

From Shamanic Trance to Spiritual Consciousness: Mapping the Earliest Roots of Human Spirituality

Dr Krushnakant Rajendra Nagargoje¹, Mr Arvind Singh Rawat²
Dr Kirti Maurya³

^{1,2,3}Assistant Professor: Department of Yoga, Shree Khushal Das University

ABSTRACT

The origins of human spirituality extend far beyond organised religions and formal philosophical systems, emerging instead from early experiential practices embedded within indigenous cultures. This paper explores shamanism as one of the earliest expressions of spiritual consciousness, with a particular focus on trance as a transformative mechanism for accessing altered states of awareness. Shamanic practices, including drumming, chanting, ritual movement, and breath regulation, are examined as systematic techniques used to enter non-ordinary realities characterised by symbolic, archetypal, and transpersonal experiences.

The study further investigates the conceptual continuity between shamanic trance and later developments in structured spiritual traditions, especially within Eastern systems such as Yoga. States of deep meditation and absorption are analysed in relation to shamanic journeying, highlighting similarities in the processes of consciousness transformation and transcendence. By adopting a qualitative and theoretical research approach based on interdisciplinary secondary sources, the paper integrates anthropological, psychological, and comparative religious perspectives to develop a comprehensive understanding of early spiritual practices.

The findings suggest that shamanism can be interpreted as a proto-spiritual framework that laid the foundation for the evolution of later spiritual systems. Trance is identified not as a primitive or irrational phenomenon but as a refined and intentional tool for exploring consciousness, facilitating healing, and achieving insight. The study emphasises the continuity between ancient experiential traditions and modern spiritual practices, arguing that both share a common underlying goal of expanding human awareness.

The paper concludes by highlighting the importance of reintegrating indigenous knowledge systems into contemporary academic discourse on spirituality, psychology, and human development, thereby offering a more holistic understanding of the evolution of spiritual consciousness.

Keywords: Shamanism, Trance, Spiritual Consciousness, Altered States of Consciousness, Yoga, Transpersonal Psychology

1. Introduction:

1.1 Shamanism: Concept and Background

Shamanism represents one of the earliest and most widespread forms of spiritual practice in human history,

predating organised religions and formal philosophical systems. It is commonly understood as a set of techniques through which a practitioner, known as a shaman, enters altered states of consciousness to interact with spiritual realms for purposes such as healing, divination, and guidance (Eliade, 1964; Walsh, 1989). Unlike institutionalised religions that rely on doctrine and scripture, shamanism is fundamentally experiential, emphasising direct engagement with non-ordinary reality.

Anthropological evidence suggests that shamanic traditions have existed across diverse cultures, including Siberia, the Americas, Africa, and Asia, reflecting a universal human inclination toward exploring transcendental dimensions of existence (Vitebsky, 2001). Central to these practices is the induction of trance states through techniques such as rhythmic drumming, chanting, dancing, and breath control (Harner, 1980). These methods facilitate a shift from ordinary waking consciousness to altered states characterised by vivid imagery, symbolic encounters, and a sense of connection with spiritual entities.

From a neuropsychological perspective, shamanic practices are associated with specific patterns of brain activity, particularly within theta wave frequencies, which are linked to deep meditative and imaginative states (Winkelman, 2004). This suggests that shamanism is not merely a cultural phenomenon but also a biologically grounded system for accessing expanded states of awareness. Thus, shamanism can be understood as a foundational framework through which early humans explored the nature of consciousness and reality.

1.2 Spiritual Consciousness

Spiritual consciousness refers to an expanded mode of awareness that transcends the individual ego and recognises a deeper sense of interconnectedness with the universe. It involves qualities such as unity, insight, compassion, and transcendence, often arising through altered states of consciousness or contemplative practices (Grof, 1985). Unlike ordinary consciousness, which is primarily oriented toward external stimuli and rational cognition, spiritual consciousness encompasses inner experiences that reveal deeper layers of meaning and existence.

Psychological theories, particularly those of Carl Jung, provide valuable insights into the nature of spiritual consciousness. Jung (1969) proposed that the human psyche contains a collective unconscious populated by archetypal symbols that emerge in dreams, myths, and spiritual experiences. Shamanic visions, which frequently involve encounters with animals, spirits, and mythological figures, can be interpreted as manifestations of these archetypes, reflecting universal patterns of human experience.

