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## ***'Nagas can't sit lotus style': Baba Ramdev, Patanjali, and Neo-Hindutva<sup>1</sup>***

### **Abstract**

This article is a preliminary attempt to understand the dynamics of how Patanjali and Baba Ramdev represent 'Hindu nationalism', or Hindutva (Hinduness) in Nagaland, India. One can read Baba Ramdev's foray into the region through the promotion of yoga, Ayurveda, and national health, as a form of 'neo-Hindutva' that is increasingly diffuse and moves away from a more militant pathway of established Hindutva designs. If one considers the work of Patanjali in Nagaland as an attempt to homogenise and unify a set of practices surrounding food and health practices, then, one can read this as an attempt to assert a singular somatic imagination, increasingly influenced by Hindutva ideas about the body, 'the health of the nation', and the promotion of *swadeshi* (indigenous goods) as patriotic duty. This article highlights the way Ramdev and Patanjali's business empire is trying to move beyond the 'cow belt' of north India, comprising mainly of 'Hindu-Hindi' into regions that are more diverse linguistically and historically, and culturally viewed as 'un-Indian'.

**Keywords:** Patanjali, Baba Ramdev, Neo-Hindutva, Nagaland, Nagas, Yoga, Christianity

### *Introduction*

On a hot summer's day in April 2018 in Dimapur, the commercial capital of the Indian state of Nagaland, I meet Arpit, one of the few storeowners of Patanjali Ayurved Limited, an Indian consumer goods company. Arpit was initially sceptical about meeting me. Why would a researcher, and a Naga, be interested in something like Patanjali? I could sense Arpit's uneasiness. This unease is partly because he lives in the context where a few years ago the powerful Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) objected to celebrating International Yoga Day on the 21<sup>st</sup> June in 2015, as it happened to be on a Sunday. These objections were published in local newspapers and made the situation difficult for people promoting yoga. During the 2015 International Yoga Day, a local newspaper, *Nagaland Post*, covered the controversy by reporting that for the NBCC 'first and foremost, Sunday is a holiday for Christians across India and holding such an event on the day would only hurt the religious sentiments of people and the sanctity of its religious practices'. *Nagaland Post*, cited the NBCC, as saying that yoga has deep roots in the 'religious beliefs and

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<sup>1</sup> Fieldwork for this article was conducted over 2016-18 in Dimapur (Nagaland), Pashigat (Arunachal Pradesh), and Guwahati (Assam). All the people and organisations quoted here have chosen to remain anonymous. Aheli Moitra, an independent researcher, helped in the interviews and some of the texts in Hindi have been translated by her. This research was funded by the British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship.

practices of Hinduism’, and that ‘meditation in any form, philosophical thinking and transcendental meditation [sic], tied to any religion “is viewed with seriousness by the church”’ (Nagaland Post 2015).

This article is a preliminary attempt to understand the dynamics of how Patanjali and Baba (father) Ramdev represent ‘Hindu nationalism’, or Hindutva (Hinduness) through the discourse of food products, health and yoga in Nagaland. There are a growing number of Sangh Parivar<sup>2</sup> activities associated with Nagaland and the Northeast since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014 and formed the national government in India. These activities have made Christian regions such as Nagaland very anxious. One can read Baba Ramdev’s foray into the region through the promotion of yoga, Ayurveda, and national health, as a form of ‘neo-Hindutva’ (Anderson 2015; also Zavos 2010; Reddy 2011) that is increasingly diffuse and moves away from a more militant pathway of established Hindutva designs. If one considers the work of Patanjali in Nagaland as an attempt to homogenise and unify a set of practices surrounding food and health, then, one can read this as an attempt to assert a singular somatic imagination (Alter 1994; Chakraborty 2006; Jaffrelot 2011; Khalikova 2017), increasingly influenced by Hindutva ideas about the body, ‘the health of the nation’, and the promotion of *swadeshi* (indigenous goods) as patriotic duty. This article contributes to the growing scholarship on Baba Ramdev and his activities in India (Chakraborty 2007; Jaffrelot 2011; Khalikova 2017; Sarbacker 2014), while addressing his (and Patanjali’s) recent entry into the Northeast of India, a region traditionally viewed as a recalcitrant periphery unable to ‘integrate’ with the idea of India. It highlights the way Ramdev and Patanjali’s business empire is trying to move beyond the ‘cow belt’ of north India, comprising mainly of ‘Hindu-Hindi’ (Bhattacharya 2015: 68), into regions that are more diverse linguistically and historically, and culturally viewed as ‘un-Indian’.

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<sup>2</sup> Also known as the family of organisations, they comprise of many Hindu nationalist groups ranging from the political party the BJP, to the cultural organisation the RSS and other groups such as the World Hindu Council, Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Kalyan Ashram for example who work with tribals. Their main aim is to make India ‘Hindu’ through these services organisations (see Longkumer 2017; Hansen 1998).

### *Somatic Nationalism*

Joseph Alter in his widely read article on Indian wrestling and militant Hinduism suggests that somatic nationalism, 'takes the body as a primary object of discipline and reform, rather than as a simple tool for the organization of a militant ideology' (1994: 559). This line of argument is also pursued by Chandrima Chakraborty (2006) with regard to Baba Ramdev. She argues that Ramdev's persona, influence, and yoga, are all indeed an attempt to improve the national health of the nation through a combination of fitness regimen and Ayurveda (a system of medicine with roots in India) (see Berger 2013), while at the same time promoting a 'somaticised religio-nationalism as an alternative lifestyle, which, in turn, aids the ideological work of Hindutva' (2006: 387; see also Bhattacharya 2015). Baba Ramdev's own words speak to a national interest in promoting and advocating yoga:

There is no greater religion than duty towards the nation. There is no God greater than the nation. National interest is above everything. I will not betray the nation for my personal, political and economic and family welfare. I will contribute my body, mind, wealth, life and vote for national interest (Ramdev 2009: 12).

Despite his claims to assert the 'national interest' and placing the 'nation' above God, the fact is that while Patanjali is associated with yoga, and is a food and health consumer brand, there is a tendency amongst the Christians of Nagaland (who comprise over 90% of the state population) to see Baba Ramdev, the face of Patanjali, as a 'Hindu guru'. His appearance – long beard and hair, and saffron robes – are also associated with 'Hindu gurus', and the fact that he is usually doing yoga on the religious channels *Sanskar* and *Aastha* (having bought the latter), does not help with the general association in Nagaland of yoga with Hinduism. This is despite attempts in Nagaland to present Ramdev, yoga, and Patanjali as a secular, 'national interest'.

Baba Ramdev is also popularly known as Swami (master) Ramdev, whose full title is Yogarishi Swami Ramdevji Maharaj – 'The Great Lord and Yoga-Seer Master Ramdev' (Sarbacker 2014: 352). Born in 1975 in the northern Indian state of Haryana, most of his early education came from the local *gurukul* (a system that is a

traditional Hindu student-teacher school). Here, he studied Sanskrit and key Hindu philosophical and religious texts, along with yoga, which would provide the foundation for his later activities (Sarbacker 2014: 353; George & Kasturi 2011). However, it was in Haridwar, in present day northern Indian state of Uttarakhand, that in 1995, he along with his friend and business partner, Acharya (teacher) Balkrishna, founded the Divya Yog Mandir Trust (DYMT). A key part of DYMT was to organise yoga *shivirs* (camps), which were available to the public, outside of the formal *ashram* (monastery) sphere (Sarbacker 2014: 355; Alter 2008). During this time, Ramdev brought yoga *en masse* to thousands of practitioners, and also experimented with Ayurveda.

