Yoga Renamed Is Still Hindu
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IN MY OPINION

Yoga Renamed Is Still Hindu

I challenge attempts to snatch yoga from its roots

subhas r. tiwari

In the past few months I have received several calls from journalists around the country seeking my views on the question of whether the newly minted "Christian Yoga " is really yoga.

My response is, "The simple, immutable fact is that yoga originated from the Vedic or Hindu culture. Its techniques were not adopted by Hinduism, but originated from it." These facts need to be unequivocally stated in light of some of the things being written to the contrary by yoga teachers. The effort to separate yoga from Hinduism must be challenged because it runs counter to the fundamental principles upon which yoga itself is premised, the yamas (restraints) and niyamas (observances). These ethical tenets and religious practices are the first two limbs of the eight-limbed ashtanga yoga system which also includes asana (postures), pranayama (breath control), pratyahara (sense withdrawal), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation) and samadhi (contemplation/Self Realization). Efforts to separate yoga from its spiritual center reveal ignorance of the goal of yoga.

I believe such efforts point to a concerted, long-term plan to deny yoga its origin. This effort to extricate yoga from its Hindu mold and cast it under another name is far from innocent. It is reminiscent of the pattern evident throughout the long history and dynamics of colonizing powers. Firstly, the physical geography of a people was colonized, then their mental arena. Now we are witnessing the next phase, the encroachment on the spiritual territory of Hinduism which began in the

last few decades. Some of the agents behind "Christian Yoga " also draw from the same treasure chest which supports the conversion movements of Hindus and other sacred cultures.

In 1989, Pope Benedict, then Cardinal Ratzinger, issued a scathing report against yoga and warned Catholics of "dangers and errors " from "non-Christian forms of meditation." He stated, "The Hindu concept of absorbing of the human self into the divine self is never possible, not even in the highest states of grace." In 2003, the Vatican issued a more conciliatory directive permitting Catholics to engage in the "New Age " in general and yoga specifically, but still warning against its spiritual and meditation practices. "I want to say simply that the New Age presents itself as a false utopia in answer to the profound thirst for happiness in the human heart. New Age is a misleading answer to the oldest hopes of man, " said Cardinal Paul Poupard. This document gives its blessings for Catholics to practice yoga, but not as a spiritual discipline!

Today, however, we are witnessing an initiative toward yoga from ordinary Christians whose positive physical, mental and spiritual heath and well being experienced as a result of "engaging " yoga cannot be denied or ignored. This 5,000-year-old system is perhaps the best known, most accessible and cost effective health and beauty program around. Yoga is also much more, as it was intended by the Vedic seers as an instrument which can lead one to apprehend the Absolute, Ultimate Reality, called the Brahman Reality, or God. If this attempt to co-opt yoga into their own tradition continues, in several decades of incessantly spinning the untruth as truth through re-labelings such as "Christian yoga, " who will know that yoga is--or was--part of Hindu culture?

The giant tree of yoga whose limbs reach high up into the different atmospheres, and whose branches stretch across the wide river offering its protection to so many, cannot deny that its roots are located in a specific place Hinduism. Seeking shelter under its vast umbrella does not entitle you to change the tree; instead, learn from its unselfish display of love and generosity.

Subhas R. Tiwari is a professor at the Hindu University of America. He is a graduate of the famed Bihar Yoga Bharati University with a master's degree in yoga philosophy.