Further expanding this perspective, transpersonal psychology emphasises the transformative potential of non-ordinary states of consciousness. Grof (2000) argues that such states enable individuals to access transpersonal dimensions of reality, facilitating psychological healing and spiritual growth. Similarly, Tart (1975) conceptualises altered states as legitimate and valuable forms of consciousness that extend beyond the limitations of ordinary awareness.

In this context, spiritual consciousness is not viewed as a product of religious belief alone but as an experiential phenomenon that has evolved through various practices across cultures. Shamanic trance represents one of the earliest methods for accessing this expanded awareness, serving as a precursor to more structured spiritual disciplines.

1.3 Relationship between Shamanism and Yoga

The relationship between shamanism and yoga reveals significant parallels in the methods and goals of spiritual practice, suggesting a continuity in the evolution of human consciousness. Yoga, as systematised in classical Indian philosophy, is a disciplined approach aimed at achieving higher states of awareness and ultimately self-realisation (Patanjali, 2009). Practices such as Dharana (concentration), Dhyana

(meditation), and Samadhi (absorption) involve the transformation of consciousness in ways that closely resemble shamanic trance states.

Scholars have noted that both shamanic and yogic traditions employ techniques that regulate breath, focus attention, and alter sensory perception, thereby facilitating entry into non-ordinary states of consciousness (Feuerstein, 2008). While shamanic trance is often dynamic and visionary, involving symbolic journeys and interactions with spiritual entities, yogic meditation tends to be more structured and inwardly focused, emphasising stillness and self-realisation. Despite these differences, both systems share a common objective: the transcendence of ordinary perception and the realisation of a deeper dimension of existence. Historical studies also suggest that yoga may have evolved from earlier indigenous and ascetic practices that bear resemblance to shamanic traditions (Samuel, 2008). This perspective challenges the notion that spiritual systems developed independently, instead highlighting a continuum of experiential practices that have been refined and systematised over time.

Furthermore, modern interpretations of yoga, as presented by scholars and practitioners such as Iyengar (1966) and Vivekananda (1896/1999), emphasise the integration of body, mind, and spirit, aligning with the holistic approach found in shamanism. Both traditions recognise the importance of direct experience in achieving spiritual insight, underscoring their shared foundations.

Thus, the comparative analysis of shamanism and yoga reveals not only structural and methodological similarities but also a deeper philosophical connection rooted in the transformation of consciousness. This continuity supports the view that shamanism represents an early stage in the evolution of spiritual practices, which later developed into more formalised systems such as yoga.

2. Literature review

Mircea Eliade (1964) presents one of the most influential foundational studies on shamanism, conceptualising it as a system of “archaic techniques of ecstasy.” His work emphasises trance as the defining feature of shamanic practice, enabling practitioners to transcend ordinary reality and access spiritual realms. Eliade argues that the shaman functions as a mediator between the human and sacred worlds, engaging in soul journeys for healing and knowledge acquisition. While his cross-cultural analysis establishes shamanism as a universal phenomenon, critics note that his approach tends to generalise diverse traditions, potentially overlooking their cultural specificity.

Michael Harner (1980) advances the study of shamanism through the concept of “core shamanism,” which identifies universal techniques underlying shamanic practices across cultures. Based on both ethnographic research and personal experience, Harner highlights rhythmic drumming as a primary method for inducing trance states associated with altered brainwave patterns. His work is significant in making shamanic practices accessible beyond indigenous contexts; however, it has been critiqued for decontextualising these practices and contributing to their commodification in modern spiritual movements.

Carl Jung (1969) provides a psychological interpretation of shamanic experiences through his theory of the collective unconscious. He suggests that the symbolic imagery encountered in shamanic trance—such as spirits, animals, and mythological figures—represents archetypal patterns inherent in the human psyche. Jung views these experiences as meaningful processes that contribute to individuation, the integration of conscious and unconscious elements of the self. His framework bridges traditional spiritual practices and modern psychology, though some scholars argue that it risks reducing culturally embedded experiences to purely internal phenomena.

Stanislav Grof (1985) expands the understanding of altered states of consciousness within the field of tran-

personal psychology. Through his research on psychedelic therapy and holotropic breathwork, Grof demonstrates that non-ordinary states can facilitate profound psychological healing and spiritual insight. He identifies experiential patterns similar to shamanic journeys, including ego dissolution and encounters with transpersonal entities. Grof's work supports the legitimacy of altered states as transformative tools, challenging conventional distinctions between normal and pathological consciousness.

