

Bhajan Yoga is NOT Kundalini Yoga

The True Kundalini Yoga

“Kundalini” is a Sanskrit word that literally means “coiled serpent.” According to Hindu philosophy it is a form of divine feminine energy that is an aspect of Shakti, the primal cosmic energy. To Hindu’s, Kundalini is the creative energy that is the origin of mind and matter.

Sir John Woodroffe, a British orientalist, was born in Calcutta in 1865. India was still ruled by Britain. He was a lawyer at the Calcutta High Court before becoming a Tagore Law School professor. At the end of his career, he was Chief Justice of India. Besides his judicial duties, he studied Sanskrit and Hindu philosophy and published books under the pseudonym Arthur Avalon. In 1919, he released *The Serpent Power. The Secrets of Tantric & Shaktic Yoga*¹. Among Indian scholars, his work in Orientalism is considered ground-breaking. He profoundly understood Kundalini.

Sir John Woodroffe's book is recognized as the most essential document for the study and application of Kundalini Yoga. Yet, this comprehensive work was never cited by Bhajan.

Another essential work never mentioned in Bhajan’s teachings is the book *Kundalini Yoga* by Sri Swami Sivananda. The author was born in 1887 into a prominent Indian family. As a successful medical doctor, he observed that conventional medicine only cured superficial symptoms. In 1924, he began a rich spiritual life while continuing to care for the sick. In 1936, he started his own ashram on the banks of the Ganges. He broke with an old tradition by making spiritual reading available to everyone. Bringing yoga closer to the people earned him the name “Yogi Propagandananda.” His description of Kundalini Yoga is close to that of Sir John Woodroffe. However, his book is less academic, more accessible, and more practical.

The first page shows a picture of the bald author with a Buddha smile. An 11-leaf Lotus flower with the OM symbol at its center is pictured next to it. Four words are written around it: “Serve, Love, Meditate, Realize.” Those who studied Bhajan’s yoga will link this to his “Obey, Serve, Love, Excel” mantra. Was he inspired by Sri Swami Sivananda? A fact is that Bhajan's version is more attuned to his personal goals and interests. “Obey, Serve, Love, Excel” versus “Serve, Love, Meditate, Realize.”

Historian Dr Trilochan Singh² does not hold Yogi Bhajan’s knowledge and skills in high esteem. He mentions *the fantastic interpretations of Kundalini Yoga he (Yogi Bhajan) gives, the like of which I have never read in any Tantra text, nor known from any living Tantric scholar.*

¹ Book ‘The Serpent Power – The Secrets of Tantric & Shaktic Yoga’ by Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe) which is called the prime document for the study and application of Kundalini Yoga.

² Sikhism and Tantric Yoga – 1977 – Dr Trilochan Singh – Chapter 1 *Sikh Doctrines and Yogi Bhajan’s Secret Science.*

The 1977 Time article above mentioned how also Judith Tybert, the respected founder of the East-West Centre in Los Angeles questioned Yogi Bhajan's knowledge of *Kundalini Yoga*.

So, if it is not Kundalini Yoga, what is it?

Copy and Paste Yoga

Historian Philip Deslippe researched Yogi Bhajan's past, his yogic and spiritual education³. He found out that he started yoga classes when he was thirty in New Delhi. This means that he was not a *Master of Kundalini Yoga* at the age of sixteen as he often proclaimed. That's just another myth.

His yoga teacher was Swami Dharendra Brahmachari⁴. He taught a very specific yoga practice that is quite different from anything else. Philip Deslippe:

It is within Swami Dharendra's unique teachings that the defining characteristics of Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga can be found. The most significant of the numerous similarities between the two include the use of the rapid diaphragmatic breath through the nose known as *Bhastrika Pranayama* (renamed as Breath of Fire by Yogi Bhajan) while holding postures.

The research paper lists more examples of resemblances. It reveals also that parts of Dharendra's books were used in Yogi Bhajan's 3HO teaching material without accreditation.

On the Internet an old video⁵ of Dharendra's yoga positions and movements. Practitioners of Bhajan's yoga will immediately recognize the similarities.

Putting it all together, it seems that Yogi Bhajan created his yoga sets himself by combining elements from different practices and adding some of his own crazy ideas like the snoring. There's nothing ancient about it.

³ From Maharaj to Mahan Tantric: The Construction of Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga – Sikh Formations Religion and Culture Theory – Dec 212 – Philip Deslippe – University of California, Santa Barbara

⁴ Dharendra Brahmachari was a spiritual leader and yoga instructor who taught yoga to India's Prime Minister J. Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi.

⁵ On the website of a Swiss yogi who was the last student of Swami Dharendra Brahmachari, more information about his teachings can be found (kundalini-yoga.ch). Extremely interesting is the old movie *The Original Sukshma Vyayama* (1940s) in which practitioners of Bhajan's yoga will easily recognize the postures.