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Abstract

Alongside Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose politics he explicitly endorses, Swami Ramdev is frequently depicted as *the* contemporary face of neo-Hindutva nationalism in India. This essay concerns specific, but interrelated, aspects of the Swami Ramdev ‘phenomenon’ and their particular relation to Hindu nationalism. We bracket the headline-stealing anti-Islamic and pro-Modi proclamations in order to focus on the nuances of the relationship between his yoga and a majoritarian Hindutva agenda and examine the specifics of Ramdev’s teachings and campaigns. We suggest that the (Hindu) nationalism of Ramdev and his organisations is formed less of propositional or even affective content but instead is a condition emerging from its particular prescription and practice of yoga; it is a condition of the body. In this way, yoga, as it is reproduced at the site of the individual body, produces the national(ist) activist subject.

Keywords

Yoga, Hindutva, Hindu nationalism, Swami Ramdev, body

Awakening Hindu Nationalism through Yoga: Swami Ramdev and the Bharat Swabhiman Movement

The past several decades have seen a particularly ardent ‘rediscovery’ or ‘revival’ of yoga in India, under the aegis of an organisation by the name of Patanjali Yog Peeth (Trust) headed by the globally-known media-savvy yoga guru Swami Ramdev. A familiar and popular affair in major parts of urban India, yoga classes held under the banner of Swami Ramdev have attracted a substantial number of followers, many of whom have started teaching yoga themselves. This essay concerns specific, but interrelated, aspects of the Swami Ramdev ‘phenomenon’ and their particular relation to Hindu nationalism.

Alongside Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose politics Ramdev explicitly endorses, the swami is frequently depicted as *the* contemporary face of neo-Swadeshi and neo-Hindutva nationalism in India. As is well known, high-profile gurus employ film and televisual spectacles to extend their auras and attract new devotees (Copeman and Ikegame 2012). They rival, or replicate, the most powerful media tycoons in terms of media presence, access, and ownership; and, indeed, Swami Ramdev played an unprecedented role in the 2014 Indian election campaign and preceding anti-corruption campaigns. Ramdev (and other guru televangelists) mobilized their own considerable media resources, also mediating other (transnational) media-publics to significant effect. But if we were to bracket the headline-stealing anti-Islamic and pro-Modi proclamations, what is the relationship between the yoga that made him famous and the Hindu nationalism with which he is now so strongly associated? Here we seek to move beyond the media spectacle to examine the specifics of Ramdev’s teachings and campaigns, especially as they manifested in the Bharat

Swabhiman (henceforth BS) movement, or India self-respect movement, in the run up to the country's elections in 2014. We see this period as one of the intensification of a particular rhetoric of Hindu nationalism, and we examine the coming into being of the organization's use of certain strategies – such as recourse to the Vedas, 'nationalist awakening,' deployment of scientificity, etc. – whose subsequent elaboration and publicisation has contributed to what Christophe Jaffrelot (2017) has described as the emergence of a 'Hindu state'. Our argument is that the (Hindu) nationalism of Ramdev and his organisations is not formed of propositional or even affective content but rather is a condition emerging from its particular prescription and practice of yoga itself; it is a condition of the body. Yoga, as it is reproduced at the site of the individual body in the activities of the PYPT, produces the nationalist activist subject.

It is rarely the case that a neatly demarcated Gandhian or Nehruvian nationalism stands diametrically opposed to that of the Hindu Right; rather, nationalist sensibilities manifest in various dialectical combinations (Cohen 2008). In seeking to understand the nationalism specific to Ramdev and his organisations, there is of course good reason to think that it possesses a certain Hindu nationalist charge. But this is not the Hindu nationalism of the Bajrang Dal or the RSS or even (at least not directly) the BJP. Ramdev's Hindu nationalism seeks to propagate a Vedic cultural paradigm on the basis of its scientificity, the exemplary representative of which is its yogic health regime. However, while such an impetus has been part of PYPT discourse from the beginning, there are instances when Ramdev and the PYPT articulate a specific kind of ecumenicism. For us, this is based on a certain capacity that the yogic health regime possesses within the PYPT's understanding and practice. It is our task here to understand exactly this capacity which allows the PYPT to simultaneously practise its ecumenicism and its majoritarianism.

Contemporary critics of Ramdev, writing in the aftermath of his Hindu nationalist pronouncements, tend to understand the yogic health regime in two ways. While the first understanding sees its popularity as an index of how a certain Hindu commodity is being sold to its consumers in order to deduce a majoritarian consensus, the second, in a more nuanced sense, takes the yogic health regime as performative, seeking to discipline the body while simultaneously indexing it to a particular kind of majoritarian nationalism. In other words, here the insistence on the centrality of the yogic health regime is read as an instance of initiating on the same register a disciplinary project, one which also leads to a certain kind of *identification*.

Though largely agreeing with this latter position, we read the promotional material of the PYPT to show that the centrality of the yogic health regime derives from its ability to materialise a certain kind of nationalist subject where this materialisation is not dependent on identification, but rather, involves a particular bodily formation that it initiates. If this regime is in fact a way of disciplining the body, the act of disciplining is successful only to the extent that there are produced certain capacities from within the body through the action of the yogic health regime. In this sense nationalism is produced in the subject of the yogic health regime as a matter of health understood as a restoration of the body to its natural proclivities. Nationalism is naturalised here, but only to the extent that this 'nature' is driven by an affective orientation internal to the body.

Here we examine closely the political pamphlets, health guides, yoga manuals and science publications of the PYPT for the specific propositions that form the self-understanding of the organisation. Of course, given Ramdev's entry into politics along with the active commodification of yoga culture, it would be easy to attribute some or the other kind of instrumental 'motive' to the yoga of the PYPT. The revivalist impetus of the organisation can legitimately be understood as a resurrection suited to modern interests and aspirations. But the analysis we offer here consciously sidesteps this tendency. It is not, however, out of some necessary disagreement that we choose to differ. Rather, we are more interested in what it is that is specific to the instrumentality one would otherwise associate with something like the PYPT. We read the organisation's literature to examine how the yogic practices professed and prescribed by the PYPT aren't yet another new medicinal product in the market. Nor are they merely a part or the core of some well-thought-out agenda for a soft (or hard) Hindutva political party line.

Instead, health is taken here to be the rubric under which an entire ideal of individual and collective well-being is conceptualized as the ultimate aim of the whole enterprise of activities that is the PYPT and its associates. Such 'ideals' need not be thought of as cover for modern 'instrumental' reason alone and are, in fact, best understood as powerful suppositions which enable a range of practical engagements, engagements that need to be understood in their own right. We complement this textual analysis with excerpts from interviews we conducted with members of the PYPT in Delhi and Haridwar in 2010 and 2011.

