Krishnamacharya's students in all three grades of "elementary, intermediate, and advanced courses" of *yogāsana* (Iyengar undated: 3).³ This experience of a *yogaśālā* might have been important to the later institutionalization of Iyengar's yoga teaching. Iyengar has not written about the impact of practicing in the group environment that Krishnamacharya established in Mysore, but group teaching was certainly significant for Iyengar's *āsana* development while in Mysore and was also the type of teaching Iyengar was initially asked to provide by Krishnamacharya.

Having failed to achieve a school-leaving certificate and having learned no other trade, Iyengar felt he had no alternative but to teach yoga for a living (Iyengar n.d.: 3). At first Iyengar attempted to work in other parts of Mysore. However, he did not receive any viable employment. In September 1937, Iyengar accepted a request that was sent to Krishnamacharya to train college students in Pune for a six-month period (ibid., p. 4). Although he found it difficult to earn a living in Pune after his initial contract had expired, Iyengar decided to stay on in the city: "The freedom had come to me by chance which I did not like to lose at any cost. If I go back, I have to join my Guruji only. That means to live in the web of constant fear" (Iyengar, 1988: 16).⁴ After he left Mysore, Iyengar primarily taught himself by a close observation of his own *āsana* practice (ibid.). Slowly he built up a successful clientele in Pune, partially by addressing individuals with medical conditions for which local biomedical doctors felt they could offer only limited help (ibid., p. 17). Iyengar's yoga teaching expanded from Pune through the personal influence of violin virtuoso Yehudi Menuhin (1916–1999). In 1952, Menuhin gave a tour in the newly independent India, and one of Iyengar's students was a member of the official welcoming party. B. K. S. Iyengar was asked to give a demonstration to the famous violinist, which turned into a regular teaching arrangement. Menuhin brought Iyengar to Europe in 1954 and the United States in 1956 (where Iyengar did not again teach until 1973) (Magidoff, 1973: 256–7). Every year between 1960 and 1974, Iyengar spent at least a month in London at Menuhin's expense, first to give the violinist private lessons in his home and second to popularize yoga more widely (Menuhin, 1996: 259). What began as a traditional guru-*śiṣya* arrangement between Menuhin and Iyengar eventually became the catalyst for transforming the transmission of a yoga tradition.

Iyengar gave public yoga demonstrations and received good press coverage on his visits to London in the early 1960s. For the first few years, Iyengar only had a dozen or so regular students, most connected personally to Menuhin ("Working for Health", 1961; *Daily Mail*, 1961; Marris, 2005).



Figure 7.2: Iyengar gave public yoga demonstrations. (Photo courtesy of the Iyengar Yoga Institute, Maida Vale.)

The small size of these early classes created an intense personal interaction between the keen yoga students and Iyengar, similar to the traditional guru-*śiṣya* transmission of the yoga tradition. Individual feedback was very important for many of Iyengar's early students, and they could ask Iyengar directly for advice about how to deal with particular problems. Diana Clifton, along with several of these first students, corresponded with Iyengar regularly during the '60s and '70s and exchanged news of their families as well as receiving Iyengar's advice on yoga. For example, Clifton sent a series of photographs of herself practicing *āsanas* to Iyengar for comment, and in reply he wrote: "I went through all the pictures and remarked in the back. In the whole you have made a good progress. For your husband standing postures and twistings are good. . . . Hope members of the yoga class are fine" (Iyengar, 1962).

In 1962, one of Iyengar's London students provided Gerald Yorke, a publishing agent, with Iyengar's manuscript for a comprehensive instructional guide to *yogāsana*. Over the next few years, Yorke made extensive suggestions for revisions to this work, and in 1966 it was eventually published by Allen & Unwin as *Light on Yoga*. It quickly came to be referred to as the bible of *yogāsana* (Iyengar, 1993: xx–xxi; Tuft, 1971). The publication of *Light on Yoga* and the media association between Menuhin and Iyengar were important in raising the visibility of Iyengar yoga in Britain (see, e.g., "Yehudi Menuhin & His Guru", 1963).