His entry into television in 2002 on 'Om Yog Sadhana', broadcast on the TV network Zee Jagran, and then later on Aastha TV aired under the name 'Yog Shivir', expanded his popularity from thousands to millions (Khalikova 2017: 108). It is estimated that he has over 85 million viewers and followers through his TV programmes in different languages and countries (Khalikova 2017: 108). The impact of his yoga programmes, *pranayama* (breathing) and *asanas* (postures), captured the Indian middle-class and the nouveau-riche, flushed with 'moolah and muscle, seeking to free themselves of inherited chips on their shoulders, and trying to do their own thing in competition with a declining West' (Bhattacharya 2015: 68). Unlike the previous illustrious yoga gurus, argues Bhattacharya, whose clientele were primarily the Western audience, Ramdev's appeal to the Indian masses using Hindi and Sanskrit, inflected with a strong nationalist message, appealed to a new Indian citizen (2015: 67-69), aided by the power brokers from the Sangh Parivar such as the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

Building on the successes of DYMT, the Patanjali Yogpeeth Trust (PYT) was established in 2005 and focused on yoga – through study, research, and practice of the Vedic tradition of yoga (Sarbacker 2014: 357).<sup>3</sup> The PYT also consolidates the

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<sup>3</sup> The name Patanjali is author-compiler of the *Yoga Sutras*, dated around the first centuries of the Common Era, is an important text for modern yoga, often seen as representing the authentic and

numerous business activities into an institutional centre, with an Ayurvedic pharmaceutical company, food manufacturing units such as Patanjali Herbal and Mega Food Parks, Ayurvedic hospitals, laboratories, a University of Patanjali for Ayurveda and Yoga, yoga retreat centres, a library, and magazines such as *Yog Sandesh*, DVDs, along with other books and pamphlets (Sarbacker 2014: 357; also Khalikova 2017: 108). Their highest earner, according to figures from 2016-17 from the *Business Standard*, is the consumer goods company known as Patanjali Ayurved Limited, with a growth estimate of around Rs.10, 000 crore (c. £1 billion) (Business Standard 2016). Alongside and in connection to DYMT and PYT, Baba Ramdev also developed the Bharat Swabhiman Andolan Trust (BSAT), or 'India Self-Glorification Trust', that is about making India corruption free, and promoting indigenous industry and yoga. While I refer to the three groups separately when required, I generally use 'Patanjali', as short hand, because most of my informants use that term, as they say that Ayurveda and yoga is the basic principle common to all the three branches. There are also local organisations in different states and regions called Patanjali Yog Samiti, or Patanjali Yoga Organisation/Committee such as those in Nagaland as well. Patanjali's economic clout and influence is no doubt a major factor in their rapid expansion over the years. In Christian states like Nagaland, however, there are suspicions as to what exactly Ramdev and Patanjali represent.

In an online news journal, *Naga Republic*, a regular Naga commentator, Dr. Sao Tunyi, discussed Ramdev's recent visit to Nagaland in January 2018. He suggests that we should not be fooled by the public perception that Ramdev's business investments are a secular initiative, and reminds the reader that Ramdev has said he would 'behead lakhs of people who don't say Bharat Mata Ki Jai [Victory to Mother India]' (Naga Republic 2018a). Ramdev's visit, suggest various commentators in Nagaland, is the slow entry of 'Hindutva' used for the 'propagation of BJP and RSS's fantasy of Bharat' (Naga Republic 2018b). Arpit's anxiety and caution in interacting with me is therefore understandable in the context of overt criticism of Ramdev, Patanjali and any form of yoga, as it is seen as promoting a form of Hindutva. But this is also the context of a Christian dominated state, whose strong desire for

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authoritative practice popularized through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (White 2014; De Michelis 2004; Singleton 2008).

indigenous nationalism often sees India as the oppressive 'Hindu state' (see Horam 1988: 76-77; Thomas 2016: 171-175).

Nagaland gained statehood in 1962; previously it was a district of Assam. Since Indian independence in 1947, it has had a strong nationalist culture of its own, leading to armed resistance against the Indian state, represented by different groups such as the Naga National Council (NNC) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) and NSCN (K-Khaplang) respectively. In 1997, a ceasefire was signed between the Government of India and the most powerful of these groups, the NSCN-IM, to seek a solution to the decades old political conflict. This was followed up in 2015 with the signing of the Framework Agreement (an agreement that remains largely secret) that seeks to energise the ailing 1997 ceasefire agreement and find a final solution to the Indo-Naga conflict. These armed struggles have been fought for Naga sovereignty, premised on a strong Christian, largely Baptist, identity, proclaiming 'Nagaland for Christ' (Longkumer 2018). This vibrant geo-religious identity and desire for sovereignty has clashed with what the Nagas see as the Indian state, alongside the militarisation of the region, equating itself with Hindu hegemony. In Nagaland, the controversial Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has been in place since 1958 to maintain public order in the face of the NNC's resistance to the Indian state, leading to armed conflict.<sup>4</sup> The Nagas' articulation of their independence from India goes back to the Simon Commission of 1929, when the Commission travelled to Kohima in the then Naga Hills to seek opinions on the future of India. The Nagas responded: '...We pray that...we should not be thrust to the mercy of the people [i.e. India] who could never have conquered us themselves, and to whom we are never subjected; but to leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times' (Alemchiba 1970: 164).

The formation of the NNC in 1946 entrenched the position of the Nagas who expressed their sovereignty in political, cultural and religious terms. On the Indian

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<sup>4</sup> Since then, it is used in 'disturbed areas', and in the Northeast Nagaland, Manipur and Assam (and some areas in Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya) are under AFSPA. It is a draconian law that gives the armed forces unregulated power to arrest individuals, prohibit large gatherings, open fire if seen as contravening the law, and enter and search premises without a warrant. It also protects the armed forces from any prosecution and legal suits without the Centre's sanction (see Gaikwad 2009; Kikon 2009).

side people like Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister, argued for the integration of India and saw the Nagas areas as an important part of India, a position maintained by the Sangh Parivar in today's India. The armed conflict that erupted and led to many casualties and atrocities, primarily by the Indian armed forces, that has left a scar on the Naga landscape, recounted in many oral and written testimonies (see Thomas 2016; Iralu 2000). As a consequence of these conflicts, Christianity became a powerful identity to assert difference from 'Hindu India', but also provided succour in the face of hardship: the NNC constitution (Yehzabo) in fact begins by acknowledging that 'the territory [Nagaland] is a sacred trust from God, who sustained our forefathers, the national workers and our people through the years... (NNC 2006 preamble). Due to these atrocities in Nagaland, an opportunity was missed, according to John Bosco Jasokie, a former Chief Minister of Nagaland:

They [the plains people of Hindustan] believe that their way of life is the right way...[and] are not prepared to accept us as human beings and, therefore, it is easier for them to go out of all human decency in their dealings with us...they think that by harassing the people they have done a great service to India, but actually India lost the friendship of the people (quoted in Glancey 2011: 181).