Swami Ramdev

We briefly delineate three main features of the Ramdev 'phenomenon' which both indicate the span of his activities and interests and form the subject of much public attention (and controversy). The first of these concerns Ramdev's ownership of a veritable corporate empire under the Patanjali umbrella, with a number of commercial units which deal in 'herbal' food, medicines and various therapeutic commodities. It is run on the basis of donations, in addition to revenue from several other holdings, including Divya Pharmacy and Patanjali Ayurved, the latter of which has been widely reported in the media to be worth over USD 6 billion, with an annual turnover of eleven hundred crore rupees (or 149 million USD) in 2016-17. In addition to Ramdev's aide Acharya Balkrishna acquiring majority shares in *Aastha*, the channel which gave Ramdev his first significant TV slot, Ramdev has also launched his own broadcasting company (Vedic Broadcasting Limited or VBL), with three regional channels in Tamil, Telugu and Kannada. Indeed, in addition to the PYPT's prolific production of printed pamphlets and booklets, which we focus on here, the PYPT also crucially rests on the repeated and repeatable sequence of the televised yoga camp (see Alter 2008) where health is at once a matter of consumption and a teleology for the nation.

The second feature of this phenomenon is the charitable organisation that the PYPT claims to be. Indeed, this is a feature of its ashram-like constitution whereby free food and lodging along with a host of other facilities are said to be provided to the poor and the needy¹. These include free consultancy in Ayurveda treatment, which is offered on its campuses by

over a hundred qualified ayurvedic practitioners on a daily basis. Such free advice can also be obtained through letters, fax, email and call-in services run by the Trust, in addition to the free consultancy service provided in nearly five thousand dispensaries (Patanjali Chikitsalayas) and pharmacies (Patanjali Arogyakendras) in India and abroad, which the Trust claims cater to hundreds of thousands of patients a day. This consultancy service is matched by the initiative to distribute medicine and food supplements on appropriate/hundred per cent discount to economically weaker sections.

The third feature of PYPT is explicitly connected to the social movement(s) it sees itself as organising. The movement-al form that PYPT has assumed has taken various names – it has been called the ‘rog mukti andolan’ (literally, ‘freedom from disease movement’) and the ‘Pranayam Revolution’ at different times. This voluntary movement has, since its inception in 2006, consisted of trained yoga instructors who seek to take the message of yoga to everyone in the country in order to ensure the health of each individual and therefore, in a logical progression, the nation at large. Since 2009 a new turn towards mobilization around issues of corruption and graft money may be witnessed, which has called for fundamental systemic change in the country. A related aspect of this movement has been an effort to create awareness about the necessity of ‘bringing back’ Indian systems of knowledge and Indian languages into the core of the activities and organisation of the Indian state and its functions. However, while we call this ‘a new turn’, it is important to note that this rhetoric has inherited in the discourse of the PYPT right from the start (a point we develop later), which sees itself as a champion of Vedic systems of knowledge and culture, especially in terms of therapeutic practices. In this new phase, the movement also acquired its new name: Bharat Swabhiman.

There are many reasons to think that there is a continuity between a movement for the eradication of diseases in India and the world and something like the more recent BS movement; not the least of which is the fact that the PYPT and Ramdev themselves do not perceive them to be radically discontinuous. While the nationalism of the later phase was also evinced earlier, along with the insistence on securing the health of the nation through a specific set of means, primarily the yogic health regime of the PYPT, the BS movement is differentiated by the singularity of its focus on state power as the crucial change-making agent.

The populism that has been constitutive of Ramdev’s particular modern development of yoga can be attributed to such discursive modifications as the one effected by his adherence to the goal of universal health instead of attainment of samadhi, ensuring, at the same time, its national and transnational appeal. By discursive modification we do not mean that Ramdev manufactures a modern treatise foreign to any doctrine of yoga in order to attract a wider audience and consumer-base for what is basically a new-age fitness regime. What we are trying to suggest is that Ramdev’s practical enunciation occurs within a set of historically sedimented possibilities of what can be said and done in the field of yoga in order to enact a particular truth of the particular discursive practices in question, in a practically different context of power-relations in which larger population bodies are made the object of attention. What is specific to Ramdev is that each of these enactments is connected to a peculiar problematic of the securing of health.

The Bharat Swabhiman Movement in Perspective

By way of introducing the topic of nationalism as enunciated in the programme of Ramdev and his organisation, that is, to provide a context for it, we start with Peter van der Veer's (2007) description of a certain trajectory that the relationship between yoga and Indian nationalism has taken.

The crafting of this relationship was occasioned by and as part of the nationalist bourgeoisie's reclaiming of the Orientalist thesis of eastern spiritualism in order to assert the superiority of indigenous Hindu traditions over those of Christianity under colonialism or, pushed to a limit, even the materialism of the west. In this practice of claim-making there was an emphasis on the scientific nature of these religious traditions, thus making them amenable for modern national identity formation. As van der Veer shows, presenting yoga as 'ancient wisdom' allows for it to emerge as 'the core of Hindu "spirituality"' whilst remaining 'devoid of any specific devotional content'. Thus, Vivekananda, who pioneered this particular kind of exposition concerning yoga, could present yoga as the 'Indian science of supra-consciousness'. Yoga, then, argues van der Veer, is made into 'the unifying sign of the Indian nation, and not only for national consumption, but for the entire world' (van der Veer 2007, 319) on account of its universal scope as a scientific form of spirituality.

An 'offshoot' of this first moment of redefining yoga as an Indian scientific tradition that is universal in scope is that 'health issues could be addressed in terms of a national science of yoga.' Yoga, or a kind of Hatha Yoga, as van der Veer specifies, could then be thought of as a mode of physical exercise amenable to medical scientific practice. This health-augmenting yoga, he suggests, gets linked to the field of martial arts and becomes available as the means for the crafting of a healthy, strong masculinity in the Hindu nationalist project of groups like the RSS or the VHP, thereby allowing a religious organisation of bodily discipline to gain political meaning. For van der Veer, this project is one that is anti-secular and makes for an Indian utopia, the programmatic aspect of which involves the exclusion of minorities, often leading up to situations of communal violence.

The other direction taken by this 'yoga for health' is that of a middle-class Indian export riding the flow of global capital, which transports it to various parts of the world. Seen as Indian spirituality or a holistic health regime competing with biomedicine, yoga becomes one of the most successful Indian commodities in the world market from the second half of the twentieth century onwards. Yet, its connection with nationalism is not therefore terminated as Indian immigrant groups use this connection to organise themselves in the realm of identity politics, especially in the USA. The liberalisation of the Indian economy in the current phase of globalisation also brings yoga 'back into' India, primarily for the consumption of the mobility-seeking middle class. In effect, it also allows for the rediscovery of yoga and other Hindu traditions within the country as part of the revival of "Indian civilization," thus aiding the political organisation of Hindu nationalism. There is then a production of a 'new-fangled urban religiosity that is both interested in yoga and in a strong nation that supports this kind of politics' (326).

For van der Veer, one of the merits of tracing this historical trajectory of yoga is in showing how this ‘discipline of the self’ – which became the distinct trope of an anti-colonial nationalism and, later, a resurgent Hindu nationalism that drew on the resources of the preceding formation – points at the possibility that movements which propagate it can have considerable ‘political impact’ (325). Even a cursory survey of the activities of Ramdev and the PYPT over the last decade or so confirm this argument, especially if one considers the specifics of the BS Movement, and the Narendra Modi government’s establishment of 21st June as the International Day of Yoga. In what follows, we try to understand and elaborate upon the conditions of possibility of the ‘political’ potential of the PYPT and its promotion and propagation of yoga in relation to the nationalism of the organisation, the individuals connected with it and its associate bodies.

