

Jung and Yoga

a meeting of East and West

Lina Mookerjee explores her relationship with yoga and spirituality in practice, through Jung's writings

My Jungian initiation, in 2009, was through a course of study at the University of Lampeter, requiring me to review *Yoga and the West*, originally published in India in 1936.¹ The paper's overall message encouraged Western yoga seekers to understand, but not practise, yoga because of differences existing between Eastern and Western psyches. I wanted to know how Jung's message applied to me – my parental Indian heritage was yogic, yet I was born and raised in England. Noticing my internal resistance to his inferred message, I turned familiar arrogance into useful curiosity by wanting to understand his theory, 'Jung's Yoga'. In order to do this, I needed to understand his way of thinking. Little did I know how my life would change from that first Jungian encounter through my review of the paper. I would like to share my thoughts with you now.

Yoga and the West

'My criticism is directed solely against the application of yoga to the peoples of the West. The Spiritual development of the West has been along entirely different lines from that of the East and has therefore produced conditions which are the most unfavourable soil one can think of for the application of yoga. Western civilisation is scarcely a thousand years old and must first of all free itself from its barbarous one-sidedness. This means, above all, deeper insight into the nature of man. But no insight is gained by repressing and controlling the unconscious, and least of all by imitating methods which have grown up under totally different psychological conditions. In the course of the centuries the West will produce its own yoga.'¹

The above quote provides a valuable insight into the world of Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), regarding the

psychological and spiritual meeting points of yoga between East and West – or not as the case may be. With his fiery and determined disposition, he was adamant in his dissuasion of Westerners practising yoga. In light of this, the purpose of this article is to articulate Jung's views for discussion whilst answering two clear aims. Firstly, to explore the reasons for his disapproval. Secondly, to see what relevance his views could have to a 21st century Western yoga practitioner, thus providing you, the reader, with an invitation to possibly reflect on what these findings could mean for you.

Creative self-exploration

My own discomfort stemmed from feeling confused about how Jung's theories could relate to my own situation. I was a hybrid fusion of two cultures – born into an Indian Brahmin family, its roots based in Calcutta, and

a long established priest-ancestry in Hinduism, yoga and spirituality. Yet my birth in the late 1960s and 'childhood' home (including my socialisation and education) was in the industrial heartland of Birmingham. How could Jung offer me another insight into my own spiritual journey?

In 2013 I was awarded an MA degree in Jungian Psychotherapy (Analytical Psychology) and Healing Practice, which included a dissertation focused on challenging Kali's misrepresentation as a Jungian archetype. Inspired by my own struggle and search for meaning, I have developed personal and spiritual development courses. Both as student and course developer, I feel fortunate and blessed to have met Jung's world and to have gained an understanding of Jung's wisdom in its context, its valuable contribution and its application to many spheres of life (including yoga). In hindsight, and probably most importantly, it has enabled me to develop the ability to hold another (and at times a polar opposite) perspective without judgment.

Jung's background

Jung was a highly respected and renowned Western psychiatrist and psychotherapist (and creator of analytical psychology). From his lectures and writings, he was on his own long and turbulent spiritual journey, in search of a truth and meaning. His 20-volume *Collected Works*² captured the various 'inner pilgrimage' reflections (along with its many struggles) and subsequent theories he proposed throughout his working life.

A Swiss and a Calvinist Protestant, he was, it seems, a committed seeker of knowledge, truth and understanding that stemmed from a challenging childhood, whilst possessing a sensitive disposition. His yearning continued as a psychiatrist at Burghölzli Mental Hospital, which treated patients suffering from psychoses. Jung wanted to make sense of the mental suffering he observed and was expected to treat. His seven-year collaboration with Sigmund Freud led to a new role in psychotherapy and to the development of his primary concept of 'individuation'. His search continued into understanding the development of man's consciousness and spiritual evolution; map of the psyche; the unconscious; persona; personality types; archetypes; complexes; dream-work analysis; introversion and extroversion; alchemy, anima/animus; synchronicity; alchemy. All are written and contained within a 20-volume set known as the *Collected Works of CGJung*.