Charles Tart (1975) contributes to the scientific study of consciousness by proposing a framework for understanding altered states as discrete and valuable modes of awareness. He argues that ordinary waking consciousness represents only one among many possible states and that systematic exploration of altered states can expand scientific knowledge. Tart's work provides a theoretical basis for examining shamanic trance within a broader psychological and scientific context.

Michael Winkelman (2004) introduces a neurobiological perspective by conceptualising shamanism as a form of "neurotheology." He argues that shamanic practices integrate brain functions through rhythmic stimulation, leading to synchronised neural activity associated with trance states. Winkelman's biopsychosocial model highlights the adaptive functions of shamanism, including healing, social cohesion, and cognitive integration, thereby positioning it as an early form of human consciousness exploration.

In a later work, Winkelman (2010) further elaborates on shamanism as a holistic paradigm encompassing biological, psychological, and social dimensions. He emphasises the role of altered states in facilitating emotional regulation, community bonding, and spiritual insight. This comprehensive framework supports the view of shamanism as a sophisticated system rather than a primitive practice.

Piers Vitebsky (2001) provides an anthropological account of shamanism, focusing on its cultural and social contexts. He emphasises that shamanic practices cannot be fully understood outside their indigenous frameworks, where they serve essential roles in maintaining social order and cultural identity. Vitebsky's work highlights the importance of contextualising shamanism within its native environment.

Ronald Hutton (2001) critically examines Western interpretations of shamanism, arguing that many modern representations are influenced by romanticised and simplified notions. He challenges the universality proposed by earlier scholars and calls for a more nuanced understanding of shamanic traditions based on historical and cultural evidence.

Roger Walsh (1989) attempts to define shamanism by identifying its core characteristics, including altered states of consciousness, spirit communication, and healing functions. His work provides conceptual clarity and establishes criteria for distinguishing shamanism from other spiritual practices.

Georg Feuerstein (1980) explores the philosophical foundations of classical Yoga, emphasising its focus on achieving higher states of consciousness through disciplined practice. He identifies parallels between yogic meditation and shamanic trance, particularly in their shared goal of transcending ordinary awareness.

In his later work, Feuerstein (2008) provides a comprehensive historical and philosophical analysis of yoga traditions, highlighting their evolution from early spiritual practices. He suggests that yoga represents a systematic refinement of earlier experiential methods, potentially including shamanic elements.

Geoffrey Samuel (2008) examines the historical development of yoga and tantra, arguing that these traditions emerged from a complex interaction of indigenous and ascetic practices. His work supports the idea that shamanic elements may have influenced later spiritual systems in India.

Mark Singleton (2010) investigates the transformation of yoga in modern contexts, particularly its shift toward physical postures. While his focus is on contemporary practice, his work provides insight into how spiritual traditions evolve and adapt over time.

Ninian Smart (1998) situates shamanism within the broader study of world religions, emphasising its role in shaping early spiritual frameworks. He highlights the multidimensional nature of religion, including experiential, ritual, and philosophical aspects, all of which are present in shamanic traditions.

B. K. S. Iyengar (1966) presents yoga as a practical system for achieving physical, mental, and spiritual integration. His emphasis on disciplined practice and inner awareness reflects parallels with shamanic techniques aimed at transforming consciousness

3. Research Gap

3.1 Fragmented Disciplinary Approaches

Existing research on shamanism is divided across anthropology, psychology, and neuroscience. While studies by Eliade (1964) emphasise universality, others highlight cultural specificity (Vitebsky, 2001; Hutton, 2001), resulting in a lack of a unified perspective.

3.2 Limited Integration of Consciousness Studies

Psychological and transpersonal studies (Jung, 1969; Grof, 1985; Tart, 1975) explain altered states as transformative but largely ignore their cultural and spiritual contexts, leading to partial interpretations.

3.3 Absence of Comparative Framework with Yoga

Although yoga scholars (Feuerstein, 2008; Samuel, 2008) discuss meditative states, the direct relationship between shamanic trance and yogic states such as *dhyana* and *samadhi* remains underexplored.

3.4 Need for Interdisciplinary Synthesis

There is a lack of integrative research connecting shamanism, trance, and yoga within a single theoretical framework of spiritual consciousness.