The publication of *Light on Yoga* was also a significant influence for the acceptance of Iyengar's teaching into the Inner London Educational Authority (ILEA). The ILEA coordinated all publicly funded education classes in Inner London on subjects that ranged from sewing to car mechanics, foreign languages, and swimming. Across the country Local Educational Authorities (LEAs) promoted these classes to reeducate the population in the period between the close of World War II and Margaret Thatcher's cuts to public services in the 1980s. The transformation of Iyengar's teaching required by the educational authorities created something new in the tradition of Modern Postural Yoga (Newcombe, 2007).

In contrast to Birmingham (which introduced Yogini Sunita's classes to the public in 1963), an experimental yoga class was not approved in the ILEA until 1967.⁵ By this time, the ILEA could be seen as jumping on an established cultural bandwagon of interest in Indian spirituality.⁶ At this time, the chief inspector for physical education at the ILEA was a man called Peter McIntosh. McIntosh was something of a physical culture visionary—he was involved in forming the U.K. Sports Council and the International Council of Sport, Science and Physical Education (Huggins, 2001). He was an enthusiastic advocate of sport for “its own sake” and firmly championed the importance of physical culture, linking it with classical Greek ideals (McIntosh, 1968: 114). It was McIntosh who took a personal interest in introducing this new subject of yoga to the physical education curriculum for London.

While the experimental class in London was a success, the committee in charge of physical education at the ILEA wanted yoga classes to be safely and respectably institutionalized. While excited about the potential of yoga, particularly for the elderly and those with limited physical ability, the ILEA officials wanted to identify a suitably qualified teacher:

Owing to the growing demand for classes there is a tendency for well-meaning enthusiasts—some perhaps not so well-meaning—to push themselves forward as teachers. Inspectors of physical education do not have the experience in this particular subject necessary to ensure good standards of teaching and work. (ILEA, 1969, Report No. 11)

The committee considered establishing yoga associations, and McIntosh visited “a number of [yoga] classes” but apparently did not find what he was looking for in what was going on elsewhere in the country (ILEA, 1969, Report 25.1.69). Apparently fortuitously, McIntosh happened to speak with Yehudi Menuhin's sister, Hephzibah Hauser, who felt that she had benefited from Iyengar's teaching (Marris, 2005). McIntosh then spent a period investigating and discussing yoga as a subject with Iyengar. McIntosh reported that he discussed with Iyengar “the difficulties in the way of ensuring that those who offer themselves as teachers at Hatha Yoga are competent and reliable” (ILEA,

1969, Report No. 11). The ILEA officials were impressed by *Light on Yoga* describing it as “probably the most reliable English text on the subject [of Hatha Yoga]” (ibid.). In Iyengar, McIntosh found a quality of instruction in yoga in which he felt confident. In late 1969, ILEA agreed to approve “gurus trained by Mr. B. K. S. Iyengar, the author of ‘Light on Yoga,’ a recognized authoritative book on this subject” as qualified to teach yoga on public funds throughout inner London. In doing this, Iyengar-trained teachers received a bureaucratic authority in addition to the charismatic authority required to inspire trust and interest in potential yoga students outside of a structured environment (ILEA, 1969, Report No. 11). It is interesting that the ILEA report called the Iyengar-approved teachers “gurus”; I have found no other evidence of guru being used in the Iyengar movement except with reference to Iyengar himself as Guruji.

