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11

YOGA AND PHYSICAL CULTURE

Transnational history and
blurred discursive contexts

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11

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Introduction

We might consider yoga in contemporary India under three rubrics: 1) non-English speaking renouncer traditions, such as the Nāths, Rāmānandīs or Daśanāmi Saṃnyāsins, in which yoga *sādhana* plays a greater or lesser role and in which foreigners are rare; 2) modern, urban Indian schools of yoga open to householders and the general public in which Hindi or another Indian vernacular may be spoken, sometimes alongside English (e.g. Kaivalyadhama in Lonavla, or Swami Satyananda Saraswati’s Bihar Yoga Bharati in Munghir, Bihar); and 3) schools and individual teachers catering almost exclusively for foreign students, who may adapt their teachings to the expectations of these students by teaching yoga forms popular in the West (perhaps most concentrated around Rishikesh in the state of Uttarakhand). In practice, there may be considerable overlap between these three groups. For example, foreigners may sometimes join a traditional *sampradāya* in which some yoga is practised; urban Indians increasingly partake in yoga classes aimed at foreign tourists; and some *sampradāyas* may adapt their teachings to reflect contemporary global trends (the Nāths, for example, appear to be foregrounding the practice of *āsana* in response to the global postural yoga boom and their perceived role as the inventors of *hathayoga* (Mallinson 2014: 174 n.38). The division nevertheless points to fairly distinct constituencies of yoga practitioners and teachers in India.

The emphasis in many contemporary Hindi yoga milieus remains on the health of the body, particularly in therapeutically-oriented institutions like Kuvalayananda’s Kaivalyadhama, Yogendra’s Yoga Institute, or the Vivekananda Yoga Kendra in Bangalore.¹ Bihar Yoga Bharati also places a strong emphasis on the therapeutic applications of yoga (and publishes a series of books dedicated to the treatment of particular diseases), alongside a strong ‘spiritual’ orientation. In many cases, the discourses underlying the practices remain greatly influenced by Vivekananda, Aurobindo and other early modern pioneers of householder yoga in India. Within such yoga schools there may also be a markedly

cultural-nationalist agenda, such as in the Vivekananda Kendra, or in the organization of the controversial Swami Baba Ramdev, perhaps today's most famous and widely followed public yogin (see Sarbacker 2013). Ramdev's practical yoga exercises are reminiscent of the 'subtle exercise' of Indira Gandhi's renowned yoga teacher Dharendra Brahmachari (see Brahmachari 1965), and Ramdev's political orientation remains distinctly Hindutva-inclined.² In this context, it is also worth noting the prominent place given to yoga practice by the right-wing cultural-nationalist organization the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh (RSS; see McDonald 1999 and Alter 2008).

However, in recent decades, yoga has become a thoroughly globalized practice, reaching well beyond South Asia to pervade urban societies across several continents. No reliable estimates for world-wide practitioner numbers are available, but a 2012 survey by the popular US magazine *Yoga Journal* reveals that 20.4 million Americans were practising yoga at that time, an increase of 29 per cent from 2008. More than 80 per cent of them were women. What is more, in spite of the global financial crisis that began in 2008, spending on yoga classes almost doubled during those four years, reaching \$10.3 billion (*Yoga Journal* 2012). Anecdotal reports gathered from yoga teachers and studio owners in Britain suggest a similar pattern there. These reports demonstrate the degree to which yoga has become a component part of social and personal life for millions of people outside of India. Perhaps the most prevalent and visible facet of yoga in the modern, globalized world is the practice of *āsana*, the physical postures of yoga. Today, *āsana* is sometimes popularly conceived and promoted as an alternative to 'conventional' exercise, a 'holistic' regime which contributes to the improvement of health, the reduction of stress and overall well-being.³ Significantly, in the same 2012 survey, the top five reasons stated for beginning yoga were flexibility, general conditioning, stress relief, improving overall health, and physical fitness (*Yoga Journal* 2012). While these may well not be quite the same motivations as for longer-term practitioners *continuing* yoga, they nevertheless indicate that in certain important global yoga constituencies (here, beginners in the United States), the health and fitness benefits associated with *āsana* practice are prioritized over and above other what may be more prominent concerns of yoga practitioners in pre-modern Indian traditions, namely meditative states, liberation (*mokṣa*, *kaivalya*, etc.), or the accumulation of special powers (*siddhi*, *vibhūti*, see Jacobsen 2012).