It is in this context of violence, militarisation, and the association of the Indian state as tantamount to 'Hindu hegemony' that Ramdev's activities, and indeed Arpit's anxiety must be understood. Ramdev and Patanjali's entry into Nagaland could signal a new kind of economic investment and national integration – that Nagaland is indeed a part of India. While the history of the region has frequently resisted efforts at integration – represented negatively through the armed conflict, or as a 'Mongolian fringe' (Baruah 2013) couched very much in racial and cultural stereotypes (McDuie-Ra 2015a) – it is important to acknowledge how the recalcitrant periphery is also a part of the national imagination, with many from the region also wanting integration (McDuie-Ra 2015b). However, the tensions between the 'idea of India' that is visible in metropolitan cities – where many of the people from Nagaland and the Northeast work in call centres, retail, lifestyle, and entertainment industries – must be tempered with the uneasy feeling of citizenship when confronted with the 'idea of independence' that has been part of their historical memory and present realities 'at home' (McDuie-Ra 2015b: 317). Inserting



this 'idea of India', particularly through 'Hindu organisations', is strongly resisted by the people of Nagaland. Even the recent entry of the BJP into the state politics has been controversial, with many churches, including the powerful NBCC, opposing them. Despite this context of resistance, Arpit remains steadfast that Patanjali products along with yoga are good for the Nagas. The work of Patanjali in Nagaland, alongside the growing presence of Hindutva actors in arguing for indigenous Indian brands like Patanjali, highlights an interesting debate around food sovereignty, health products, and culture which creates a 'somatic nationalism'. How does Nagaland illuminate these ideas?

### *Ramdev in Nagaland*

'Patanjali invests big in Nagaland', exclaims one of the local Nagaland newspapers, *Morung Express*, in January 2018. In the group photograph accompanying the report, Baba Ramdev stands alongside the Chief Minister of Nagaland, T.R. Zeliang, his business partner, Acharya Bal Krishna Maharaj of the Patanjali Yogpeeth Trust (PYT), and various Ministers of the Nagaland government. The Chief Minister announces a number of investments made by the PYT, including an Engineering College in Niuland (near Dimapur, the commercial capital) a Para Medical & Nursing College, an Ayurvedic College, Management College and a National Institute of Fashion Technology in Punglwa, Peren (see image 1, 2, 3) (Morung Express 2018).

There are also photos of Ramdev and Maharaj next to a private jet in Dimapur, the only airport in Nagaland, and as he makes his way to the function in Punglwa, Peren, by road. He is garlanded by the Chief Minister and welcomed by a large number of people, mostly non-locals, some even touching his feet, as he walks towards the foundation stones. Beside him are 4 security personnel in matching uniforms, fingers on their triggers, as he walks amongst the people – PYT workers, tribal women in their traditional costumes, and various people from different parts of Nagaland. It is striking to see the presence of tradition, spirituality, business, politics, and security combined in these images.

In his speech during the unveiling of the foundation stones, Ramdev declares that he wants to see 'all of India as a healthy, scientific and secular country'. He continues, 'God is one and therefore our philosophy should be to bring out a good human being from fellow human beings' (Morung Express 2018). Ramdev's reception was akin to the state visit of a dignitary, though with typical Naga elements. An evangelical pastor from a Naga Pentecostal church opened the ceremony with a prayer (see image 4), blessing the occasion to legitimise it as a Christian affair. It is interesting that the pastor was from one of the independent churches and not the NBCC, the official national body.

The main organiser of the event who is also a senior government official, John, suggested to me that the prayer was to counter the criticism of the church (probably referring to the NBCC) who calls Ramdev a 'Hindu missionary'. In fact, in his speech during the event, Thomas Lotha, advisor, Higher & Technical Education (a government department) and a member of the Nagaland government, explicitly declared that 'these projects have nothing to do with religion' (Morung Express 2018). This was, according to Lotha, solely a business venture made to involve the Naga villagers in whose land these projects are based. As part of this deal, according to the report by *The Morung Express*, the villagers will be taken to the Patanjali Yogpeeth Trust headquarters in Haridwar to experience first-hand and be trained in how the Company operates, bringing a sense of ownership to this enterprise. The Chief Minister, too, focussed on the benefits of an investment that will bring about 'quality health care, and jobs for the youth'. The involvement of Patanjali, the Chief Minister added, is a timely opportunity for the large percentage of the population under the age of 25, many of whom are unemployed (Morung Express 2018). It is not surprising to hear the enthusiasm the Nagaland government is articulating. After all, Nagaland is a dependent territorial unit within the Indian union that generates no internal income. So, the arrival of a well-known company and the promise of employment is a welcome relief to government officials and entrepreneurs who see Ramdev's visit as an opportunity for investment and job creation. Therefore, the government line, and one that is promulgated by Ramdev himself, is centred very

much on the notion of national and economic development, devolved from any religious and cultural activity.

It appears that Patanjali replicate this model of working across different states, with recent examples such as those in Assam, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh (Reuters 2017). Huge tracts of land are usually promised by the state government or by the village landowners themselves, allowing Patanjali to invest in the infrastructure that advances their business ventures, while the state government provide road connectivity. In Nagaland at least, John, tells me, Ramdev was insistent that road infrastructure was essential for PYT's investments to be a success. A demand made, John says, after Ramdev experienced Nagaland's dusty and rugged roads travelling from the airport to Punglwa village. In many BJP-governed states, Patanjali has bought land at discounted prices, indicating a certain relationship between government and Patanjali.

It has been reported by *Reuters* that since the arrival of the BJP in central government, supported largely by Ramdev himself during the elections, an estimated \$46 million (c. £35 million) in discounts for land acquisitions in states controlled by the BJP has been given to PYT. According to *Reuters*, this relationship is two-way. Ramdev popularises the BJP, while the BJP leaders in turn endorse Ramdev's vision for India: 'a populism laced with assertions of Hindu primacy that twins nostalgia for ancient glory with suspicion of foreign influence' (Reuters 2017). This emerges in the way Patanjali shapes its marketing ideology based on 'ancient remedies/products', while questioning the role foreign investment plays in the domestic economy. The BJP supports the idea of *swadeshi* (indigenous products), though differs on the role of foreign investment, a point I elaborate on below.

While there was some celebration around Ramdev's visit to Nagaland – primarily around the potential investment, and the creation of jobs – there was also uncertainty over his visit amongst those whose lands the projects will use. Speaking to the landowners of Punglwa village, the site designated for PYT's investments, the Punglwa Village Council Chairman (PVCC) said that the land being offered to

Patanjali is community land, belonging to the Zeliang Naga tribe. He was quite unsure, and vague, about what the government and PYT were planning to do with the land. The Chief Minister, along with Thomas Ngullie, the then minister of Higher & Technical Education, met with the village council and informed them only that 'we will bring you a big project' reported the PVCC. It was only later that the Village Council realised that it was Ramdev and PYT: 'They [Chief Minister and Ngullie] told us that it will be an herbal thing and a project will be put up here'.

They were even willing to donate the land for free, the PVCC said, precisely because of the promise of employment for the Punglwa youth and those from the surrounding villages. Recognising that such an investment will also come with much political and economic wrangling, he was insistent that without employment for the villagers, it would be difficult to participate in the project. He told me that the people in the village are very cognisant of their rights, and without definite offers of employment and contracts for the village, they would not go forward with the investment. If they agree to these conditions, then, the Chairman said, 'we will welcome them happily'. In our discussions, we talked about the context of Ramdev's visit and some of the questions raised by the churches. I asked if he had heard of Ramdev's activities elsewhere. The Chairman explained:

We had heard his name from before. We are aware of his yoga. But it is not necessary that we will all have to do yoga just because he is a yogi. Even if they set up these projects, they won't force and we won't allow them to. If interested, then people can join. When people got to know that they are coming here, our Naga people started saying all this: hinduisation and what not. We shouldn't be so narrow-minded. If it is like that, then why should there be Hindu or Muslim temples in Kohima? Our village council does not object to Hindu or Muslim, we just need development. They will start the project; develop our area... we will not allow them to discriminate by hiring only Hindus or something. We will take care of all that and lay our conditions once we have a sitting for more information, discussion and finalisation.