4. Objectives

1. To analyse the concept and practices of shamanism with special reference to trance states.
2. To examine trance as a mechanism for transforming human consciousness.
3. To explore the concept of spiritual consciousness from psychological and philosophical perspectives.
4. To identify similarities and differences between shamanic practices and yogic traditions.
5. To develop an integrative framework connecting shamanism, trance, and yoga in the evolution of spirituality.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Nature of the Study

The present study is qualitative and theoretical in nature. It focuses on conceptual analysis and interpretation rather than empirical data collection.

5.2 Research Design

The study adopts an exploratory and descriptive research design to examine relationships between shamanism, trance, and yoga.

5.3 Sources of Data

The study is based on secondary data, including:

Books on shamanism, yoga, and spirituality

Research articles from journals

Anthropological and psychological studies

Classical yogic texts

5.4 Method of Analysis

Comparative analysis (shamanism vs yoga)

Conceptual interpretation

Interdisciplinary synthesis (anthropology, psychology, neurocognitive, yoga)

6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

6.1 Concept of Shamanism

Shamanism is recognised as one of the earliest forms of spiritual practice, characterised by the role of a shaman who acts as a mediator between the physical and spiritual worlds through altered states of consciousness (Eliade, 1964; Walsh, 1989). It is fundamentally experiential rather than doctrinal, emphasising direct engagement with non-ordinary reality. Shamanic practices are deeply embedded in cultural and ecological contexts, reflecting a worldview that emphasises interconnectedness between humans, nature, and the spiritual realm (Vitebsky, 2001). While early scholars presented shamanism as a universal phenomenon, later perspectives highlight its cultural specificity and symbolic richness (Hutton, 2001). Despite variations, the defining feature of shamanism remains its reliance on altered states of consciousness for healing, guidance, and knowledge acquisition (Eliade, 1964).

6.2 Concept of Trance

Trance is a central component of shamanic practice and refers to a controlled, altered state of consciousness characterised by focused attention, reduced awareness of external stimuli, and heightened internal imagery (Tart, 1975). Unlike pathological states, trance is intentionally induced through techniques such as rhythmic drumming, chanting, dancing, and breath regulation (Harner, 1980). These techniques enable the practitioner to access non-ordinary reality and engage with symbolic and transpersonal dimensions of experience.

From a psychological perspective, trance facilitates access to deeper layers of the psyche, including archetypal structures and unconscious processes (Jung, 1969). Transpersonal psychology further supports this view by suggesting that altered states can lead to profound psychological healing and spiritual insight (Grof, 1985). Additionally, neurocognitive studies indicate that such states are associated with integrative brain functions and specific neural patterns that support expanded awareness (Winkelman, 2004). Thus, trance serves as both a psychological and physiological mechanism for transforming consciousness.

Table 1: Types of Trance States

Type	Method	Experience	Outcome
Shamanic Trance	Drumming	Visionary journey	Healing
Yogic trance	Meditation	Stillness	Liberation
Psychedelic state	Substances	Ego dissolution	Insight
Breath-induced	Holotropic breathing	Emotional release	Therapy

Source: Adapted from Tart (1975); Grof (1985); Harner (1980); Winkelman (2004).

6.3 Concept of Spiritual Consciousness

Spiritual consciousness refers to an expanded state of awareness that transcends the individual ego and recognises a deeper interconnected reality. It is characterised by experiences of unity, insight, and transcendence, often achieved through altered states of consciousness or disciplined spiritual practices

(Grof, 2000). In shamanic traditions, such states emerge through trance experiences involving symbolic and archetypal encounters (Jung, 1969).

The study of consciousness has demonstrated that altered states are legitimate and valuable modes of awareness beyond ordinary waking consciousness (Tart, 1975). These states enable the integration of mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, contributing to personal transformation and self-realisation. In yogic philosophy, spiritual consciousness is considered the ultimate goal, achieved through practices such as meditation and absorption, which lead to higher states of awareness (Patanjali, 2009; Feuerstein, 2008).

6.4 Integrative Conceptual Model (Shamanism–Yoga Continuum)

6.4.1 Foundational Basis: Shamanism as Proto-Spiritual System

Shamanism represents the earliest stage in the evolution of spiritual practices, where trance is used as a primary tool for accessing non-ordinary reality and gaining spiritual insight (Eliade, 1964; Harner, 1980). It emphasises direct experience and interaction with symbolic and spiritual dimensions.

