

# YOGHISM, CHRISTIANISM, AND THE ANDEAN COSMOVISION: AMALGAMATING YOGA IN BOLIVIA, ISSUES OF SYNCRETIC SPIRITUALITY

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## Abstract

As is the case in many countries, yoga initially arrived in Bolivia in the shape of books. One text stands out as possibly initiating Bolivia's yoga tradition: 'Autobiography of a Yogi' by Paramahansa Yogananda. Planting interest and curiosity for yoga among a mainly Christian audience searching for new forms of spirituality, the book was then followed by the arrival of Serge Raynaud de la Ferrière's Universal Great Brotherhood (GFU), promoting Yoga and a new movement he called 'Yoghism'. It was not until the 1970s that the first GFU centre was founded in La Paz. The initial ceremony setting the beginning of the GFU in Bolivia was carried out at the Tiawanaku ruins, a sacred Andean landmark. Characterised by its religious syncretism, Bolivia today embraces Yoga in both a Christian and an Andean way, with roots in De la Ferrière's and Yogananda's philosophy, and the New Age ideals of union of the Self and the Higher Self or a divine essence pervading the universe.

With a historical and ethnographic approach, this paper aims to discuss yoga and the issues of individual and social identity and spirituality in Bolivia. It presents some characteristics of what this practice and philosophy has meant and means to its Bolivian practitioners.

## Adriana Maldonado - Bio

Adriana became a BWY Level 4 500+ yoga teacher in 2017. She completed an MA in Traditions of Yoga and Meditation at SOAS University in 2021 and starts a PhD at the Open University in October 2023 exploring the Role of Absorption in Modern Postural Yoga. She has been teaching History and Philosophy of Yoga at Yoga Teacher Trainings since 2021 and continues teaching yoga.

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