While community land is being negotiated with PYT for investment in Nagaland, the PYT model has come under scrutiny in other parts of the Northeast. In Assam, in 2016, the Patanjali Herbal and Mega Food Park was set up in Sonitpur district, north Assam. This came in for criticism because it was not declared if the 150 acres of land given to PYT by the BJP Assam government was offered for free or at a discounted

price. Whatever the transaction, as discussed above, it accords well with how PYT tends to operate in BJP-dominated states. Meera Nanda makes the point that god-men are now claiming the Indian economy through the corporation of food and herbal products, an idea encapsulated in her book *The God Market* (2009). She argues that alongside India's new affluence runs a renewed, homogenised Hinduism riding on a wave of religiosity.

As India is liberalising and globalising its economy, the country is experiencing a rising tide of popular Hinduism, which is leaving no social segment and no public institution untouched...This religiosity is being cultivated by the emerging state-temple-corporate complex that is replacing the more secular public institutions of the Nehruvian era...a new Hindu religiosity is getting more deeply embedded in everyday life, both in the private and public spheres (2009: 3).

While Nanda's book is explicitly concerned with 'popular Hinduism' and not Hindu nationalism or Hindutva (2009: 4), Ramdev's work in the Northeast and in particular Nagaland is illuminated through the use of her framing of 'state-temple-corporate complex', particularly when we examine Ramdev's association with the BJP and RSS. Here, as Nanda's thesis suggests, Ramdev appears to harness a collective Hindu identity, renewing itself to remain relevant in the new economic milieu and taking on nationalistic overtones by virtue of its economic and political machinery (2009: 110). Ramdev's Patanjali and its desire to bring local, indigenous products to create a healthy nation, accords with the viewpoint of various RSS workers I have spoken to. The RSS detail how *swadeshi* products lead to a sense of patriotism in the nation.

In Assam, the government appear enthusiastic about Ramdev's investment, which, according to the Patanjali Herbal and Mega Food Park, will receive an investment worth Rs.1300 crores (c. £150 million), said to be the largest by the company anywhere in the country (The Wire 2016). This project will accomplish synergy, the Chief Minister of Assam, Sonowal, promises. The synergy of jobs, organic products, non-polluting medicinal, herbs and plants, while maintaining an ecological balance (The Wire 2016). However, not all showed the same enthusiasm as Sonowal. The United Liberation Front of Assam – Independent (ULFA-I), an armed nationalist group in Assam, asserted that:

The ULFA (I) in principle is opposed to allocation of 450 bighas of land to Indian's latest capitalist incarnation yoga Guru Ramdev's Patanjali at Balipara in Sonitpur district of Assam at a time when the state government has failed to provide rehabilitation and livelihood options to lakhs [thousands] of indigenous people displaced by flood, erosion and other natural disasters (The Wire 2016).

The ULFA-I further condemned 'those cunning politicians who have laid a red carpet to capitalist entities like Patanjali to Assam thus converting the state into a ground of exploitation by colonial Indian forces' (The Wire 2016). In 2014, Patanjali was allotted a substantial tract of land in the Bodoland Territorial Council in Assam to set up the country's largest herbal medicinal plant farm and factory, a move that has not been uniformly welcomed by the community as it would evict and displace many people (The Wire 2016). These protests often go unheeded – business trumps economic welfare of affected communities. In Nagaland, John tells me he encouraged Patanjali to invest in Nagaland because Baba Ramdev and Patanjali are brand names that people can trust. Their emphasis on holistic herbal products will benefit Nagaland, he says, primarily because 'Nagaland is a virgin state as far as herbal medicines are concerned. We have a high potential for marketing herbal products'. Explaining the attractiveness of such an investment, purely in the language of economic benefit and business, John tells me:

Even Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is very interested to come down to Nagaland to set up skill development programmes. He also has his own products. South east Asian market already dominated by Chinese and people of the South East Asian market rely on herbal medicines like Japanese, Korean, Thai, Myanmar, so why allow only Chinese to dictate terms in this market? We can also do! Fortunately, Ramdev and Sri Sri are already ahead of many competing companies. Going with Patanjali sounds wise, as they already have established market. Nagaland can just take their name and go international.

For John, the kind of investment that Patanjali can make is hugely beneficial for a resource rich region like Nagaland and the Northeast, because large forest areas are still unexplored. The potential to market this internationally, looking eastward, is what is driving this initiative, according to John. While it is not clear if Patanjali shares this vision of economic expansion, one can say that the 'virgin forests' that John speaks of aligns with Hindutva interests. One of the RSS workers in Arunachal Pradesh, Sumit, told me that the whole of Northeast reminds him of the Vedic era –

the time when India was ‘covered in forests’ and where the relationship between nature and humans was intimate: ‘we have lost it’, he said, referring to other parts of India, but ‘it is still here’.

This nostalgic rendering of the region is something that appears frequently in Hindutva narratives, concluding that here in the Northeast nature is abundant, and where herbs and plant life thrive and they can heal, and where modern medicine can be challenged through indigenous knowledge (see Heritage Explorer 2018). With the aim of creating an economic empire filled with the symbolism of ecological balance and indigenous innovation, Patanjali and their activities raise a number of challenging questions. What room does this ‘saffron-tinged’ momentum have for non-Hindu minorities who also call this country their home (Nanda 2009: 4)? What happens to those who have resisted the ‘Indian imagination’ when this economic model threatens the very basis of their sovereignty? In the following sections, I elaborate more on these questions to highlight the work of Patanjali Yog Samiti and how it aligns with Hindutva ideas of ‘Bharat’.

#### *Patanjali Yog Samiti (Yoga Committee) Nagaland*

Dimapur is a busy city most days. The main commercial street, Church Road, has congested traffic, jostling pedestrians and commuters, and groups regularly form around street vendors that make this road difficult to walk or drive through. But on Sundays, it is eerily empty and quiet, for this is the time when Nagas attend church. This Sabbath time and space is also when the Patanjali Yog Samiti (PYS) meeting happens. I have been invited to their weekly meeting on the top floor of a commercial building that they rent as office space, meeting room, and a small godown (warehouse) to stock their products.

I meet Alok, the President of Patanjali Dimapur, and we walk up the stairs to their meeting room. We clean the meeting room, and organise the chairs while we wait for the group to arrive. Around the office I notice large posters of Patanjali products, along with stickers and posters of Baba Ramdev and Balkrishnan (see image 5).