6.4.2 Mechanism of Transformation: Role of Trance

Trance functions as the central mechanism of consciousness transformation, enabling access to deeper psychological and transpersonal states (Tart, 1975; Grof, 1985). It serves as the experiential core of early spiritual practices.

6.4.3 Systematisation in Yoga Practices

Over time, these experiential practices evolved into structured systems such as yoga, which employ disciplined methods including meditation, concentration, and breath control to achieve similar states of consciousness (Feuerstein, 2008; Patanjali, 2009).

Table 2: Shamanism vs Yoga Comparison

Dimension	Shamanism	Yoga
Nature	Experiential and ritualistic	Systematic and philosophical
Method	Trance, drumming, chanting	Meditation, pranayama, concentration
Goal	Spirit communication and healing	Self-realisation and liberation (moksha)
Consciousness State	Altered (ecstatic, visionary)	Controlled (focused, absorptive)
Structure	Informal and practice-based	Codified and text-based
Cultural Context	Indigenous and tribal traditions	Indian philosophical and spiritual tradition
Practitioner Role	Shaman as healer and mediator	Yogi as practitioner and seeker
Techniques	External stimuli (sound, rhythm, ritual)	Internal discipline (breath, mind control)
Approach	Dynamic and outward (journey-based)	Static and inward (meditative)
Outcome	Healing, guidance, spiritual interaction	Enlightenment, self-awareness, inner balance

Source: Adapted from Eliade (1964); Harner (1980); Feuerstein (2008); Patanjali (2009); Samuel (2008); Winkelman (2010).

6.4.4 Common Experiential Core

Both shamanism and yoga share a common experiential foundation centred on the transformation of consciousness and the pursuit of transcendence, despite differences in methods and cultural contexts (Samuel, 2008)

6.4.5 Continuum of Spiritual Evolution

The relationship between shamanism and yoga can be understood as a continuum in which early experiential practices gradually evolved into structured philosophical systems, reflecting refinement rather than discontinuity (Winkelman, 2010).

7. Discussion and Analysis

The present study demonstrates that shamanism represents one of the earliest structured approaches to understanding and experiencing spirituality through direct, experiential methods. It highlights the central role of trance as a transformative mechanism that enables individuals to access altered states of consciousness and deeper levels of awareness. These states facilitate symbolic, psychological, and spiritual experiences that contribute to healing and insight. The study further shows that yoga represents a more systematised and disciplined evolution of similar practices, employing techniques such as meditation, concentration, and breath regulation to achieve comparable states of consciousness. Although differing in structure and cultural context, both traditions share a common objective of transcending ordinary awareness and attaining higher states of spiritual consciousness. The analysis indicates a clear evolutionary progression from experiential and ritual-based practices to structured philosophical systems, while retaining a common experiential core.

Comparative Analysis

7.1 Trance vs Dhyana vs Samadhi: A Comparative Perspective

A central theme in the study of spiritual consciousness is the transformation of ordinary awareness into expanded or altered states. In shamanic traditions, this transformation is primarily achieved through **trance**. In contrast, in yogic philosophy, it is expressed through **Dhyana (meditation)** and **Samadhi (absorption)** as described in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali.

Shamanic trance is typically characterised by a **dynamic and visionary state of consciousness**, in which the practitioner actively engages with symbolic imagery, spirit entities, and mythological landscapes. This state is often described as a “journey” into non-ordinary reality, involving movement across different planes of existence. The experience is **experiential, symbolic, and often narrative-driven**, with the shaman maintaining a degree of agency while navigating these realms.

In contrast, Dhyana represents a **state of sustained, uninterrupted concentration**, where the fluctuations of the mind (*chitta vrittis*) are gradually reduced. Unlike trance, which involves engagement with symbolic content, Dhyana is characterised by progressive inward absorption that leads toward stillness and clarity. The practitioner moves from multiplicity toward unity, reducing sensory and cognitive distractions.

Samadhi, the culmination of yogic practice, transcends both trance and meditation. It is a state of **complete absorption where the distinction between subject and object dissolves**. In higher forms such as Nirvikalpa Samadhi, even the sense of individuality ceases, resulting in pure consciousness or awareness without content. Unlike shamanic trance, which may involve rich experiential phenomena, Samadhi is often described as **contentless awareness or pure being**.

Thus, while all three states—trance, Dhyana, and Samadhi—represent altered modes of consciousness, they differ significantly in **depth, direction, and phenomenological quality**. Trance is outwardly

expressive and symbolic, Dhyana is inwardly focused and stabilising, and Samadhi is transcendent and non-dual.