Much of the revision of van der Veer’s account that we offer has to do with introducing into it a concern with the body. We show that this concern with the body emerges fundamentally from within the PYPT’s re-imagining of yoga itself. Yet, understanding any form of practice on its own terms is a precarious a proposition, since all practices are located within multiple and often competing ideological and strategic propositions – a fact that is certainly applicable to the PYPT’s understanding of the place of yoga. The attempt will then be to grasp the ways in which yoga as practice, or in fact the very practicality of yoga along with the ‘human subject’ that is implicated in it, relates to the shifting discursive locations of the present.

The Bharat Swabhiman ‘Upsurge’

On the fifth of January 2009, Swami Ramdev, along with his disciples and other known associates of the Patanjali Yogpeeth Trust, launched an organisation called the Bharat Swabhiman Trust. The organisation (along with the PYPT) lists five regulations for its members, which are: ‘100% voting, 100% nationalistic thinking, 100% total boycott of foreign companies, and complete support to swadeshi, 100% organisation of patriots, to make a healthy, prosperous and cultured Bharat by developing a 100% yoga-practicing Bharat.’ With the target of making India a superpower and an ideal for the entire world, the trust envisaged a movement that would take the country by storm, cleansing it, as it were, of all the impurities that have collected over time due to ‘wrong policies, corrupt systems and corrupt practices’, leading to unbearable conditions of economic and social misery, impurities which have also greatly disturbed the cultural cohesion of the nation. In short, the BS movement aims at nothing less than what it calls ‘Vyavastha Parivartan’ or ‘Changing the System.’

The change that the movement seeks to bring about is two-fold. First, the movement seeks to bring about a change in the self, what it describes as ‘self-change.’ ‘Self-change,’ as a widely circulated manifesto of the movement published in 2010 reflects, ‘means to us spiritual upliftment and the things we have to do to ourselves under the five main guiding principles of Bharat Swabhiman, i.e., those things for which we are not under any obligation to any government’ (Changing the System 3). Second, and this is where the reference to the ‘system’ in the formal sense of the term comes from, the movement aims for ‘a total or radical change in the existing five policies and systems related to education, health-care,

law, economy and agriculture' (8), the existing structures of which are taken to be colonial in form. The movement aimed at changing these systems, it is thus claimed, will bring about a 'new independence.'

Almost every time he was interviewed, Ramdev was asked why or how he made this shift from the earlier yoga and Ayurveda programme to 'politics'. Ramdev repeatedly suggested that the launch of the BS movement and his 'entry into politics' was a moment he was long waiting for, and that there was no shift per se from the activities of the PYPT to the 'politics' of the BS movement, except for the greater sense of urgency of the latter.

One need only look at Ramdev's earliest public comments made through the vernacular (Hindi) press and articles in the early issues of *Yog Sandesh* (henceforth YS), the magazine run by PYPT, to validate this claim of continuity. Indeed, this move into politics with an explicitly nationalist agenda is not an entirely novel prospect for an organisation that has always included a particular brand of nationalism as foundational to its project. As we go on to show, a major part of the PYPT's literary output conveys the systematic Hindu nationalism at play in its activities, if by this we mean the championing of those practices and traditions that went into the construction of modern 'scientific' Hinduism in the colonial context. These practices and traditions (such as yoga) – ready markers of the religious formation of Hinduism and of the basis of Indian civilization and nationality – are to be 'revived' for the present and future benefit of the nation.

The PYPT's Majoritarian Nationalism

The titles of some of the articles authored by Ramdev for the early issues of YS are as follows: 'Vedas – The Mainstay of World Religion' (YS 1.1, 17-22), 'Vedas – The Messenger of Equality' (YS 1.4, 19-26), 'Vedas – The Proponent of World Fraternity' (YS 1.5, 14-19), and so on. The universal scope of 'Vedic culture' asserted in these articles is one which is qualified with a certain Hindu nationalist charge which subsumes all of the subcontinent's – even the world's – religious traditions under the Vedic paradigm. For example, the September 2003 article mentioned above describes the Vedas as the founding texts of the Hindus like the Koran for the Muslims or the Bible for the Christians. The doctrines of Jainism and Buddhism are said to have presented the Vedas in a simplified form which thus ensured their popularity. It even goes to the extent of suggesting that the Hebrew religion was born in India and is not very different from Vedic principles, except for its lack of an understanding of the science of creation and a concept of self-realisation. The scientific character of the Vedas is repeatedly emphasized by arguing, for example, that the Vedas presented shastras pertaining to everything, ranging from medicine to economics, from geography to machinery. At the end of this 'historical' exposition of the Vedas, they are also given a sociological basis – 'Vedas can be considered to be the practice of ancient aryan' – and a national rejuvenation is sought whereby all contemporary religious identities are collapsed to imagine a return to the Vedas which will revolutionise personal, social and national life – a return, in other words, to the Aryavarta. This return is also imminently necessary for the achievement of 'world peace, world fraternity and universal well-being' (YS 1.1, 31-34). Lest this return is conceived as a mere renewal of cognitive interest, one of the articles states clearly that the Vedas are not the subject of thought-activity ('chintan-krira') alone but are

also evidently and essentially about practice ('abhyas'/'sadhna') and well-being ('mangal') (YS 1.2, 7).

This appeal for a practical return to the Vedas is often coupled with a campaign against what is described as 'western materialist culture.' The Orientalist opposition between Indian spirituality and western materialism is replicated in order to mount a scathing attack on what are deemed to be the products of such materialism. These could be attitudes, dispositions and practices like pleasure-seeking, profiteering, adulteration, non-vegetarianism, addiction, nudity, the objectification of women, etc (YS 1.11, 22- 24). They could also be objects/commodities like soft-drinks, fast food, biomedicine, pesticides, television programmes, etc. (YS 2.6, 4-5). It is often the case that through a critique of biomedicine, the entirety of 'western culture' is denounced. There are different grounds for the criticism levelled at each of these categories; importantly, though, what wins the case for Indian Vedic spirituality is its scientificity and, subsequently, its capacity to bring about a universal sense of well-being as well as to restore the character of the nation, with yoga as the exemplary representative of this combination of science and spirituality.

The return to the practice of Vedic culture is invariably couched in the language of 'Swadeshi Jagran' or nationalist awakening. Once again, this analogy has been part of the conceptual edifice and vocabulary since its early years. A succinctly articulated proposition to this effect is found in Acharya Balakrishna's editorial in the July 2004 issue of YS, which announces the call for/mission of Swadeshi Jagran. The prime emphasis in this announcement is on maintaining the unity of the nation and changing the 'attitudes' and 'mentality' of its citizens: the adoption of *yoga, pranayam* and other Vedic knowledges and principles is highly recommended here and by implication seem to be both the means and the end of securing the change which is sought (YS 1.11, 4). The October editorial of the same year, again by Balakrishna, follows up on this to specify how yoga is a simple, easy and scientific method of cure which is available to all since 'it doesn't discriminate on the basis of gender, race, caste, region and sect (*sampradaya*)' (YS 2.1, 4).