The agenda of ILEA shaped how Iyengar was teaching yoga in two main ways: (1) Iyengar was explicitly asked to teach physical aspects of yoga and avoid discussion of religion or spirituality⁷; and (2) there was an emphasis on safety and avoiding physical injury in the students. The ILEA agreement with Iyengar specified that yoga was to be taught only “provided that instruction is confined to ‘asanas’ and ‘pranayamas’ (postures and breathing disciplines) and does not extend to the philosophy of Yoga as a whole” (ILEA, 1969, 25.11.69). Regarding the safety of yoga classes, the ILEA medical advisor assessed Iyengar’s teaching and recommended that those with “five types of disorder” (unnamed in the report) should be excluded from general yoga classes to avoid possible harm (ILEA, 1969, Report No. 11). The yoga classes in ILEA were expected to benefit healthy participants’ levels of fitness and flexibility; any further benefits were not to be promoted.

These two stipulations of yoga teaching under ILEA clearly continue to resonate with what is expected of yoga teacher training programs in the twenty-first century. Emphasis is placed in most teacher training programs on how to keep students safe from injury. Although many yoga teacher training programs now include yoga philosophy, this is often explored in a nonconfessional context that was only beginning to become established in the 1970s.⁸ The situation in ILEA reflects an attempt to control the more spiritual, ineffable, and unpredictable aspects of the yoga tradition within something that was safe and beneficial within the context of adult, physical education. It was a utilitarian compromise that angered other yoga groups in Britain. This was particularly true of the British Wheel of Yoga, a national association of yoga teachers, who argued at this time that yoga was more properly a philosophy than a physical discipline, and that classes in adult education should consist equally of postures, *prāṇāyāma*, meditation, and philosophy (Newcombe, 2008: 62–79).

The ILEA format was a curious meld between bureaucracy and charismatic authority. The “gurus approved by Iyengar” to teach in ILEA were subject to

the “prior approval of the Senior Inspector of Physical Education” (then Peter McIntosh) and therefore nominally subject to a “quality control” at ILEA’s discretion. Iyengar himself lived in Pune and came to London only once a year. In practice, from 1971 to 1979, both teachers and would-be yoga teachers for ILEA attended a weekly class run by Silva Mehta (1926–1994) at the Physical Education College in Paddington. Iyengar would approve future yoga teachers by watching participants in the class on his annual visits (Finesilver, 1999; personal interview with John and Ros Claxton, December 5, 2004). For the first few years there were no standardized syllabi of postures or contraindications for specific medical conditions. However, within a few years Iyengar developed three grades of progressively more difficult *āsanas* for the ILEA classes. By 1979 approximately two hundred yoga teachers had been trained on this course (Mehta, 1983).

Participants remember Iyengar’s annual visits as resulting in a “tough” and “highly charged” experience (personal interview with John and Ros Claxton, December 5, 2004). Iyengar attempted to give his students control over both their minds and bodies by demanding precision in *āsanas* (“The Sutras of Iyengar” c.1970s: 11). Much of Iyengar’s instruction was focused on details of how to work in the basic postures (Herremans, 1974–5). In response to criticisms that he only taught physical postures, Iyengar described his approach as a pragmatic expedient: “Better life can be taught without using religious words. Meditation is of two types, active and passive. I took the active side of meditation by making students totally absorbed in the poses” (Dale n.d.). Iyengar attempted to give his students control over both their minds and bodies by demanding precision in *āsana*.

Some of the students experienced that elusive moment of peace, as one student articulated:

He never warned us or prepared us for special experiences. He simply led us, all unawares, into an altered state of consciousness and then called our attention to it when we were already there . . . my mind had been like a deep pool, unruffled by random thoughts and fancies. If I had the slightest expectation that he was going to lead us into that sort of experience, I would have been so greedy for it that I would have missed it altogether. (Herremans, 1974–5).