There are of course seemingly similar mundane health concerns within, for example, pre-modern *hathayoga* (such as preventing constipation and gas, getting rid of excess fat and so on), and we need to be sensitive to similarities in modern and 'traditional' practice as well as to the differences. However, it is clear that as modern forms of yoga have developed and grown with such remarkable rapidity in a variety of distinct geographical and cultural spheres, the procedures, supporting narratives, end goals and applications have adapted and mutated accordingly. What results is in many respects new, by virtue of the very divergent contexts in which yoga is practised in the globalized world and the manifold techniques and ideas stemming from non-traditional sources, including the often complex, creative and recursive relationship that these techniques and ideas may have with the perceived 'tradition' itself. As Simona Sawhney puts it with regard to 'the modernity of Sanskrit', 'Cultural modernity itself becomes what it is by way of a confrontation with tradition – that is to say, with various contesting narratives about tradition' (Sawhney 2009: 14). Such is also most certainly the case with *āsana*, regardless of the relative age or particular genealogy of particular postures or sequences in contemporary practice. It is not necessary to assert a recent derivation for *āsanas* in order to appreciate that *āsana* practice has taken on a life of its own in contemporary society, and that its role and function need to be considered in this light, as well as in the broader pre-modern context within South Asia.

Yoga and the global physical culture movement

One context for understanding the particular development of *āsana* within contemporary, global contexts is as an outgrowth of yoga's creative dialogue with the global physical culture movement during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During this time, new technologies of the body, mind and spirit, as well as the new or revisioned cultural or ideological frameworks that went along with them, were developed and disseminated across the globe, through photography, print media and travelling teachers. As these technologies and ideas circulated, they informed and were informed by the particular habitus⁴ in which they found themselves: adapting and causing adaptation, structuring and being structured through ongoing processes of dialectical exchange.

In India and elsewhere, physical culture enthusiasts experimented with the potential of yoga (in particular *hathayoga*). Yoga enthusiasts, inversely, experimented with the new, sophisticated resources of modern physical culture. In practice, however, it can be difficult to draw a bright line between these two 'camps', insofar as yoga and physical culture were regarded by many as allied, compatible sciences, with similar goals and interchangeable methods. One result of this synthetic bias was that core features of yoga traditions were reframed within the discourse of physical culture, resulting in historically unique modes of yoga practice. Such syntheses are perhaps characteristic of all revivalist movements, and are certainly a feature of the 'modern yoga renaissance' as a whole (De Michelis 2004). This period of creative exchange gave rise to a new perception of yoga as an Indian method of holistic fitness, which in some quarters displaced competing narratives of yoga's function and goal to become the predominant discourse. This endures today in the predominance of health and fitness-oriented *āsana* practice in many local and transnational varieties of global yoga culture.

The nineteenth century saw an explosion of interest in practices of health and fitness, often expressed in terms of the individual's duty to the nation and national militaristic prowess. Recapitulating and adapting Thomas Hobbes' influential vision of state and citizen, the body of the subject was perceived as a microcosmic instantiation of (a particular limb of) the state body. This vision became part and parcel of the patriotism and nationalist pride that accompanied the rise of the modern nation state. Alongside and within nation-specific rhetoric and praxis, there arose a common, international vocabulary of nationalist physical culture. As Patricia Uberoi (2006) puts it:

Somatic nationalist theories, along with the systems of knowledge that endorsed them and the related bodily disciplines, were part of the shared intellectual ambience of elite and reformist groups in the east and west alike, dialectically interrelated in a world system of nations.

Modern European somatic nationalist regimens can be traced to figures like J.F.C. Gutsmuth (1759–1839) and F.L. 'Turnvater' Jahn in Germany (1778–1852), whose hugely influential systems were designed to bring into being a new and improved German citizen (Mosse 1996: 42). In the century that followed, other European nations built on and adapted Germany's example, and national 'man-making' systems of gymnastics and exercise burgeoned, most notably in Britain, France, Prussia and Scandinavia (Hargreaves 1982, 1986; Singleton 2010 Chapter 4). In Britain, physical culture was underpinned by a cluster of values which came to be known as 'Muscular Christianity', and which promoted health and athleticism as a religious (and evangelical) imperative for British subjects at home and abroad.⁵ By the beginning of the twentieth century, European nationalist gymnastics systems

had spread across the globe, with nationalist leaders advocating the adoption of physical culture as a solution to the generalized degeneration seen to be afflicting the nation, and as a means of assuring its military prowess.⁶ Physical training in line with European models was introduced into schools and military academies in China, Japan and India, albeit with significant regional variation (see Uberoi 2006 on the situation in China).

D.C. Mujumdar, in his English-language edition of the *Encyclopedia of Indian Physical Culture* (1950; originally published serially in Marathi between 1935 and 1950), echoing the values and the grammar of modern, European physical culture, writes: ‘God cannot be pleased with the ugly, unhealthy, weak and flabby bodies. It is a sacrilege not to possess a fine, shapely, healthy body. It is a crime against oneself and against our country to be weak and ailing. Our own future and that of your Nation depend upon good health and enough strength’ (ii). Much of the experimentation in Indian physical culture from the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards was based on similar rhetorical exhortations, which recapitulated the religious-nationalist and eugenic concerns of ‘physiological patriots’ in Europe.⁷ To the end of improving the national ‘stock’, pioneers of Indian physical culture adapted technologies entering India from abroad – such as Ling-inspired gymnastics systems, Sandow bodybuilding and the physical culturism of the YMCA – and revived and adapted practices from the Indian traditions. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were periods of intense creative activity, with innovators often drawing freely on whatever resources were at hand to construct (or revive) the Indian physical culture tradition. This included, of course, yoga, and in particular *āsana*, understood as a component part of physical culture itself, and subject to the same principles, rationales and ends. It was in this spirit of experimentation and revival that *āsana* came to form such an important part of the physical culture movement, not just in India but also abroad.