Part of this attempt to 'awaken' the nation is to remind it of its 'heroes', which range from 'brave and righteous kings' like Ram and Shivaji to the martyrs of the nationalist armed revolutionary movement such as Ram Prasad Bismil, Chandrasekhar Azad, Sukhdev and Bhagat Singh as well as modern nationalist figures linked to the freedom movement like Subhash Chandra Bose and Sardar Patel and finally characters who are responsible for and are key figures in the construction of the modern imaginary of Hinduism – Vivekananda, Dayanand, Savarkar and Golwalkar. Gandhi, too, makes it into this series at times as the foremost proponent of *swadeshi* and *satyagraha*..

It is important to understand that a particular modality of invocation is specific to each of these categories of great men. For example, Vivekananda and Dayanand are hailed as the foremost pioneers of the revival of Vedic culture, rescuing the doctrines from their sorry state, mired as they were in medieval callousness and adulteration, and restoring them to their ancient wholeness and purity. They are also pioneers by virtue of the fact that they were responsible for the renewal of scientific interest in the Vedas – an endeavour for which Ramdev, as claimed in the literature of the PYPT, is no less a ground breaker, working against the tide of mistaken western interpretations of the Vedas/*yoga*. In this tradition, a

figure like Ram is thought of less as a god and more as an exemplary practitioner of the culture of honest and righteous rule of precolonial India, a legacy inherited by leaders like Shivaji and even Sardar Patel. Others, such as the martyrs of the revolutionary movement and Subhash Chandra Bose, are explicitly remembered for their role in the struggle for freedom.

Through these invocations the PYPT has claimed for itself a distinct lineage through the synergistic amalgamation of anti-colonial nationalism and the supposed scientificity of indigenous traditions. In spite of its specific nuances, this kind of campaign and symbolism can most easily be associated with a Hindu upper-caste formation, one whose violent, exclusionary vision of nationalism is familiar to both its opponents and advocates. Yet, examining the PYPT primarily as a Hindu nationalist political enterprise fostering a programmatic project of majoritarianism might undermine the thrust of its attempted universalism and inclusionary gestures. Made somewhat pre-emptively at times, these efforts, we think, deserve some analytical attention if we are to make sense of how PYPT's nationalism *works* in the present.

The PYPT's Ecumenism

On November 3, 2009, Ramdev became the first non-Muslim 'cleric' to address the annual convention of Islamic seminaries under the auspices of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind at the Darul Uloom seminary in Deoband. A special invitee to the event, he spoke to a mostly Muslim crowd of five hundred thousand people – which included over ten thousand maulvis – in his signature style, starting with a brief introduction about unity, health and well-being, and following it up with a demonstration of Anulom-Vilom, Kapaal Bhati and other Pranayam techniques and Yogasanas. At the convention, he is reported to have said, 'I teach people Yoga, I speak of well being, healthy life and haven't changed anyone's religion,' adding also that 'yoga is not related to any religion nor is there any underlying idea behind it to promote any religion,' stressing all the while that it was a physical exercise to keep the body and mind fit.² There was no abatement of his nationalist rhetoric as he urged Hindus and Muslims to maintain the unity of the nation and not be split by political interests, though his showering of praise on the anti-British Awadh queen Begum Hazrat Mahal and Bahadur Shah Zafar's nationalist credentials indicated his willingness to draw on a more democratically selected pantheon of nationalist figures. The convention also became an occasion for the Jamiat spokesman Maulana Hameed Nomani to invoke a more syncretic historical lineage for yoga, commenting that 'the idea is not foreign to Muslims – exercises similar to yoga are found in Sufi schools.'

Darool Uloom has in fact publicly come out in favour of yoga several times, most significantly after the declaration of a fatwa in Indonesia banning yoga from Muslim life. The PYPT has often declared that it would not hinder the effectivity of yoga in any possible way if Muslim and Christian followers were to begin their drill with a prolonged utterance of 'Allah' or 'God' instead of the standard 'Om'. The two organisations have interacted in public on more than one occasion, just as Ramdev has shared his dais several times with maulanas from all over North India.

This set of affairs points to a different, more inclusive trajectory that the PYPT and Ramdev have kept available to themselves. One could of course rule out such ‘secular’ advances made by Ramdev as staged paternalist performances or opportunistic advances made by a shrewd businessman to secure a broader client/consumer base. Yet, if only through these very ‘motives’ and ‘performances’, the possibility of (such) an alternative direction exists for the PYPT, we argue, *entirely due to the medium of yoga*. One could argue that the most *productive* instances of such different trajectories being charted out can be found in the everyday functioning of the yoga teachers of the PYPT, which is mostly not driven by any special organisational imperative of reaching out to minority populations. These instances occur in what one could call an ‘informal economy of human interaction’, a domain of what are essentially uncertain encounters staged through the interface of yoga classes, the necessity to engage in/with such a domain being crucial to the modality in which the PYPT ‘becomes’ a definitive public presence at least in significant parts of north India. We illustrate this point through an example from one of our interviews.

Savita Kaushik is a dedicated worker of the PYPT. Inspired by Ramdev’s television programme, she started teaching *yoga* in 2005 and finally joined the organisation in 2008. While some teachers stay within the ambit of their assigned classes and localities, some others, like Savita, often encounter groups of learners outside of these. While the ‘motive’ here might be said to be to expand the organisation to newer localities, most of the women we met seemed to lay emphasis on the chance nature of these encounters, and their genuine enthusiasm, even delight, in the fact that they could share the ‘knowledge/gift’ they possessed.

In one such situation, on a Sunday morning, Savita, who is from East Delhi, travelled with a colleague of hers to a place called Hindon located between Ghaziabad and Delhi, a good five kilometres from her home, to organise a yoga class in a local park. As she started the class for the few people who had gathered in the park at around five in the morning, a man came up to her and said that there were some women who wanted to talk to her after the class. She asked him to bring them to the venue of the class but they didn’t join it, so after class she went to meet them. These women, Savita exclaimed, ‘were all Mohameddan sisters and they wore burqas!’ She continued, ‘They caught hold of me and asked me to teach them yoga. I felt really great. I thought that if all of them want to take lessons then it is a great thing that we have managed to cross religious boundaries in this case.’ So she told them that she would take a week-long class for them, which was extended to two weeks at the women’s request. Savita was struck by how ‘they used to come by foot through difficult roads and there would be about ninety to hundred ladies who would assemble there,’ fifteen minutes before she arrived to take the class at five o’clock in the morning. The women used to refer to her as their elder sister. Savita told us that she was very touched by all of this. She remembered ‘how incredible it was’ that ‘they used to do *pranayam* inside their burqas’ – they did not take off their burqas. ‘I would make them do yogic jogging and they would manage.’ In fact she thought that ‘they took their lessons very well and they learnt things superbly.’ Even after these two weeks they asked her not to leave and by then both Savita and her students had developed ‘a great attraction towards each other.’ So she contacted the local wing of the organisation and asked them to depute someone to teach them.

Without overstating it, through this example one could make a case not only for the ecumenical potential harboured by a cultural form like yoga but also how, within the quotidian practices of the PYPT emerge certain possible spaces of relatively intimate communication where one can practice a form of belonging, perhaps even a particular kind of localized kinship, which need not be entirely subsumed by grander identity projects. What lends these spaces an additional potential for modest cultivation of such forms of belonging is that apart from the contribution of the enthusiasm of the yoga teacher and the eagerness of her students, the production of these spaces is an entirely contingent affair. Savita's pleasant surprise at finding Muslim women interested in yoga, her being struck by the fact of burqa-clad and thus heavily religiously coded and oriented bodies being able to lend themselves to the absorption of the knowledge that she shares with them, and the reciprocation of affection and commitment between the instructor and the learner – all point to the unwitting production of such a space of relative intimacy via the interface of the yoga class, a space governed mostly on its own terms.