At least some of Iyengar’s English students reported experiencing personal transformations, which they attributed to Iyengar’s charisma and skill in yoga. Although the ILEA extracted some compromises for the teaching of yoga in London, the teacher training system for Iyengar Yoga in the ILEA was similar to the system that Sunita developed, in that it was primarily reliant on Iyengar’s personal charisma in deciding who embodied the yoga tradition enough to teach it.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF IYENGAR YOGA

Iyengar's tradition of yoga became fully institutionalized only when it developed a form of transmission that was not dependent on Iyengar's charismatic authority. It was in Manchester during the 1970s that a system developed aimed at isolating a syllabus and principles for qualifying teachers. Part of the catalyst for this change was logistical; Iyengar's annual visits were based in London. Iyengar first came to Manchester in 1968 at the invitation of two women who were already teaching yoga in the LEA evening classes (Maslen, 1992).⁹ Iyengar's demonstration popularized yoga, and to meet the demand for more yoga teachers in the LEA structure the Manchester and District Iyengar Yoga Institute was established and a course for training yoga teachers was designed ("East Manchester Area of Further Education: Yoga Demonstration", 1968; "Indian Yoga Expert at Spurley Hey", 1968; Maslen, 1992). This institute had no official premises but used the LEA premises (often school buildings) for evening classes and teachers did administration from home.

The Manchester-based teacher training program started in 1971–72. It was open to those who had taken yoga classes under a recognized teacher for at least two years. The course lasted thirty-four weeks at four hours per week, with an emphasis on physiology and anatomy to "safeguard against physical injury which can be incurred if the complicated posture exercises are taught by a person uninstructed in this direction" (MDIY, 1972: 6). The successful passing of both a written exam and practical teaching assessment assessed by both yoga instructors and "educational experts" would result in a diploma "recognised by the Manchester Education Committee" (ibid.). While Iyengar did not personally select teachers (as he did in London), he was consulted on the syllabus, which facilitated the growth of a bureaucratic means of transmitting Iyengar's understanding of yoga. Due to the physical distance between Iyengar and his English students, a system of assessing standards of teaching *yogāsana* developed that was not personality dependent. This development was crucial to the global popularization of yoga in the Iyengar tradition and has influenced the shape of other traditions of yoga teaching.

As the 1970s progressed, Iyengar teachers in England began to work together to create a national assessment body that issued certificates. In 1975 it was reported to Iyengar that two people in Oxford had been "taken to hospital from yoga classes" reported to be taught by another yoga association's teachers (Iyengar, 1975). As a result of this, it was requested that a pupil of Iyengar conduct three teacher training classes at the Oxford College of Further Education. In response to this request Iyengar chose one of his first English students, Diana Clifton. In consultation with Iyengar, Clifton designed a set of syllabuses with "an emphasis on safety" and sent it to Iyengar for approval. The course in Oxford involved observing a yoga class for beginners. Later the teachers would be taught "to assist so as to get an understanding of how to

teach beginners" (ibid.). This teaching method—to observe and correct incorrect physical action in *asana*—quickly became the focus for the Iyengar teaching method in Britain.

From 1978, formal assessments of all Iyengar-trained teachers in Britain were standardized on a national level by the formation of a professional organization, the B. K. S. Iyengar Teachers' Association. At the end of a training period, potential Iyengar Yoga teachers were assessed by a panel of qualified teachers whom they did not know personally. Emphasis on safety and avoiding harm rather than on the personal transformation of the pupil became the overall standard for teaching beginners. A focus on physical actions also made it easier to reduce the teaching of yoga into a syllabus. In June 1978, ILEA was informed that Iyengar was now issuing certificates to teachers qualified in his system at three levels: elementary, intermediate, and advanced (BKSITA, 1978: 1). Elementary and intermediate levels were assessed in Britain, while advanced certificates were issued by Iyengar personally in India (Assessments for Teaching Certificates, 1979–1980, no page numbers). This decentralized authority away from Iyengar but maintained a place for his charismatic oversight at the top of a pyramid of teaching.

