

Yoga and Physical Culture

Exercise and the Cultivation of Body,
Mind, and Soul in Modernity

Learning Objectives

- Situate yoga within the context of European physical culture.
- Identify key figures, institution, and trends in the history of the physical culture movement.
- Analyze how physical culture reinterpreted yoga and the role of *āsanas*.

Historical Context (1 of 2)

- late 19th-early 20th centuries
- Interest in evolution/eugenics/health
 - Lamarkian evolution
 - Social evolution
 - “Fitter Family” (early 20th)
- Nationalism
 - First modern Olympics (1896)
 - Wars

Historical Context (2 of 2)

- Anglophone interest in the world
 - increased connectivity
 - travel accounts
- World Parliament of Religion (1893)
 - Chicago's World Fair
 - Vivekananda's yoga (*Raja Yoga*)”



“You will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of the *Gītā*, you will understand *Gītā* better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger.”

-Swami Vivekananda

Physical Culture Movement

- Europe and US
- nationalist in origins
- Competing schools of practice



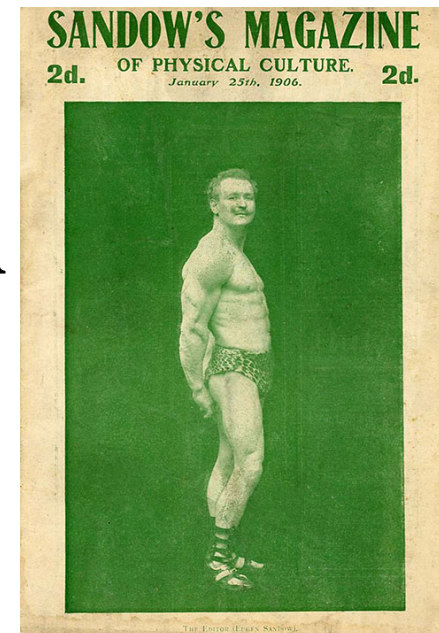
German Turnverein System



Swedish Ling System

Body Building

- Eugene Sandow
- Entire range of exercises
- Very popular in India
- response to “effeminacy”
- “greatest influence on modern yoga.”



Muscular Christianity

- morals are developed through the body
- emphasis on athletics



“...the least of the muscular Christians has hold of the old chivalrous and Christian belief, that a man's body is given him to be trained and brought into subjection, and then used for the protection of the weak, the advancement of all righteous causes, and the subduing of the earth which God has given to the children of men. He does not hold that mere strength or activity are in themselves worthy of any respect or worship, or that one man is a bit better than another because he can knock him down...he would prefer that man who can lift a hundredweight round his head...to the man who can construct a string of perfect Sorites.”

Thomas Hughes in *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1868, 170)

YMCA

- Young Men's Christian Association
- HC Buck
- postural yoga as PE curriculum
- “Y” ethos of piety and service found in India through *āsana*



Rise of Yoga as Exercise

- nativized
- modern *āsana*
 - health and hygiene
 - exercise regiment



Questions for Reflection

- What were the historical factors that influenced the physical culture movement and modern yoga?
- What were some of the major trends and institutions that developed from the physical culture movement?
- How did these factors influence modern yoga?