Yet what Savita had to say at the end of all this is rather striking and instructive, if we are to understand the real potency of this example that she cited to describe one of her 'special experiences' as a yoga teacher in PYPT. Clearly having described what seems like a rather serendipitous encounter, Savita, as if to specify why this was indeed special in any sense, added her final take – 'you know how we think of them as *bechari* (helpless) who have to stay behind purdah all the time and are not able to take care of their health... and even they had such a great attachment to *yog* – and that I had added a drop to this, had had a small role to play in this – this makes me feel great.' If one reads back from this and the rest of her interview, which was virtually a reproduction of the PYPT's central thesis regarding the superiority of scientific Vedic culture and the need to base a programme of national rejuvenation on the restoration of this culture in the interests of the entire national populace, it becomes clear that what is at play here is indeed an unmasked paternalist argument which tries to show how it is only under the rubric of Vedic culture that the unification of various communities can occur, not by any political compulsion but by the fact of having embraced a scientific life-form. The helpless women in burqas need this even more as they otherwise languish in conditions of ignorance and poor health.

If politics, following what Ramdev had to say about it in Deoband, has been responsible for preventing these encounters or relegating them to being occasioned merely by chance, perhaps what Savita was trying to show us in describing her 'special experience' was how there could really be a space of interaction where minority cultures would not find it difficult to accept something like yoga for all the health it brought to them, and conversely, how a sort of developmental imperative lay at the heart of the project of popularizing the broader traditional formation to which yoga was indexed. On this count then, the PYPT is indeed serving the holy nationalist developmentalist mission and vision by aiding the proliferation of such 'chance encounters' as well as actively engaging in public with minority groups – as Ramdev did in Deoband – through which the imagined Vedic community of Indians, unencumbered by religious affiliations, would come to be lived, felt and thus realized.

The medium of yoga and the public life given to it by the PYPT (which in turn has endowed the organisation with its own public existence), is most suited to accomplish this project of

the reframing of nationalism by replacing all the explicitly communal rhetoric associated with the dominant varieties of it in the recent past with the universalist thrust of science. It is the use of this 'scientific' medium which has perhaps enabled, to the greatest degree of effectivity, what seems a familiar majoritarian nationalist project to come across as an agreeable alternative to many. Yoga then is the axis of continuity that best links up Ramdev's yoga campaign of the fifteen years preceding the BS movement with his recent struggle aimed at a sort of course-correction for the nation; a continuity, as we saw earlier, that he himself appreciates. But exactly what is involved in the use of this 'scientific' medium that makes it so effective for both PYPT's ecumenicism and its majoritarian nationalism?

Critical commentaries on the Ramdev phenomenon appearing in the aftermath of the BS movement and the subsequent campaign against corruption and graft-money that the Baba is leading underscore his self-representation. They read the current 'political' phase of Ramdev in conjunction with his more regular advocacy of yoga and Ayurveda to describe him as the most potent face and exponent of neo-Hindutva nationalism in India. In one such reading, Meera Nanda (2009) argues that Ramdev's yoga has always been linked to a more pronounced and brazen Hindu nationalism which sets him apart from other traditional healers, spiritual leaders and godmen in the alternative healing and spiritual goods market. Similarly, Varuni Bhatia's (2011) argument is that the yoga that Ramdev offers to one and all, apart from being a competing commodity in this market, is also an 'ultra nationalist disciplinary aesthetic', the holism of which – including both 'bodily discipline such as breathing and dietary practices, as well as moral discipline such as hard work and truthfulness' – amounts to the putting into practice of a certain 'Hindu cultural nationalism,' producing thereby a patriotic individual who is 'performatively non-western in thought and habit.' The BS movement mobilises this ideal citizen figure to erect a political front of 'honest,' 'apolitical' Indians who plunge into politics to cleanse it of its various 'corruptions', rid the nation of its residual colonial structures and revive/restore the glory of the nation as '*viswaguru*' (world-leader) through the BS movement.

The yoga programme of the PYPT thus constitutes a 'majoritarian cultural ethos' which replaces the 'outright communalism' of the earlier kind as the content of the nationalism espoused by this new Hindutva, thus differentiating it from older versions. This modified form of Hindutva serves the important political objective of reconstituting/reclaiming its older support base. In this regard, 'neo-Hindutva' functions to win over the lower-middle classes alienated by the BJP's 'India Shining'-like programmes (Bhatia 2011) or reach out to the moderate Hindus who are fed up with the Ram temple affair, more interested in 'constructive issues' of the kind raised by Ramdev and his associates (Nanda 2009).

Our own analysis of the premises and lineage of the project that the PYPT has adopted confirms these critical observations. In particular, we emphasise that yoga is significant to the practical enterprise of the organisation and to the BS movement as the manifestation of an ideal Hindu lifestyle. But our understanding, based both on a reading of PYPT texts and ethnographic research, is that this significance is strongly related to the corporeal material productivity this discourse endows yoga with and to the claim to 'scientificity'. For a critic like Nanda (2009, 2011) the science at stake here is less so by way of evidence than as a concocted truth, the wide acceptance of which is for her a strong indication of how normal

and ordinary the worldview of Hindu supremacy and revival has become. Bhatia, who in her more nuanced critique, does take note of the fact that the claims of the PYPT and Ramdev about yoga and Ayurveda are 'relentlessly one of science,' does not probe the matter any further than pointing out how this makes Ramdev a contemporary proponent of the Arya Samaj discourse of Dayananda Saraswati – the difference between the two being that the former chooses his enemy to be corruption rather than non-Hindus.

In these assessments, there is a certain functionalism attributed to the use of yoga in PYPT and Ramdev's activities which understands its effectivity either in terms of how a lot of people in the country are looking for Hindu commodities to satisfy their Hindu cravings, or in terms of it being a symbolic passage into a Hindu nationalist identity. However, within the PYPT's discourse there is a more substantive role attached to yoga, which these critics do not consider. We elaborate on this role now.

Yoga and the BS Movement

The BS movement may be considered the apex of the 'political' activities of the PYPT and Swami Ramdev (as spread over nearly three decades now). As discussed, the movement brought together the PYPT's nationalist concerns in the form of a clearly articulated political programme of cultural reform and systemic change – which became the mainstay of the movement's attempts to mobilise the masses preceding the national elections of 2014. Yet the movemental form of BS was not unique in the PYPT's scheme of things. Ramdev and his associates always claimed that they were leading and conducting a movement for freedom from the clutches of diseases (*'rog mukti andolan'*). In effect, this has constituted something like a public health campaign that aims to extend a 'holistic' form of cure to every citizen of the country and subsequently the world. A significant point to note here is that a BS Trust member formally and officially pledges to abide by a set of principles, of which a significant one is that he/she will practice yoga on a daily basis.