Since the late 1970s in Britain, and increasingly throughout the world, a generation of teachers is being guided in how to teach Iyengar Yoga without any personal contact with Iyengar. The facilitation of these international networks of Iyengar's students was made possible by the model of distance teaching developed by Iyengar in the 1970s for his English students who were working within the already established structure of state-funded adult education classes. Iyengar began regular trips to Southern Africa from 1968, and there has been a formally organized association for the region since the late 1970s.¹⁰ Iyengar made his second visit to the United States in 1973; the BKS Iyengar Yoga National Association of the United States (IYNAUS) began assessing teacher training candidates in 1985. In the 1990s, Iyengar Associations and teacher training organizations were founded in Canada, Western Europe, Israel, and New Zealand, while even more recently institutionalized Iyengar yoga has spread to Eastern Europe, South America, and East Asia.¹¹

At the head of this bureaucratic pyramid, there is still a charismatic element in the transmission of Iyengar Yoga. In 1976, Iyengar's international students funded the opening of a yoga center in Pune, and this became the center of the global Iyengar network. Senior students worldwide began traveling to Pune for a month or more of intensive daily lessons with Iyengar, his daughter Geeta, and his son Prashant. This ensured that students continue to have a personal relationship with Iyengar as a teacher and that teaching is controlled and standardized at one source. Those who train Iyengar Yoga teachers locally are also expected to have been taught yoga at the Iyengar Institute in Pune. As of 2012, Geeta, Prashant, and Iyengar's granddaughter Abi all teach classes at the Institute in Pune, while Iyengar supervises from a

distance. As Iyengar ages, the charismatic authority has been transferring to a dynastic lineage of sorts in Pune. Presently, it appears that Iyengar has developed a successful method of institutionalizing his yoga tradition and ensuring the continuation of his influence.

Iyengar's work in England provides an example of a particular kind of routinization of charisma. Rather than independently establishing a bureaucratic system of transmission, Iyengar melded his charismatic yoga teaching with the already established institution of adult education. The resulting method of transmission involved standard syllabi and teacher training courses that were successfully exported globally. The further transmission of this method of teaching (i.e., the subject of Iyengar yoga) has become something independent of the dynastic lineage. However, it remains to be seen how the compromise between bureaucratic and charismatic authority in the Iyengar tradition will transform in the twenty-first century after Iyengar's death.

CONCLUSION

Sunita and Iyengar show two different trajectories for charismatic authority and the continuation of a yoga tradition. While Yogini Sunita was highly popular during her lifetime, her approach was personal, and she never developed—or intended to develop—a bureaucratic framework for transferring her knowledge that was not ultimately dependent on a guru's intuition. Despite training a group of Pranayama Yoga teachers, Sunita never separated the knowledge contained within her tradition of yoga from the guru-*śiṣya* model. Her tradition has continued, but with teachers of Pranayama Yoga currently numbering between fifty and sixty Sunita's tradition has faded as a social movement (personal interview with K. Cabral, July 17, 2007).

In contrast, Iyengar's teaching has been institutionalized to the extent that his understanding of *āsana* can be (largely) transmitted in his personal absence. This transformation occurred in the process of adapting his teaching to the needs of the state-funded adult education system in Britain. This environment created teacher training syllabuses that could produce Iyengar quality-controlled teachers in the absence of Iyengar's physical presence. In the stages of getting yoga approved in the ILEA and Manchester areas, Iyengar effectively routinized his charisma so that a recognizable teaching of yoga could continue in his absence. This system has spread Iyengar Yoga worldwide, and this form of teaching now influences *āsana* in most other forms of Modern Postural Yoga worldwide (De Michelis, 2005: 187).

The contemporary experience of yoga is not defined primarily by a relationship with a charismatic personality. While this development has made yoga more accessible, it has also made yoga teachers' effects more safe and predictable. Of course, they can still exert considerable charisma within the

institutionalized structures of international coordinating associations. However, the very structures that promote greater popularization, reliability, and safety in yoga teaching (e.g., ethical standards and professional accountability practices) also sanitize the guru-*śiṣya* relationship.