The importance of the unconscious

The basic driver of Jung's work was to increase his understanding of the unconscious (personal and collective) part of 'Self', the large psychic container that he considered held the key to man's individuation. The psyche (soul) was considered as the totality of being and existed as a self-regulating entity that constantly adapted to influences to maintain its homeostasis. It was the action of movement between pairs of opposites that enabled this self-regulation mechanism to occur, and the unconscious was part of this process. So if there was an over-tendency towards being

busy, the psyche would create ways to alert the individual to regain a sense of balance, by encouraging ways to relax and 'be'. If the quiet call was not being heeded, then more overt scenarios might be created.

In terms of the unconscious, Jung considered it to consist of two facets - firstly the repressed, hidden parts, and secondly the creative potentiality that exists within man. In terms of the repressed parts of self, these, Jung believed, consisted of all life experiences deemed too overwhelming, painful or distressing and redirected out of view of conscious awareness and into the unconscious. The Jungian journey (in the form of analysis) towards individuation involved many steps, initially bringing the unconscious contents into consciousness awareness. By making sense of this 'information' and meaning for the individual, this would lead to an inner understanding. Its eventual integration as part of the psyche would contribute to a growing sense of wholeness, whilst also providing a mechanism for repairing any psychological fragmentation.

Jung's position on yoga

'Jung's Yoga' was not restricted to India's classical paradigm (as one of the six *dharshanas* of Indian philosophical thinking) or to Patanjali's systemised Ashtanga model. Instead, he was looking through different lenses, belonging to a Western empiricist and scientist, with grounded theories in observation and experimentation. Jung's life work involved increasing understanding of the unconscious part of self, where the unconscious was the subject to be observed. He came to regard this enquiry as if it were a scientific experiment, believing that in order to be able to observe another, the observer needed to be fully aware of his own nature and personality: 'The concept of the unconscious is for me an exclusively psychological concept, and not a philosophical concept of a metaphysical nature... the existence of unconscious processes... is derived simply and solely from experience.'³

Jung's self-exploration resulted in various psychic experiences, and struggling to find explanations using logic and rational thinking, he looked to Eastern philosophy (yoga in particular) for validation and answers. He also realised that yoga enabled, citing Coward⁴, 'broadening and heightening one's experience of consciousness, by stimulating one to an increased awareness.'⁴ Yet Jung was very clear in warning Western enquirers that when it came to yoga, it was vital to maintain an objective stance. This was to avoid the potential for psychic confusion through ingesting culturally and philosophically alien concepts. Without going through any conscious 'intellectual digestion', by simply copying Eastern practices, this would result in becoming just an imitation, a carbon-copy, without any depth. He warned that to abdicate a Western scientific bias would be unwise, especially when engaging with such abstract Eastern concepts. Coward⁴ suggests that, for Jung, contact with the East could provide a way of redressing a homeostatic imbalance with the Western psyche. According to Jung, accessing Eastern concepts

could provide that valuable prompt for the seeker to find answers within their own cultural context. Jung was observant of the East's respect and practice of the intuitive at the expense of developing a scientific outlook, just as the West had developed a strong outer intellect at the expense of its own roots to an inner intuitive and spiritual self. Both could learn from each other. Coward describes that, for Jung, 'The West must not simply attempt to copy the Eastern spiritual yoga, or the East blindly adopt Western science. Each should study the other and gain inspiration from its example, but each must pursue its own development within its own historical consciousness.'⁴

In summary, two reasons explain why Jung considered it important to study yoga. Firstly, it was within Indian philosophy that he found meaning and validation of his own psychic experiences and reality. Secondly, yoga offered the modern Western man a wider and richer sense of consciousness beyond that offered by the collective's left-brain-dominant awareness. This provided a way to redevelop regard as well as connection with an intuitive sensitivity, and a psychic redress of homeostatic balance. Yet Jung remained fervent in his warnings against Europeans' adoption of yoga in terms of practice and philosophy.