From our interactions with members, it seems that the rule is not very strictly followed. Nonetheless, the extensive orientation programmes organised for the BS volunteers over the last three years have been modelled entirely on the yoga camps, which Ramdev famously arranges with great frequency. The way most of the members of the organisation understand it (even those extremely enthusiastic about the BS movement), the success of this programme is critically dependent on the therapeutic/curative capacity of yoga. It is also pertinent that yoga is in no way for them an indigenous cure for indigenous diseases but rather a comprehensive therapy that seeks to restore the natural body to its natural condition (in a world that presents increasingly 'modern' threats like adulteration and corruption).

Almost all general members and senior leaders of the movement started off as yoga teachers before going on to occupy their respective positions of seniority. Discomfort was voiced to us about the fact that, especially with the organisation's growth and the launch of the BS movement, there is an increasing presence of people who have nothing to do with yoga and do not practice it themselves. It was argued that unless one practices yoga it is not possible to appreciate or understand the BS movement at all.

As an example of this role of yoga, one could cite the '*Yog Jagran Yatra*' conducted by the PYS across the country in December 2008 and January 2009. The goal of this *yatra*, to be carried out by existent workers, sympathisers and teachers of the PYS, was stated as: 'through yoga, the construction of a healthy body, a healthy mind and healthy thinking to build up personal character in order to build up national character and create a healthy, righteous and prosperous India' (Yog Jagran Yatra 2009, 1). This *yatra* sought to recruit a minimum of three hundred yoga teachers in every district of the country and also to increase the number of *sadhaks* (practitioners) who practice yoga on a daily basis along with the members of the Samiti and thus spread yoga as far and wide as possible within the nation. For these purposes, the yoga teachers in every district were to go out in campaign vehicles announcing the aims of the *yatra* over a microphone and distributing pamphlets to motivate and eventually enlist interested individuals who acquiesced to the norms (seven each of nationalism and good conduct) set by the organisation as *yog*-teachers. While this selection process was to be completed as quickly as possible, the instructions for the *yatra* specified that the training of these new yoga teachers should be carefully carried out without any hurry whatsoever, as this was to be the 'prior preparation for the social and national movement, Bharat Swabhiman' (2).

Evidently, there is a distinctly pragmatic dimension to employing yoga for the work of mobilising people, such as the deployment of yoga teachers and yoga camps of the PYPT to run the membership drive of the BS Trust or using the popularity of yoga to attract potential members. After all, it was in the course of the Yog Jagran Yatra that youth and professionals (army personnel, legal personnel, professors, officers, etc.), later to be clubbed into different front organisations of the BS Trust, were recruited as yoga teachers and workers of the PYS. It was these same individuals 'who were going to be assigned the bigger responsibilities in the nationalist social movement - Bharat Swabhiman, to be launched the following year' (3).

However, as the stated goal of the Yog Jagran Yatra – national character building through yoga – would indicate, yoga plays a more fundamental role in the BS movement than the mostly pragmatic intent of using Yog Samitis, yoga camps, classes or teachers, to recruit nationalist individuals might suggest. The literature that formally introduces the BS Movement asserts that 'non-practice of Yoga fosters self-alienation' which 'is the root cause of corruption, immorality, insensitiveness and anarchy' – all of which are the bane of the nation – and the practice of Yog will help one attain self-realisation as a result of which individuals will not 'deceive anyone and believe in the practice of non-violence', thus aiding the rejuvenation of the nation (Bharat Swabhiman Trust 2009, 9). Accordingly, for the BS movement, 'national development is merely a dream without self-development' (inside front cover).

The claim that the practice of yoga can lead to a change in the self, not only by way of restoring biological health but also by bringing about a sort of self-realisation as a much-needed cure for the modern maladies plaguing the nation's 'health' – ailments both moral and economic – has long been part of the PYPT's discourse. In fact the eight-fold yoga of Patanjali, which PYPT advocates, involves the inculcation of discipline(s) like non-stealing, celibacy, etc. which evidently ought to bring about the changes in the self which PYPT hopes

for every individual. One can discern in all of this an additive logic in the journey from self-transformation through yoga to national transformation whereby every personal (yogic) character building exercise serves to cut down unit by unit the nation's financial drain and also contribute to the development of national character, fulfilling the goals of the Yog Jagran Yatra, as also the objectives of the BS movement.

Yet as early as the moment this *yatra* is being proposed, a more proactive project striving for 'a new independence, new system, new change,' is being envisioned in comparison to which the patient additive exercise of building national character through personal development seems like an abbreviation. According to a pamphlet titled 'Ahwan Patra', which was made available for mass distribution in the course of the *yatra* and all points of which were to be read out 'again and again,' this new independence is to be brought about by ridding the people of the country of their apathy for politics, more specifically by doing away with 'political ignorance, misconceptions, disinterest, silence and aloofness' and consequently creating 'pure nationalist thinking,' once again through the medium of yoga (Ahwan Patra 3).

In terms of its understanding of 'politics' (*rajneeti*) as well as nationalism (*rashtravad*) and devotion towards the nation (*rashtradharma*), the pamphlet is quite clear that the domain to which it is referring is the entire governmental setup and the parliamentary process which hold the key 'to the (proper) functioning of the entire system of the nation.' The pamphlet then questions the 'corrupt' character of the 'leaders' of this system alleging their role in the drain of the country and calls for a vow to be taken that 'neither will we (ourselves) loot our country nor let anyone else loot it.' The proposition made is to throw such leaders out of power and punish them for their guilty acts. For this, of course, nothing less than a massive struggle is deemed necessary: the pamphlet urges each of its readers to participate in this 'holy movement,' to become a yogi first and dedicate everything possible for this movement (4).

Yoga here becomes the modality par excellence of self-development and provides the crucial conditions for the possibility of any work that is concerned with nation-building or national development. Thus yoga's centrality to the BS Movement has to do with an even more direct relationship between the nationalism of the movement and yoga as effective practice than merely producing such values in a person.

Consider for example this point made in a sub-section titled 'The Goal of Yoga' in Jeevan Darshan, a major publication of the movement:

Through the power of yoga, we want to awaken in each person devotion towards the nation. We want to link each person with their duty towards their nation (*rashtradharma*) through yoga-culture (*yogadharm*). We want to carry forward the holy mission of self-awakening through yoga awakening. In the holy mission of national development, by way of elevating our soul through yoga, we want to sacrifice all that is ours. (74)

In this proposition, the self-awakening/elevation of the soul that the practice of yoga effects is intelligible as such to the extent that the 'awakened' practitioner devotes himself in an

active sense to the cause of the nation. Not only does the practice of yoga through the production of an ascetic self/self-awakening, effectively control or even eradicate ailments like corruption or violence that have debilitated the nation, it also enables the practice of appropriate asceticism/sacrifice as a conscious manifestation of the self's devotion towards the nation. Thus here, as also repeatedly in the BS Movement literature, yoga is vested with a capacity to 'awaken' in the practitioner this practically manifest sense of devotion towards the nation, a nationalist consciousness of sorts but which has to be practicable in a definite way. This devotion is not so much an object of inculcation or about learning to devote oneself to the cause of the nation. Rather, this devotion is produced as an effect of the practice of yoga.