Once the group has gathered, we introduce ourselves; some slightly amused that I am interested in their group, others unsure of what to make of a 'Naga' doing research on Patanjali. The majority of the 20 people gathered are yoga teachers who work in private schools as teachers in Dimapur, while some are full-time yoga teachers who offer yoga as *seva* (service) in charitable organisations such as the Lions Club Dimapur. Others are nurses, who work in clinics and hospitals, while a few are pharmacists and business people. Out of the 20, none are Nagas; all are, what the Nagas would call, 'non-locals' – meaning people whose ethnicities are Rajasthani, Bengali, Bihari, Malayali, and Gujarati. Some are second-generation 'non-locals' born in Dimapur, while others are recent immigrants due to private sector jobs in clinics and hospitals, family connections, or new business ventures. It is this multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan urban space of Dimapur that allows the PYS to meet, share, and organise their activities, which may not be possible in other smaller towns and rural settings in Nagaland. It is also in Dimapur, at least to my knowledge, that the only Patanjali store exists in an area dominated by the Marwari, a successful business community from Rajasthan who settled in Dimapur in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The first thing that comes up in our discussion – with a splattering of English, Nagamese (a local pidgin), and Hindi – without any prompting, is the question of 'religion'. One of the young yoga teachers, Shanti, suggests that most Nagas think that Baba Ramdev is bringing 'Hindu religion'. Another yoga teacher, Ashok, chimes in to say that the Nagas see Ramdev as a 'Hindu guru' or a 'Sadhu'. This is a view that has been aired by the Baptist churches in Nagaland, and the group are aware of these perceptions. 'It doesn't help', Ashok continues, 'that with a long beard and hair, and with saffron robes, people are led to believe that he is a Hindu missionary, and therefore locals are afraid that Ramdev is propagating the Hindu religion'.

This is lamentable, notes an older gentleman, Sanjay, who is also the Finance Secretary of the group, because yoga is beneficial to everyone, regardless of



religion. He cannot understand what yoga has to do with religion – it is simply, as he put it, ‘taking in the breath and throwing out the breath’ (*‘sas lehte he or sas phekte he’*, in Hindi). This basic formula, Sanjay elaborates, does not ask a person to attend the *mandir* (Hindu temple); it is the most flexible and self-motivated form of exercise – it can be done anywhere. This is a point Ramdev himself made during a public yoga event organised in Kohima in 2011, his first official visit to Nagaland (see image 6).

Dressed in traditional Naga clothes, Ramdev asks the audience – comprising mainly of ‘non-locals’, school children, the armed forces and their families – if anyone has been converted by doing yoga? During his yoga routine, he pauses, and notes breathlessly in Hindi:

Does anyone need to go to the gym after all this exercise? You don’t need any machines or trainers! Self-exercise, self-healing, self-discipline, self-realization, self-wisdom, self-victory. This is yoga! Should this happen or not? Is yoga a *dharm* [religion]?<sup>5</sup> I made you do yoga for so long, did someone’s *dharm* change? Did someone get converted? Listen, this is how you have to change your life.

Like the Patanjali Yog Samiti, Ramdev is also keen to present yoga as a neutral activity, one that does not propagate any ‘religion’ over another. This tactic is consistently maintained, at least in Nagaland, during his public events. However careful he is at presenting yoga and Ayurveda as not ‘Hindu’, the language and cultural references in the numerous publications, as well as in meetings in Nagaland, are clearly informed by Hindu nationalist narratives. A similar point is made by Verena Khalikova in her article on ‘The Ayurveda of Baba Ramdev’, where she notes ‘that notwithstanding the differences in praxis, the rhetorical consistency between Ramdev, the RSS and the Vishva Hindu Parishad provides substantial grounds to argue that Ramdev’s Ayurvedic drugs, noodles, toothpaste and other goods are not simply produced to restore the health of individual Indian bodies, but also to nurture the soil of the Hindu nation’ (Khalikova 2017: 120). The linking of

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<sup>5</sup> There are numerous ways *dharm* has been translated – as duty, way of life, religion. Here, in this instance, I translate *dharm* as ‘religion’ primarily because Ramdev is talking about ‘conversion’, as in conversion from one religion to another. Also, this is in the context of Nagaland where yoga and Ramdev are often accused of bringing ‘Hindu religion’. Ramdev in part is addressing these concerns in the language of ‘religion’.

Ramdev's Patanjali to ideas of somatic and Hindu nationalism is demonstrated in my interactions with RSS activists around notions of *dharm*.

The association of Patanjali with yoga and Hindu identity is unfortunate, notes an RSS *pracharak* (full-time worker), Siddarth, in Dimapur. While sympathetic to Ramdev's vision of Patanjali and yoga, Siddarth is critical of PYS in Dimapur, because of their understanding of *dharm*. 'Dharm is not worship, but lifestyle, a discipline of a certain kind, like when you wake up, you do *pranam* (pay respect) to the gods and then to your parents. This feeling in today's Hindu society has confused *dharm* to be a method of worship. This is totally wrong'. This very idea is then taken on by the PYS in Dimapur, reports Siddarth, who combine yoga with Vedic chants, scaring the Nagas away. Even Baba Ramdev understands this distinction – between *dharm* as 'religion and lifestyle' – argues Siddarth, who reported that Ramdev asked the Home Minister of Nagaland if by doing *Surya Namaskar* ('Salutation to the Sun' – a popular sequence of yoga poses) his religion had changed, indicating that it had not. This understanding of *dharm* as 'lifestyle' is what they want to achieve, observed Siddarth.

Ramdev and the RSS organisation want to establish yoga on the basis of Christianity, not on the basis of Vedic philosophy. We don't want to make Christian, Hindu, and Muslim. We want to make patriots (*desh bhakt*). They just have to say Bharat Mata Ki Jai! Love your state. When you love and respect your state, only then will you develop it. That is the work of yoga.

Those familiar with the RSS tactic of inclusion, particularly in Christian Nagaland (Longkumer 2017) and amongst indigenous religions of Arunachal Pradesh (Kanungo 2011), will not be surprised when they focus their attention on indigenous cultures of the region as a way of fashioning national behaviour. But Ramdev's mission is explicitly concerned with valorising Vedic philosophy and traditions, unlike Siddarth's elaboration, a feature that is central to the Patanjali Yogpeeth Trust and other related activities.

This tension between Siddarth's insistence that Ramdev's yoga is about presenting itself as a patriotic duty – an idea that is also developed by Ramdev: 'From Yoga Duty to National Duty' (Ramdev 2009: 13) – and the 'Hindu' cultural references

related to nationalist narrative, is striking in the following two instances. The first instance is when Ramdev repeats this message of yoga, health and nationalism in Kohima in 2011, highlighting a particular mission – of shaping and disciplining the national body. In his own words:

I want to make the whole country a student, a soldier, a yogi, a warrior!...Every part of the body has to be strong. 100% fitness. You have to be number one in health, wealth and character. You have to make yourself number one, and make Bharat number one country.

In the second example, he makes the ‘Hindu’ link explicit. Ramdev moves around the stage in Kohima with his different yoga postures and suddenly pauses and says ‘Stand up everyone! Say, Bharat Mata Ki Jai! Vande Mataram’.<sup>6</sup> He then asks the audience:

Among all the human beings who have been on this earth till date, who is our most ideal icon in physical body and character? Hanuman ji [popularly known as the monkey god]! Say, Bajrang Bali Ki Jai! [Victory to Bajrang Bali, also Hanuman].

He then begins to recite the Hanuman Chalisa, a Hindu devotional hymn for Lord Hanuman, and the participants, mostly non-locals, repeat this in unison. He then goes on to refer to other deities to demonstrate an ecumenism and inclusiveness:

Who is ideal in service and love? Lord Jesus! Who destroys sin and injustice? To eradicate dishonesty from earth... for that, messenger Mohammad sahib showed courage. Lord Ram is the ideal for *rashtra dharm* [national duty].