Western yoga – Jung's perceived limitations

Jung¹ was aware that Western thinking, through the 15th century Renaissance influence, was limited to science and philosophy/religion. The increase in scientific and world discovery stressed the importance of willpower, intellect and proof, thus overriding the once influential 'subjective spiritual and religious experience'. This only further encouraged a psychic split within man's reality.

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Experiences processed rationally were valued and held in conscious awareness, whilst rejected psychic material was relegated to the hidden unconscious. Coward⁴ highlights Jung's assumption that Western man's ignorance of his own unconscious might emerge when encountering unfamiliar concepts. Jung suggested that exploring Eastern philosophical constructs might provoke two scenarios; firstly, any concepts considered 'strange' or 'odd' might actually be

the projected fears that cannot be readily owned or admitted to. Secondly, when a person 'adopts wholesale' the Eastern way of being, at the expense of disconnecting with their own cultural heritage, this could result in an internal psychic chaos. A chosen disregard of any rational processing of experience might only encourage an imitation existence, especially when there is little understanding of the psychic changes involved. For both scenarios, the consequences could simply further inflate the will and split with the unconscious dimension, and potentially lead to neurosis.

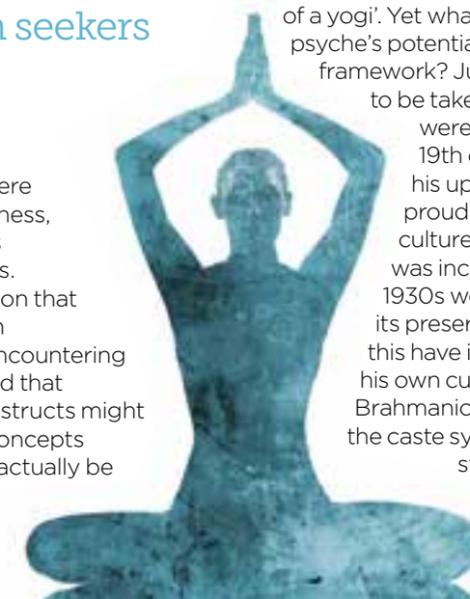
Yet Jung also recognised how connections with the East could be highly beneficial for soul-hungry Western seekers. Not only could parallel connections with one's own culture be useful but they could also provide the much needed impetus for valuing once again the importance of one's inner life and intuitive function. Coward⁴, citing Jung, says: 'Scientific as well as artistic and religious creativity may directly depend on sensitivity to the intuitive process of the unconscious'.

Conversely, Borrelli⁵ suggests how Jung criticised Europeans practising yoga through his repeated writing themes. These included his observation of people and suggestion that a rejection of personal heritage revealed a level of self-rejection; how the use of archetypes provided the interaction between the conscious and unconscious; how yoga was the equivalent to that of individuation; viewing Western seekers of Eastern religions and practices as their psyche's way of compensating for a spiritual imbalance.

Discussion

It is clear that Jung was adamant that Westerners should be discouraged from practising yoga, and his reasons seem plausible. However, as someone who lives within two cultures, there are three points to consider:

Preserving one's cultural context: Jung warned⁴ that adopting a deference towards an Eastern way of being might involve an inner psychic splitting of self, leading to denial and avoidance of parts that no longer 'fit the model of a yogi'. Yet what about inclusivity and respecting the psyche's potentiality to hold more possibilities than one framework? Jung was of his time and his theories need to be taken in context of when and where they were written. He was born at the end of the 19th century into a strict Calvinistic family, and his upbringing was influenced by a rigid and proud Germanic patriarchal and rule-bound culture. His theories were written while there was increasing unrest in an unstable Europe. The 1930s were a time of growing Nazi ideology and its preservation of the supreme Aryan race. Might this have influenced his urge and need to protect his own culture? The irony is that within the Brahmanic culture, this same ideology exists as the caste system and its expectation that no caste strata must mix, to avoid contamination.