7.2 Philosophical Difference: Dualistic vs Non-Dual Awareness

Another critical distinction between shamanism and yogic spirituality lies in their **philosophical orientation toward reality and consciousness**.

Shamanic traditions generally operate within a **dualistic or pluralistic framework**, where the world is inhabited by multiple entities—spirits, ancestors, animals, and forces of nature. The shaman interacts with these entities as distinct beings, suggesting a clear **subject-object relationship**. The practitioner (subject) engages with external spiritual realities (objects), even within altered states of consciousness. This dualistic orientation reflects an **animistic worldview**, where consciousness is distributed across nature and existence.

In contrast, classical Yoga, particularly as interpreted in Vedantic and later non-dual traditions, moves toward **non-dual awareness (Advaita)**. In states of Samadhi, the distinction between observer and observed collapses. Consciousness is no longer directed toward an external object but becomes **self-luminous and self-aware**. The ultimate realisation is that **Atman (self) and Brahman (universal consciousness) are one**, eliminating all duality.

Even within the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, although the system is technically dualistic (Purusha–Prakriti), the experiential culmination in Samadhi approaches a state where duality becomes irrelevant. Later interpretations, especially in Advaita Vedanta, fully embrace non-dualism.

Therefore, while shamanism emphasises **interaction within a dualistic cosmos**, Yoga ultimately seeks **transcendence of all dualities**, leading to absolute unity. This marks a significant philosophical evolution from relational spirituality to ontological unity.

7.3 Mechanism of Practice: External Induction vs Internal Discipline

The mechanisms through which altered states are achieved also reveal fundamental differences between shamanic and yogic systems.

Shamanic trance is predominantly induced through **external techniques**, such as:

Rhythmic drumming

Chanting and vocalisation

Dance and movement

Fasting or sensory deprivation

These methods act as **sensory and neurological triggers**, altering brainwave patterns and facilitating entry into non-ordinary states. The process is often communal and ritualistic, embedded within cultural and environmental contexts. The shaman relies on **external stimuli to shift consciousness**, making the experience more immediate but also dependent on specific conditions.

In contrast, yogic practices emphasise **internal discipline and self-regulation**. Techniques such as:

Pranayama (breath control)

Dharana (concentration)

Dhyana (meditation)

They are designed to systematically refine awareness from within. The practitioner gradually gains mastery over the body and mind, reducing dependence on external aids. The transition into Samadhi is achieved through **progressive internalisation**, culminating in complete stillness.

This distinction reflects two different paradigms:

Shamanism → **Induction-based transformation (externally facilitated)**

Yoga → **Cultivation-based transformation (internally developed)**

Despite this difference, both systems aim at **altering ordinary consciousness**, suggesting that they represent complementary approaches rather than opposing ones.

7.4 Evolutionary Continuity: From Experience to Systematisation

The comparison between shamanism and yoga suggests an **evolutionary trajectory in spiritual practices**. Shamanism represents an early, intuitive engagement with altered states, rooted in direct experience and environmental interaction. Over time, these practices appear to have been **refined, systematised, and philosophically articulated** in traditions such as Yoga.

This transition can be understood as a movement:

From **ritual to method**

From **experience to philosophy**

From **external induction to internal mastery**

Thus, rather than viewing shamanism as primitive and yoga as advanced, it is more accurate to see them as **different stages in the evolution of human spiritual consciousness**.

7.5 Integrative Perspective

An integrative approach reveals that both traditions contribute valuable insights into the nature of consciousness. Shamanism offers **rich experiential and symbolic understanding**, while Yoga provides **systematic and philosophical clarity**. Together, they form a more comprehensive model of spiritual development, bridging the gap between **experience and realisation**.

8. Findings

The findings of the study reveal that shamanism can be understood as a foundational system of experiential spirituality, with trance serving as a primary tool for the transformation of consciousness. It establishes that there are strong conceptual and functional similarities between shamanic trance and yogic states such as meditation and deep absorption, indicating a shared mechanism of expanding awareness. The study further finds that spiritual traditions have evolved through a gradual process of refinement and systematisation rather than emerging independently. It also concludes that altered states of consciousness are not primitive or irrational but represent sophisticated and purposeful methods for achieving psychological integration and spiritual realisation. Overall, the study identifies shamanism as a proto-spiritual framework that has significantly influenced the development of later structured traditions such as yoga.