It is possibly with such an understanding of the relationship between the practice of yoga and the practice of nationalism that the BS Movement states its goal as: '[w]e want to ignite nationalist feelings in everyone by associating them with Yog-Discipline' (Agnipatra 1), or even, 'we want to organise the entire country through the medium of Yog' (Bharat Swabhimān Trust, inside front cover). The self-realised yogi-nationalist is then the felicitous subject who can be recruited and trained for a nationalist movement and thus the divided nation – that is, a nation divided on the basis of caste, language, religion, region, etc – can be organised once again around the cause of national development. Moreover, there is also an understanding that the practice of yoga contributes to the economic reforms that the BS Movement seeks to bring about not only by way of a practice of austerity but also by generating in an individual an active attraction for Swadeshi goods, as evinced by the statement 'through the Yog-Revolution we will create the feeling of Swadeshi in each individual and thus make for the adoption of Swadeshi goods which will make India economically independent' (Ahwan Patra 2).

What are we to make of these claims, which are made in the course of the BS Movement but also prior to its launch or even its conception in the PYPT's literature? While there is no doubt a performative nationalism in place here, one that seeks to produce a proactive citizen-subject through the means of yoga (where yoga stands in as a symbolic referent for everything Indian), one must also ask after the manner in which this performance and production are linked to each other. Are they linked simply in terms of referencing each other?

We think that the insistence on yoga in the BS programme points to a different possibility here. Let us quote a section titled 'Yoga Service' from a pamphlet of the BS movement titled *Rasthradharm*:

The best and complete medium to serve [the] poor, society, the nation and world is Yoga. The human being and society are home to many diseases, evils and sorrows. Yoga service is the lone service, which has remedy to all the problems. Thus separate campaigns would not be required if Yoga campaign is launched. This would ensure disease-free, intoxication-free, violence-free society and simultaneously, the people would be able to launch drive against corruption, corrupt political figures, system(s) and black money decisively. Yoga is the best, relevant, result oriented, scientific and complete path for self-development, nation-development, nation-building and rural-development. In ancient era, yagna, math, temples, historical stories helped in

personality and nation building and are still relevant. But Yoga service is the best available service in view of the time, era and circumstances (Rashtradharm in Yog Sandesh 7.9, 31).

Yoga is insistently thought of here as the medium par excellence of achieving the goals of the BS Movement. Several other ancient forms of knowledge could serve as the media for conducting the task of nation-building. But given the particular time and place where diseases, evils, and sorrows (all placed in the same category) surround us, yoga is the best possible resolution that one could imagine within the current predicament. Yoga would free people of diseases but it would also simultaneously – and in the same way in which it cures diseases – ensure that corruption and corrupt political figures are also eliminated. This is because it has had certain scientific validity in terms of the results it has yielded in the past. Notably the PYPT's own resources and efforts are directed at arriving at this science of yoga and it is primarily on this basis that such an affirmation regarding the desired changes to be effected is made.

This begs the question of whether the yoga referred to in this pamphlet is the yoga that Ramdev teaches every morning on TV, the yoga which the PYPT propagates on a mass scale. How is it that a practice so mundane, so everyday, and so lacking in anything mystical but overdetermined and ceaselessly televised can produce such effects? Here we may draw an explicit connection between the yoga that Ramdev prescribes and that which, following his election in 2014 and celebrated launch of the International Day of Yoga, Prime Minister Modi advocates. In countless speeches and interviews on the subject, Modi describes yoga simultaneously in terms of the personal, the developmental (in a nationalist sense) and the ecumenical (viz. its outreach to the world). No doubt yoga can mean at once a specific set of postural and breathing exercises as well as a universal unifying force that connects us with our true inner selves and hence with each other, in part due to various kinds of 'slippages' that are characteristic of contemporary reimagining(s) of yoga. However, our main interest here is in the specific *substance* of yoga in its reimagination by the PYPT and how the Hindu national body is thereby (sought to be) reawakened.

We suggest that in the yoga of the PYPT, the key referent is not so much the historical and the symbolic connection affirmed between yoga and nationalism as it is the therapeutic system proposed. The PYPT asserts a universalism for yoga, endowed with which it can come to ensure the production of a certain kind of nationalism, a production which is generative rather than referential. This is a matter of the body not in the sense of the body becoming marked by a certain cultural index but rather a body which is activated – to keenly take up particular actions, especially the pursuit of nationalism. It becomes a question of a certain kind of energy that the body can be made to produce – as declared a few sections earlier in the same pamphlet:

From one cell to entire body, one single atom to entire universe works on the principle of energy. Yoga, Pranayam, meditation, yagna, herbs and shrubs all create positive energy among us and meet the challenges of diseases, intoxication, maligned thoughts, illiteracy, darkness and weaknesses of body. Consequently, soul and the human being becomes super human being. A mobile phone battery is

charged for 30 minutes in the morning and then used for entire day, likewise, yoga, *pranayam*, meditation charge body and soul (32).

The 'super human being' is not an ideality that is superphenomenal. The very phenomenal nature of this entity is to be mobilized from within the parameters of the body, by use of simple analogies that now substitute electricity/charge for 'breath'. The mobilization is both curative and rejuvenating. The crucial point is that in talking about the body or what the practice of yoga can effect upon it, the argument is made in terms of the substantial effects that yoga has on the body; changes which are in terms of the same materiality that is both involved and produced in the eradication of diseases through *pranayam* and *asanas*. The energy produced is physico-chemical, like that of a recharged cell-phone battery – it is tangible and felt, and can eventually be made manifest like the material fact of cure in living one's life in a particular way (in service of the nation). The performance of yoga, then, produces nationalism 'in' a person by the sheer fact of the elementary natural work it practices on the body, mind and soul.

The performance is not simply a referential practice whereby yoga presents itself in a familiar relationship with the nation in which an adherence to the former structurally refers the individual practice of it to the latter. Rather, the performance successfully produces the nationalist activist subject as a particular material possibility within a range of things that yoga can do to the human body, where the materiality produced is by dint of mechanisms internal to the body rather than in connection with a symbolic order and a(n) (in)habitation of it. It is also not the case of a production of strength, an ability to take up certain roles and functions in the cause of nationalism, the cause itself being the object of a different kind of inculcation, strictly ideological (*baudhik*) in nature, where words reach the interiors of a corporeal structure to align it with a particular kind of motivated political programme. This, as Joseph Alter (1994, 2009) has shown, is how the RSS has taken to yoga as a man-building exercise which, given its Indian origins, is a suitable form of a physical cultural enterprise that, when combined with a range of other kinds of indigenous physical activity like, say, stave training, makes for a strong body and allows for an easy entry into the ideological programme of a majoritarian Hindu nationalism.

As envisaged in the literature of the BS movement discussed here, the cause and the strength are both actually produced simultaneously as a kind of energy. Both are isomorphic forms of change which originate more at the level of physiology and processes internal to the body rather than at the level of muscles. Nationalism for the PYPT, then, is intrinsically a somatic matter where the entire affair of imagining the nation has a definite elementary thrust to it, the elements being those of natural physiology understood as a form of elementary being which possesses the capacity for influencing the manifestations of entities like soul or mind. It is the matter of a somaticising imagination that is at stake here, as it is also an issue of health understood in a holistic sense where *nothing less than a particular way of being human is implied*.