Accessing the unconscious can be a truly magical and transformative process towards wholeness



Differences between Eastern and Western psyches: The idea that Eastern and Western psyches are different seems credible, especially when one considers how the former is introvert-oriented, and the latter sits at the opposing 'extrovert' pole, and how this reflects with the differences in philosophical orientations. In India, the unconscious, the sensitive intuitive faculties and the physical body are valued and integrated as part of the established spiritual-psychic framework, which makes assimilation of psychic experiences much easier. Such a framework also provides a greater capacity for the strength required to hold the 'created tension' when opposites compete for dominance. Whereas the Western person has a conditioning focused on externalising awareness (through left-brain intellect and will) and only experiences that are backed by evidence are considered valid, which could infer a difference within the 'internal wiring'. Jung also suggested that the West's reduced exposure to an established spiritual framework could explain why there is less reverence for the body or psychic unconscious compared to the East. Consequently, the Western psychic framework is less prepared for what emerges from psychic practices within yoga. With the 'thinking tendency', and less awareness of the intuitive faculties, processing these experiences can become arduous and potentially destabilising for mental processing and for staying present.

Is there any current evidence for this theory? I was invited to take part in research being carried out by Danny Hinton⁶, a doctoral researcher based at Aston University. The research focus is to look at how ethnic minorities perform in cognitive ability selection tests. There is evidence to suggest that performance is negatively affected as different cultures offer variance to meanings of words, thus affecting the ability to choose the correct answer. I am convinced that failing my 11+ grammar school exam, as did both of my sisters and all my Asian primary school friends, was as a result of us all struggling with verbal reasoning as we just 'didn't get it'. Yet, we all went on to pursue left-brain-dominant degrees and careers in science and engineering. So, even though we were all educated in British schools, was our inherited Indian wiring a contributing factor? I shall have to wait and see what Danny's research concludes.

Recognising a Western approach to yoga: as a seasoned yoga teacher, trainer and therapist who has been trained within the Western education system whilst having my spiritual yoga roots well planted in my Indian ancestry, I am continually amazed to see how yoga is developing. I can understand how Jung's theory of the collective psyche's need to continually redress balance applies here. With the West's preoccupation and deference towards the 'thinking

self', it has been to the detriment of its psychic soul and physical body – on both a personal and collective level. Therefore, it is totally understandable how, for the last 50 years and within thousands of classes, yoga's practice has centred primarily on posture and meditation practice. Its rising popularity might be explained as an answer to feeding increasing spiritual hunger and poverty. Maybe the time is coming to consider further developing this now established framework, to recognise the existence of the rich unconscious. Through my own therapy process and my psychotherapy client work, I observe how accessing the unconscious can be a truly magical and transformative process towards wholeness. Yet I also appreciate how one needs to be prepared, guided and supported through such enquiry. Without engaging conscious awareness or understanding, it can be counter-productive and unwise. That's why in India, a Guru is sought at times of spiritual development.

This draws me to my shared enquiry with you the reader. I invited you on an exploration of the rich, colourful and complex world of Carl Jung through his perspectives of the psyche and his considerations regarding this alien spiritual framework called yoga. I hope you have felt stimulated to find out more, even to explore any adverse reactions you may have felt whilst reading this article. Each sensation is a call for attention and possible action. In light of Jung's suggestion, 'In the course of the centuries the West will produce its own yoga'², as far as I am concerned the discussion has only just begun and I hope to continue this through my doctoral research. I look forward to receiving readers' thoughts and reflections on this matter.

Biography

An ex-electrical engineer, Lina is an integrative humanistic-Jungian counsellor, international lecturer, mindfulness-meditation and workshop facilitator and Director of Praxis School of Yoga, in Nottingham. Her inclusive spiritual approach is informed by a humanistic-Jungian-yogic matrix. Her current doctoral research is on therapist self-care and vicarious trauma.
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