In an event jointly organised with Bharat Swabhiman and PYT, Ramdev’s speech provides a clear vision of his motivation for national wellness, scattered with ‘Hindu’ cultural references. Bharat Swabhiman (founded in 2009 by Ramdev), in particular, presents itself as a nationalist project on their website that says through ‘100% nationalist thinking, 100% boycott of foreign companies and by assimilating indigenous, patriotic people to organize 100%... [we want to] build a healthy, prosperous, culture in India – this is the “pride of India” campaign’ (Bharat

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<sup>6</sup> Bharat Mata Ki Jai, victory to Mother India, and Vande Mataram, Mother, I bow to thee – are nationalistic slogans composed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ramaswamy 2001). The former, in particular, is used by the Hindu-right in their political events, which has caused controversy amongst Muslims and Christians, who see this as ‘mother worship’. It goes contrary to their monotheistic principles, and their exclusive allegiance to one God (see Indian Express 2017).

Swabhiman Trust 2018). The website goes on to say that ‘through yoga, we want to organise the whole nation’. This is a view that complements the RSS and Hindu nationalist movement more broadly. Even a cursory glance at the website, and the *Yog Sandesh*, a monthly magazine published by Divya Yog Mandir (Trust), a part of PYT, emphasises the nationalist credentials of Bharat Swabhiman (BS) as economic nationalism, combined with a healthy dose of yoga. One of the goals of BS is that ‘along with Yoga exercise, nation building and national religion shall also be discussed regularly. People shall be informed as what they could do for the betterment of the nation’ (Ramdev 2011: 25).

It is no surprise then that Ramdev would address the audience in Kohima along these lines:

Now that I have given you complete physical education, I will give you yoga education, pranayama meditation training. Then social education and education on patriotism, anti corruption education... now I have started another education...I saw it in UK, USA, Canada. This is called political education. They make children sit there and teach them how politics is done. The kind of thieves and thugs sitting in ours, if we make children sit there, our children will say even we want to loot like them. They cannot give training at the Vidhan Sabhas or Lok Sabhas [lower legislative and house of the people respectively]. That is why, just like I have created free and open yoga education, now I have started open political education so that no dishonest, corrupt, thief, thug will rule over us, so that only good people rule us.

Creating a healthy nation that is disciplined, corrupt free, and inculcating a ‘open political education’ may be laudable, but it is moulded according to one template – that of yoga – and this begs the question: ‘whose way of life is it?’ The PYS in Dimapur certainly had views of their own, which explains the aims of Patanjali/BS and promulgating Ramdev’s vision.

Shanti, a yoga teacher and member of PYS, explains to me that yoga can also cure diseases such as cancer. She gives the example of a Naga Lotha lady (who had cancer) who practised *pranayama* and the *asanas* taught by Ramdev. She was completely cured, Shanti recounts. But the problem was, Shanti continues, once she was cured, she stopped attending the yoga sessions. That is the problem, she says,

‘Nagas are not committed nor disciplined to become regular’. Discipline then is an issue with Nagas, because PYS generally agree that they do not take yoga seriously. When I interject to ask if yoga comes with a particular way of life unfamiliar to the Nagas, members of PYS all tell me of the simplicity of yoga – it is all about the breath – and how doing it, in whatever way one can, has huge benefits, and transcends national and local contexts. When I ask for some examples of how yoga is essential for national wellbeing, they say that theirs is a yoga programme based on *seva* (selfless service). But the problem is that, they tell me, Nagas are suspicious when they offer free yoga sessions – but when yoga studios charge a fee and package yoga as fitness with ‘sporty outfits’, then, the Nagas are willing to pay ‘thousands of rupees’, replies Shanti.

Not all Nagas, say the PYS, are convinced that yoga cures, and want medicine to accompany it. When I comment that this is an odd combination, they agree, but say that ‘if yoga heals them [the Nagas], they say that it is medicine and not the yoga due to the pressure from the church’. The problem with yoga, Alem, a church pastor of a prominent Dimapur congregation, tells me, is that it is trying to enter Nagaland as a ‘physical exercise’. He argues that it is a tactic to infiltrate Naga Christianity slowly – yoga is actually Hinduism, especially when they touch the ‘spiritual’ aspects, he says. When I ask him to give me an example, he says, ‘if you are ill and you do yoga and you are healed, then, ‘spiritually’ there can be a question mark. ‘Was it the Christian god or the Hindu god’ – there will be doubt and they [the Nagas] will start developing a ‘soft corner’ for the Hindus’. This is how, Alem says, hinduising starts. While yoga is a serious concern for pastors such as Alem, and for many Nagas over the anxiety of yoga as a ‘healing agent’, asking for medicine, however, suggests Ashok (from the PYS group), demonstrates a lack of discipline.

The comparison of yoga and medicine invites a value judgement on habit and attitude – the Nagas appear to lack discipline and this is due, according to Ashok, to their lack of belief (*biswas*) in yoga. As we talk the PYS group with regard to the lack of self-discipline of the Nagas – ‘they do not like pranayama, as it is slow, they want faster exercises’; ‘the Nagas have a problem sitting down – they can’t sit in the lotus style’. There appears to be an assumption of cultural superiority underlining their

attitudes towards the Nagas – that the technique of the body is normal for certain people and difficult for others. Instead of treating this as an instance of unfamiliarity with the practice of yoga, PYS attribute this to certain cultural traits. These views were aired openly particularly during my discussion with PYS with regard to food. ‘Eating meat and rice’ is a problem for the Nagas, they said, and it causes ‘major health issues’. One could see how this might cause health problems. When Nagas were primarily agrarian farmers, it would make sense for them to consume plenty of meat and rice, as this would be burned off during their manual labour in the fields. But now, due to their shift way from an agrarian society to urban areas, the quantity of meat and rice no longer needs to be so large. Not reducing the amount of salted meat consumed has led to heart disease and high blood pressure becoming more common. But their remark about meat was not solely a judgement over health practices; it was a question over culinary choices and culture, indicating that one is better than the other.

Arpit and Sunita are two of the Patanjali shop owners (see image 7) who regularly provide advice to people – both Nagas and non-locals – about specific health and food products. On two occasions, one with both of them and one with just Arpit, I sit in their shop discussing the philosophy of Ramdev and Patanjali, as customers come and go. Two Naga women come to the shop asking for joint pain medicines. Sunita offers them a Patanjali product but also insists that they consume garlic and turmeric. She suggests that the joint pain is related to the stomach and to ‘reduce your protein intake and eat less *tenga* (sour food such as bamboo shoots, a common dish in Nagaland)’. Along with the health advice, she also advertises their Patanjali cornflakes, and sells them by informing the women that it is currently a very popular product.

Arpit and Sunita tell me that because Nagas are primarily a meat-eating society, sometimes there is a clash with the products that Patanjali sells. ‘So, we suggest to Naga customers to reduce eating meat slowly; they cannot stop all at once’. When I asked why, and if anybody has heeded their suggestions, Sunita, remarks: ‘meat causes a lot of problems like piles. There are some health problems that happen due

to a large consumption of meat. But if we suggest that they should avoid meat, they listen. Yes, many changes have come. Even if you cannot be 100% vegetarian, have meat occasionally – that is better’. Arpit enthusiastically affirms Sunita’s assessment – ‘Some people have told us that they have left eating meat altogether’. Eating meat, Sunita continues, causes the stomach to react, as it is not easily digestible. ‘It causes constipation, gastritis. After 40, in any case, we have to control our diet like ghee, oil etc. They [the Nagas] also understand this’.