That the PYPT's nationalism is presented in these terms is not very surprising, given that Ramdev's primary 'appeal' undoubtedly has been his ability to penetrate the public through a specifically governmental intervention in what is an extremely significant part of modern life, especially in the context of globalised India – the health of a person. What increasingly

seems like a successful regrouping of lower-middle class and middle-class Hindus through his Bharat Swabhiman campaign, (and indeed there is enough reason to think so) is, in spite of what seems like a familiar result, not necessarily because he has been able to energize older technologies of the Hindutva movement to attract those who fall within its structural logic or because there is a general receptivity among the majority of the national population for Hindu values. Each of these – Hindutva itself, along with its technologies as well as the Hindu majority – is in fact being reconstituted here in terms of a different material framework (that is, in terms other than itself) and unless these terms are understood, the inevitability (of the final result/assessment) is taken too much for granted and the specificity of the phenomenon in question missed.

It will suffice to say here that in the present moment, there is a certain importance that the notion of health carries within itself, which makes it possible, to organize certain forms of mass politics around it. The point that mass politics is being organized around the notion of health is important to note here because this, we think, is the key problematic which Ramdev, the PYPT and the BS Movement offer to us. Bhatia makes a significant observation when she notes that Ramdev and his 'yog-dharm' represent a 'populist phenomenon' which harbours 'a deep distrust' of the political process. This is for her the 'politics of the apolitical' of the 'burgeoning Indian middle-class,' which 'likes to pretend that it is supporting a non-partisan cause that impacts the entire population,' – a politics which has marked similarities with the earlier version of Hindu nationalist mobilisation which was seen in the 1990s around the Babri Masjid demolition.

Yet one may in fact trace this characteristic of the political engagement of major Hindutva formations to the anti-colonial struggle and thus argue that this is a constituent historical feature of the political culture of the Indian middle classes, as Thomas Blom Hansen does in *The Saffron Wave* (1999). Thus, significant as Bhatia's observation is, we reaffirm that the articulation of this 'politics of the apolitical' with respect to the nationalism associated with the Ramdev phenomenon, has to be grasped in terms of a different order of specificity, and perhaps, as a particular combination of the problematic of 'governing through securing the health of the individual and the social body' with a problematic concerning 'science'.

It is also here that, while agreeing with Alter's (2009) rejection of all essentialist readings of yoga, we pay attention to how, in operating outside of a strictly governmental/state programme of medicine and normativity (while aspiring to it both in scale and apparatus), the PYPT is able to offer to its practitioners a system that is at once therapeutic and ethical. This means two things – first, a deferment of the 'asocial' goal of yoga (*samadhi*) to engage with an entire range of activities aimed at bettering one's health (neoliberal body disciplining and practice through consumption); and second, a concern with the social where the nation now becomes a matter of restoring individuals to their natural state(s) of health, fellow feeling and freedom from adulteration/corruption. Crucially, this can happen only by bracketing off the political, such that, even while they make claims on state power, members and followers of the PYPT continue to see themselves as apolitical.

This is made possible by a parallel slippage that repeatedly stages the scientificity of yoga while at the same time positing yoga as a supra-science that is not yet fully understood by 'human' medical science. Hence, as is the case with countless other gurus, yoga is presented

as the very embodiment of cutting-edge contemporary science, as well as a timeless gift from ancient Hindu civilisation to the world. However, it is significant that in Ramdev's enterprise, this scientificity is staged in a particular format – that of the *yog-science shivir* or camp, where the repetition of a particular sequence of breathing and postural exercises is combined with the medicalised everyday of the proof of health, repeatedly staged and performed in different media. This mediated 'testimony' to the efficacy of yoga using the televisual generates an entire range of affects, not unlike those in televangelist settings, yet drawing on a distinctly biomedical apparatus in the form of 'before and after' medical reports and measures.

Here, both the content of yoga (the particular sequence developed and prescribed by the PYPT) and its form (as a televisual testimony of good health and national community) matter, and *materialise the nation as such*.

Conclusion: The BS Movement beyond Yoga

The BS movement and the activities of the PYPT have of course not been entirely about taking yoga to the masses. Indeed, in the years preceding the general elections in 2014 the idea of systemic change had somewhat eclipsed the goal of self-change through yoga. A sense of urgency had been introduced with respect to the political task at hand: the prior necessity of systemic change to perform any possible program of rejuvenation. While the BS movement stated clearly in its pamphlets that it was not going to join any political party or formal politics, by 2010 Ramdev had announced his plans to develop this movement into a party which was to contest the 2014 elections, a party that would field honest and righteous candidates in all 543 seats of the Parliament, and who, if elected would accelerate the process of bringing about desired change ('Vote for Baba Ramdev?' *Outlook India*). In June 2011, the BS enterprise was involved in a massive campaign with Ramdev and his supporters vowing to fast-unto-death against corruption and graft money (money which is illegally transferred to foreign banks for the purposes of tax-evasion). This then turned into active support for a politics of majoritarian resentment and 'corruption-free' but also 'unhindered development', voiced under the leadership of the BJP's notorious prime ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi, in 2014. Since the BJP won an electoral majority in 2014, the BS movement has ceased to occupy centre stage in the organisation's activities and self image. We argue that despite these 'shifts and adjustments' to the movemental form of the organization, it is precisely due to the centrality of yoga's potential for self/nation-building in the PYPT's conceptual repertoire that the organization may continue to remain relevant and imagine new ways of somaticising the nationalist subject.

We have seen that the PYPT is very different from the available models of medical government that secure the task of governing population bodies through installing a model of normativity. While neither normativity nor the social are alien to the practice of the PYPT, the yogic health regime it establishes does not necessarily concern itself with the production of either. As opposed to other scientific models, which prescribe a treatment-oriented regime of therapy, the PYPT health regime involves the collapsing of the ethical and the therapeutic to make the latter a fact of living. The health thereby produced is holistic, undergirded by a radical individuation which invests the natural human body with

an inherent potential, making it the sole locus of this production. What is internalised in this schema is not normativity but the perception of health whose meaning is materialized entirely at the level of the body.

As we have shown, the health ideal involved here understands an active service-oriented socialization to be a function of this health, with the impetus for such socialization originating from 'inside' the body. This denotes the holism involved in the description of this health, and it is this conception of holism which allows Ramdev's organisation to claim that yoga 'awakens' the nationalism in a person where nationalism becomes a matter of nature more than culture. Understood in this manner, the PYPT's enterprise demonstrates a new way of imagining the (health of the) nation as a particularly somatic exercise.

Critically, health conceived in this way does not preclude consideration of political or communal concerns. As we've tried to establish through our focus on the BS movement, while yoga (as health) is central to the imagination of the nation for the PYPT, it nonetheless gains meaning within a larger system of signifiers. In its prescription as both therapy for modern ailments as well as an ethics of belonging, PYPT yoga constantly shifts between different registers of meaning. However, instead of reading such shifts as an instrumental deployment of yoga to justify a Hindutva/Hindu majoritarian reimagining of the nation, our focus has been on the form and content of this yoga as a means of apprehending the strategies adopted to consolidate its persuasive power.

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¹ At the same time, health seekers are invited to experience a holistic health experience that includes consultations, cleanses and treatments at the *Yog gram* and ashram at daily rates that rival those of spas and private hospitals.

² See 'Baba Ramdev steals the show at Islamic Conference in UP', November 3, 2009 and 'Swami Ramdev promotes yoga at Deoband gathering', November 4, 2009, *The Siasat Daily*.