Iyengar and Yogini Sunita's personal biographies emphasize the transformative relationship with a guru. Iyengar's transformation from sickly child to determined *āsana* practitioner would not have been possible within an adult education class. Likewise, one wonders if Bernadette Cabral would have been so profoundly affected by her guru's teachings had she herself learned yoga at the Birmingham Athletics Institute. The institutionalization of yoga might promote the greater good in terms of safety and the benefits of health and relaxation commonly ascribed to contemporary yoga practice, and the lack of explicit religiosity offends neither contemporary humanistic ideology nor the ideal of a human right to individual religious freedom while learning a skill. However, global participation came at the cost of losing the more extreme elements in the dynamic, unpredictable, transformative, and possibly abusive guru-*śiṣya* relationship. In this, the institutionalization of charisma marks a significant new chapter in the thousands of years of yoga history. As the Birmingham city officials lamented in 1965, it is an irritating business to find a qualified yoga teacher. Even early in the twenty-first century when there are a plethora of organizations offering accreditation and ethical frameworks for qualified yoga teachers, it can remain a struggle for a student to find a yoga teacher that is both safe and is able to offer profound physical, psychological, and spiritual transformation. As Sunita's legacy demonstrates, is unlikely that Modern Yoga could have become a global phenomenon on the strength of interpersonal, charismatic interactions alone. A tension between keeping a tradition viable through institutionalization and maintaining the possibility of a transformational experience through contact with an inspirational teacher has been a theme in the global expansion of Modern Yoga—and this tension shows no signs of reaching a resolution in the foreseeable future.

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NOTES

1. Conventional wisdom has held that the US Immigration Act of 1924 (which limited immigration to 2% of the number of immigrants already present from a given nation—seriously limiting immigration from Asian countries) prevented the global spread of yoga before the 1960s. However, there were no restrictions on Indian residents as members of the Commonwealth who entered Britain as full citizens before 1962—after which date immigration restrictions began to be enforced. Therefore, more factors need to be considered in the question of why yoga did not become more popular a practice outside of India prior to the 1960s.
2. The BBC lunchtime program Pebble Mill at One produced a regular yoga feature with teachers who had studied with Yogini Sunita during the 1970s.
3. These might be earlier versions of the sequences that have become Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga as taught by another of Krishnamacharya's students, Pattabhi Jois.
4. These challenges were not insignificant. In addition to having little money, Iyengar (a Tamil) spoke neither of the local languages (Hindi and Marathi), and his English had not been good enough to achieve his school-leaving certificate.
5. Alan Babington gave the first "experimental" yoga class in Inner London Adult Education at the Clapham Institute. He later moved to the independent Mary Ward Centre in Bloomsbury where he developed Albion Yoga.
6. Perhaps most significantly, the Beatles' well-publicized association with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi from August 1967 to summer 1968 raised the profile of meditation and yoga for many who had previously never considered the subject.
7. It is likely that Iyengar's teaching could have included more explicit references to Indian religiosity had ILEA not requested this approach. For example in 1961 descriptions of public yoga demonstrations by Iyengar ("Working for Health", 1961; *Daily Mail*, 1961) make it seem that Iyengar was referencing scripture at this time.
8. Another important British "guru" of modern yoga in this context was Wilfred Clark who, through the British Wheel of Yoga, worked tirelessly to have yoga considered as philosophy (or at least not solely as physical education) in the British adult education system.

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9. One of the women, Pennrell Reed, had learned yoga in Birmingham (probably from Sunita Cabral) and the other (Jeanne Maslen) transferred from teaching Keep Fit to teaching yoga after seeing Ms. Reed demonstrate yoga at the end of a Keep Fit class in the mid-1960s.
10. For a short basic history of countries and dates see <http://www.bksiyengar.co.za/html/history.html> (accessed April 29, 2012). Australia began institutionalizing Iyengar Yoga in the 1980s.
11. Iyengar Yoga Association of South East & East Asia (IYASEEA) established in 2009; in 2012, if living in Southeast Asia, one could train as an accredited Iyengar Yoga teacher in Bali, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Singapore, and Macau. Available at http://iyengaryoga.asia/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=35 (accessed April 29, 2012).