Shamanic trance is not merely a primitive or ritualistic phenomenon but a **systematic and experiential method of consciousness transformation**. The use of rhythmic, sensory, and symbolic techniques in shamanism reflects an early understanding of the mechanisms required to transcend ordinary awareness. These practices, although culturally embedded, reveal a universal human capacity to access non-ordinary states of consciousness.

A key contribution of this study lies in establishing a **comparative framework between shamanic trance and yogic states such as Dhyana and Samadhi**. While shamanic trance is characterised by dynamic, symbolic, and often dualistic engagement with spiritual realities, yogic practices represent a progressive inward movement toward stillness, culminating in non-dual awareness. This comparison highlights both continuity and divergence: continuity in the shared goal of transcending ordinary consciousness, and divergence in methods, philosophical orientation, and experiential depth.

Furthermore, the study underscores a significant philosophical transition from **dualistic and animistic**

worldviews in shamanism to non-dual realisation in advanced yogic states. This transition reflects a broader evolution in spiritual thought—from interaction with external spiritual entities to the realisation of consciousness as a unified and self-luminous reality.

From a methodological perspective, the research contributes to the growing field of consciousness studies by integrating traditional knowledge systems with modern theoretical frameworks. It emphasises that shamanism and yoga should not be viewed in isolation but as interconnected expressions within the continuum of human spiritual development.

9. Conclusion

Shamanism can be understood as a foundational layer in the evolution of spiritual consciousness, providing the experiential basis upon which later systems such as Yoga were developed and refined. The progression from externally induced trance states to internally cultivated meditative absorption represents a shift from experience-driven practices to disciplined self-realisation.

10. Future suggestions

On the basis of the present study, future research should focus on empirical and interdisciplinary investigations to further explore the relationship between shamanism and yoga. Field-based studies involving indigenous communities can provide deeper insights into the practical and cultural dimensions of shamanic practices. Scientific research examining the physiological and neurological aspects of trance and meditation can contribute to a better understanding of consciousness transformation. Additionally, there is a need for integrative approaches that combine perspectives from anthropology, psychology, and yoga studies to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework. Future studies may also explore the application of these practices in contemporary contexts such as mental health, yoga therapy, and holistic well-being, while ensuring the preservation and respectful representation of indigenous knowledge systems.

References

1. Eliade, M. (1964). *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy*. Princeton University Press.
2. Eliade, M. (1969). *Yoga: Immortality and freedom*. Princeton University Press.
3. Feuerstein, G. (1980). *The philosophy of classical yoga*. St. Martin's Press.
4. Feuerstein, G. (2008). *The yoga tradition: Its history, literature, philosophy, and practice*. Hohm Press.
5. Grof, S. (1985). *Beyond the brain: Birth, death, and transcendence in psychotherapy*. State University of New York Press.
6. Grof, S. (2000). *Psychology of the future: Lessons from modern consciousness research*. State University of New York Press.
7. Harner, M. (1980). *The way of the shaman*. Harper & Row.
8. Hutton, R. (2001). *Shamans: Siberian spirituality and the Western imagination*. Hambledon and London.
9. Iyengar, B. K. S. (1966). *Light on yoga*. Schocken Books.
10. Jung, C. G. (1969). *The archetypes and the collective unconscious* (2nd ed.). Princeton University Press.
11. Patanjali. (2009). *The yoga sutras of Patanjali* (E. Bryant, Trans.). North Point Press.

12. Samuel, G. (2008). *The origins of yoga and tantra: Indic religions to the thirteenth century*. Cambridge University Press.
13. Singleton, M. (2010). *Yoga body: The origins of modern posture practice*. Oxford University Press.
14. Smart, N. (1998). *The world's religions* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
15. Tart, C. T. (1975). *States of consciousness*. Dutton.
16. Vitebsky, P. (2001). *Shamanism*. University of Oklahoma Press.
17. Vivekananda, S. (1896/1999). *Raja yoga*. Advaita Ashrama.
18. Walsh, R. (1989). *What is a shaman?* *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 21(1), 1–11.
19. Winkelman, M. (2004). *Shamanism as the original neurotheology*. *Zygon*, 39(1), 193–217.
20. Winkelman, M. (2010). *Shamanism: A biopsychosocial paradigm of consciousness and healing*. Praeger.