Is this simply an instance of sharing their knowledge of health practices? Or is there ideology behind their views? All of the yoga teachers and Patanjali storeowners (who are also trained yoga teachers) have to undergo a rigorous 50-day programme in Haridwar, the headquarters of Patanjali Yogpeeth Trust. They also meet regularly in Dimapur and attend other regional meetings in Guwahati, Assam, or go frequently to Haridwar to receive additional training. They read the monthly magazine, *Yog Sandesh*, and regularly follow Ramdev on the *Sanskar* and *Aastha* TV channels. So, there is an arc of influence from Ramdev and his philosophy for these followers that resonates in their daily lives. It is also in their attempts to educate the Nagas about yoga, food and health practices, and how this relates to a particular national culture. In a way, PYS share the same ideas of national health couched very much in a language of pride, loyalty, and cultural unity of Bharat, though in ways that may not come across as explicitly adversarial or confrontational. Ramdev’s presentation of himself in Nagaland may not signal an obvious relationship with Hindutva ideals – he is simply a business guru investing in the state. However, Joseph Alter reminds us that ‘[t]he obvious problem with such a perspective [of Hindu nationalism] is that the “cultural unity” which Muslims, Christians and Scheduled caste Hindus are supposedly incipiently part of is a high caste vision of both the terms of culture and the criteria of unity’ (Alter 1994: 578).

This criterion of ‘high caste’ visions that Alter speaks of is an important interpretation of Hindutva food practices based around vegetarianism, for example. Vegetarianism is the first principle for the teachers of yoga, as advocated by Baba Ramdev, who even declares that ‘man is vegetarian by nature’ (Ramdev 2009: 16,

11). This high caste notion is something that does not always accord well with those of the lower castes and tribals in India who consume meat on a regular basis because it is widely available and is a cheap source of protein (Natrajan 2018: 4). Since the BJP came to power in 2014, the consumption of beef has become considerably more politicised and restricted through state-level bans. ‘Cow vigilantes’, or *gau rakshaks*, have surged, attacking beef-eating communities like Muslims and Dalits, often overlooked or even sanctioned by state law enforcement, ostensibly protecting, preserving, and promoting the ‘culture of Hindus’ based on a ‘Hindu nation’ (Natrajan 2018; Jaffrelot 2017).

Although the Patanjali group are more nuanced and understated in their approach (Arpit also told me that he does not believe that beef eating should be stopped in Nagaland), meat (and in particular beef) plays a significant role in how the food cultures of the region, according to Patanjali and the Sangh Parivar, must be altered. The ‘beef ban’<sup>7</sup> debate all over India is a case in point, though in states like Meghalaya where people resisted this call, even organising ‘beef parties’ when the BJP President, Amit Shah, visited the state (Firstpost 2015). Although discussions about the beef ban have quietened down in the Northeast, there are still undercurrents of the contested nature of ‘beef’ in the minds of the RSS workers. M.S. Golwalkar, the second RSS chief, in a quote that has appeared frequently in magazines published in Nagaland and Assam, reportedly said that, ‘It is a fact that Naga Vanvasi [tribal] brothers take beef but for that not they but we are to repent because we have not treated them well and we have not enlightened them about civilisation and culture’ (M.S. Golwalkar, quoted originally in Souvenir 2003). A classic RSS tactic of cultural assimilation is on display here, but it also speaks to a certain ‘civilisational lack’ of the Nagas, which the RSS will provide by way of introducing new ways of livelihood. In a way, there is a synergy between the Patanjali activities and those of the RSS.

### *RSS/Patanjali synergies: Swadeshi and Patriotism*

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<sup>7</sup> 20 out of the 29 states in India have some regulation with regard to the slaughter or sale of cows. What is significant since the BJP came to power in 2014 are the increased ‘cow vigilantes’ and the introduction of stringent legislation in both the national and state levels with regard to the slaughter, consumption, possession and transportation of cows (Natrajan 2018: 1).



Siddarth is a seasoned RSS *pracharak* living in Dimapur. When I casually ask him about Patanjali, he goes on to elaborate on their activities, noting how he was one of the people involved in facilitating Ramdev's visit to Nagaland in January 2018. For Siddarth, the introduction of Patanjali is very much linked with *swadeshi* (literally of one's own country) products and the encompassing of the region – Northeast and Nagaland – into the larger 'Bharatiya' culture. Economic nationalism premised on *swadeshi* became popular amongst the Sangh Parivar when the Indian government liberalised the economy in 1991 (Gurumurthy 1998). It must be noted that the idea of *swadeshi* is not a uniform one, used by both those on the left and the right of the political spectrum (Sarkar 2016; Hansen 2001). The strategy to challenge British rule through boycotts and the promotion of economic self-sufficiency emerged in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and was developed in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century amongst the Bengali elite, who resented the British plan to partition Bengal in 1905-8. As a form of resistance, *swadeshi* was an economic strategy to reject, both symbolically and literally, anything British (Hansen 2001: 292). Under Mahatma Gandhi in the 1920s it took on a more generalised concept of nationalist *swadeshi* politics linked to sartorial production of homespun, hand-woven cloth called *khadi* (Trivedi 2003: 11; also Tarlo 1996). It was not only a movement to boycott foreign products or to produce indigenous cloth (*khadi*), but became a movement for self-sufficiency that developed during the struggle for Indian independence. Gandhi's notion of *swadeshi* then has close affinities with Hindu nationalism through economic protectionism (Jaffrelot 2007: 342-43), intertwined with the notion of self-sufficiency and patriotism.

Siddarth has been in Nagaland since 1981, and he is very aware of what the Nagas think of the 'Indian state'. The strength of the bond between Naga nationalism and Christianity is something that has inhibited the spread, and the activities, of the RSS, Siddarth explains. He laments that the vision of India, a vision solely focused on New Delhi as the centre, has created problems for many regions in India. Siddarth argues that New Delhi's hegemony must be reinterpreted by considering what national integration means. It must involve a more sophisticated approach looking at how the Indian state understands 'border societies' like Nagaland. For him, it is

not for Nagaland to 'integrate' but New Delhi that needs to integrate with Nagaland – 'National integration has to happen *with* them [the Nagas]'.

When I ask how this is to be done, Siddarth focuses the argument on national organisations like Patanjali who have started playing the role of 'national humanity through real development of human beings'. Siddarth explains to me:

There is the *swadeshi* feeling it [Patanjali] creates [of belonging to your own country]. *Swadeshi* feeling is not a commodity. It is the individual responsibility. *Swabhasha, swasanskriti, swaparivar, swadesh*—my language, my culture, my family, my country. This feeling has left us. Patanjali is a vehicle for this by coming to make Ayurvedic products here. Allopathic medicines are costly, and though they heal us, our country's raw materials and knowledge don't get developed. Patanjali is here to instil *swadeshi* feeling and the other is to provide alternate medicine. The other path Ramdev ji has brought is 'yog'. He brought the path of yoga not just for some poses and exercises but to develop one's individuality in a way that conjoins the family, society and country with it - to bring a sense of devotion.

When I ask what kind of development would happen as a result of Patanjali's presence in Nagaland, he tells me about the work on Ayurveda. There are plenty of herbs here in Nagaland that are useful for Ayurveda, he suggests. When I ask 'what kind of "Naga herbs"?', he reprimands me, saying 'why do you call them Naga herbs? Herbs are herbs?'. He emphasises that they are national property and should not be distinguished according to geo-ethnic identities. Ramdev's aim is to establish an Ayurveda school in Nagaland (with local employment) and to develop *swadeshi* products (the plan for the investment promised in January 2018). These products will carry the tag 'Made in Bharat', emphasising the indigenous, national aspect of production, whether it be from Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan or Nagaland, an idea that is different from the BJP's 'Make in India' economic policy, which sought foreign investment rather than building from within (Ruparelia 2015).

Another RSS *pracharak* in Guwahati, Nikesh, of Sewa Bharati, a charitable RSS-affiliated organisation, is very insistent on the idea of *swadeshi* and talks to me at length on what it means and how it can cultivate patriotism. The use of indigenous products must be foremost in the nation now. He further explains that Indians have been exploited relentlessly by foreign companies who have looted the country

through their economic activities and not invested in the country; all the money has filled the coffers of rich multinational companies while the average Indian continues to suffer. Such a view is not exactly a surprise, it has been argued many times that national economies have been exploited for maximum profit by foreign companies (see Nussbaum 2002; Hansen 2001). This ‘anti-corruption’ rhetoric formed a key part of Narendra Modi’s campaign for the 2014 election (Ruparelia 2015). Nikesh reminds me that there is Patanjali but also Baidyanath, Dabur, and Bajaj, which all promote indigenous products. Participating in buying and promoting these products is what brings about patriotism, he suggests.

The issue with these indigenous products is, Nikesh reminds me, that they have been used in the past to suggest that India is ‘backward’. These products, once unfashionable and a cause for embarrassment, are now making a comeback, because people want something that is ‘natural, herbal, and even organic’. Take the example of Colgate he says:

In Colgate ads they are saying ‘ved shakti’ [literally Vedas, a sacred Hindu text, and Shakti, power]. Have you seen their ad? You see! They are saying it is a combination of ‘ved’ (Vedas; sacred Hindu text) and ‘vigyan’ (science). This same Colgate used to say before that salt was bad but later they said their paste has salt. They show cloves and all that in the ad. Why are they showing all this herbal stuff now? Why didn’t they show herbal before?...When our country has good stuff like in our food items, we have *dalia* (cracked wheat), maize, etc. When we used to eat all this, they used to say this is not food; it is better to eat fast food they said. Now what do they have in Horlicks? Wheat, maize. Today multinational companies are using these very things. If they sell all this, then they are just using it for trade/profit. If someone is using/selling it in *swadeshi* terms then we should propagate and push that.

As Nikesh acknowledges, even foreign companies like Colgate, which have a base in India, make use of *swadeshi* language to sell their products, and protect their market interest. The question he then poses is, ‘how do people get the *swadeshi* feeling’? This is where the ‘patriotic consumer’ comes in. If a person has a cold, she can combine ‘clove oil and tea’ according to the Ayurvedic formula, Nikesh says, or here in the Northeast, people consume ginger for a cold mixed with hot water, or chicken broth. The same ‘*videshi*’ (foreign) company can take the indigenous Ayurvedic formula, make some modification, and then market it as ‘cold medicine’. The

'patriotic consumer' can thus decide which to consume. That is the knowledge we must give the people, he says.

In both Siddarth and Nikesh's views, *swadeshi* companies like Patanjali are good for the region because they cultivate patriotism and also contribute to the economy by reinvesting back into the local economy. This is clearly a case of economic nationalism, with its particular ethno-centric approach made palpable by harnessing 'India's nature' to make desired citizens – those who consume and buy 'Indian', and by default bringing about a 'patriotic consumer' who participates in the 'ethics of Hindutva and the spirit of capitalism' (Hansen 2001). The problem though, as many of the critics (Khalikova 2017; Bhattacharya 2015; Chakrabarty 2006) of this approach would acknowledge is that, 'this spirit' is encapsulated in Bharat Mata and involves devotional slogans such as Vande Mataram and invocation to deities like Hanuman. It is this kind of patriotism, not on some superficial level with a promise to create jobs, but on a deeper form of involvement laced with national and religious symbols, that inhibits participation in the nation of regions such as the Northeast.

### ***Conclusion***

Baba Ramdev is now a household name in India through the widely consumed and available product, Patanjali. Ramdev appears to be ubiquitous – from brand ambassador, and television personality, to political leader, championing yoga at a national and international level. This article has demonstrated that there are different dynamics to Patanjali's interactions with Nagaland. The investments that Ramdev and Balkrishnan came to inaugurate in Punglwa show their economic vision. It highlights the aim of Patanjali Yogpeeth Trust in creating an Ayurvedic college along with a medical and nursing college. Both the Nagaland government, who initiated this entry, along with the landowners of Punglwa, see this as a development opportunity that will create jobs and skills, provided that land is available for these investments and accompanying infrastructure like roads are built by the government. This model is something that is followed by Patanjali in other parts of India where they have similar projects. For some Nagas, it is an opportunity to compete with the Southeast Asian market, dominated by Chinese, Thai, Burmese

and Korean products. The combination of resource rich regions like Nagaland, along with the knowledge and skill provided by Patanjali will create 'bioprosperty' (Osseo-Asare 2014) that focuses on indigenous knowledge, through the search and use of indigenous plant life, aiding in potential cures.

While Ramdev's activities could be viewed within a business model of entrepreneurship, it is vital to consider the kind of language and cultural resources he utilises. On the one hand, I have shown how Ramdev, along with other interlocutors like the RSS, project Ramdev and Patanjali as 'secular', solely with a 'national interest' at heart through improving the health of the nation. This 'somatic nationalism' is further interspersed, on the other hand, with Hindu cultural narratives like Bharat Mata Ki Jai, Vande Mataram, and Hanuman Chalisa. This tension, though attempts are being made to manage it, remains at the heart of Patanjali activities both at the national and state level, as demonstrated through Ramdev's public speeches in Kohima. A similar situation unfolds through the activities of Patanjali Yog Samiti in Dimapur. Yoga for them is essential to the health of the nation. Introducing this practice to the Nagas is therefore crucial, particularly since they have an unhealthy lifestyle – consuming meat, salt, bamboo shoots – that requires a gentle nudge towards a cuisine that is extolled by Ramdev and Patanjali. While vegetarianism is pervasive in Ramdev and Patanjali's philosophy, meat as a way of life is central to the Nagas. The debate over food sovereignty unleashes another conversation about diversity, difference, and acts as 'resistance that continually problematizes vegetarian food's claims to its universal and unmarked (by caste) status' (Natrajan 2018: 14).

While the success of Patanjali has been attributed to the close affinities with the Sangh Parivar and the popularity of the current BJP government in the centre, Patanjali and Ramdev's entry into the Northeast of India and in particular Nagaland raises a number of questions. The association of the Sangh Parivar and Ramdev with International Yoga Day falling on Sunday for the Christians, to its alleged association with Hinduism and with cultural hegemony represent complex discussions with regard to food, cultural superiority, and *swadeshi* and patriotism. Cultivating a sense of belonging that is not only about consuming Indian brands like

Patanjali, but also creating a 'feeling' of belonging to India, has clearly been associated with the RSS who now rely on Patanjali to be that vehicle. The somatic nationalism of Patanjali and Ramdev – utilising the body, and its focus on the health of the nation –, I have shown, represent a new kind of Hindutva (neo-Hindutva) that is increasingly mobile, flexible, and diffuse. It moves in spaces, forged not by its steely traditional militancy, but by its liquidity according to the nature of its host. And the question remains how this will develop in Nagaland and the Northeast.

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