This said, it is important to understand that the spread of somatic nationalism throughout the world during this period rarely if ever represents a straightforward imposition of European knowledge systems upon non-European nations, even in the case of countries like British India, where certain gymnastics techniques were unambiguously introduced as part of the colonial state apparatus for controlling subject bodies. The dialectic of global physical culture in India not only left room for local variation, but also, crucially, encouraged resistance to unwelcome and antagonistic elements within the predominant discourse, through a return to indigenous forms and expressions of self-sufficiency, purity and strength – over and against racialist colonial narratives which served to demean the Indian body. Nor should one assume that, because such systems seemingly begin and flourish within the context of European modernity, comparable developments in other regions during the same period can also be satisfactorily viewed as modernities on the pattern of Europe. For one thing, this does not give proper consideration to the importance of parallel and alternative modernities which are not beholden to or derivative of the European model (see van der Veer 2014), nor to the kind of cultural exchange that is not linear, but is circular and dialectical.

To take but one intriguing early counter-example to the narrative of a unilateral flow of physical culture knowledge from Europe to Asia: perhaps the most influential of all pre-twentieth-century European physical culture techniques, the ‘Swedish gymnastics’ systems stemming from the work of P. H. Ling (1776–1839) – whose work was to change the course of military training throughout Europe and, crucially, in India – drew inspiration from Chinese body exercises.⁸ These quintessentially European gymnastics systems, in other words, subsisted in a complex web of influence with Asiatic cultures of body discipline. This history, of course, becomes all the more tangled when adapted forms of Ling gymnastics make their way back to Asia as part of the pedagogical and military colonial apparatus in British India,

which then exerts its own influence on modern conceptions of *āsana* as physical training and curative gymnastics. This example also illustrates that the colonial encounter is not sufficient to explain the cultural context of modern yoga, and exemplifies David Shulman's recent observation that our modernities 'ramify and exfoliate backwards', beyond the cultural and chronological boundaries that merely colonial history would impose (Shulman 2012).

Here, as in much of the history of transnational yoga in the modern age, it quickly becomes difficult to discern precise origins and clear genealogies for practices and belief, where borrowing, adaptation, mutation and rewriting are the rule. Like an open source computer code, modern yoga has been altered, adapted and rewritten by specialists and amateurs alike. So varied and divergent are its adaptations, indeed, that recourse to the original application(s) – namely ancient, traditional yoga(s) – is on its own insufficient to explain the complexities and innovations that characterize the particular version at hand.⁹

Yoga physical culture in India

De Michelis (2004) has identified the beginning of a fully-fledged 'modern yoga' with the publication of Swami Vivekananda's book *Raja Yoga* of 1896. While some have taken issue with this assertion,¹⁰ Vivekananda certainly created a modern vocabulary and grammar for yoga in 'the West' (*Raja Yoga* was written for an American audience), as well as in India, where Vivekananda's books, essays and lectures are still widely available today. His work was also instrumental in transforming the predominant perception of yoga from the disreputable practice of the exoticized or denigrated other into a discipline that could be undertaken by ordinary people everywhere.¹¹ Significantly, Vivekananda was often outspoken in his dislike of *āsana*, and the renaissance of yoga that he inspired did not initially focus on the development of this aspect of practice. Although Vivekananda himself was an energetic proponent of nationalistic Indian physical culture, it was not until later that *āsana* began to be incorporated as a component part of the yoga renaissance that he himself had helped to initiate. Early renowned physical culture visionaries like Professor K. Ramamurthy, Rajaratna Manick Rao of Baroda and Pratinidhi Pant (the Raja of Aundh), experimented with combinations of modern western body development techniques and indigenous traditions, including yoga, and their teachings had a lasting effect on the development of yoga in succeeding generations.

The case of Pratinidhi Pant is worthy of note here. *Sūryanamaskār*, today a component part of the global postural yoga class, was revived during the early twentieth century as a fitness regime aimed at improving the health of the citizen, and thereby of the nation. The person responsible for the popularization of *sūryanamaskār* within the framework of modern physical culture was Pratinidhi Pant, the king of the Maharastrian state of Aundh, who was himself an avid bodybuilder, and a devotee of the teaching of the European muscle-man Eugen Sandow (1867–1925). The internationally renowned Sandow had a profound impact on global physical culture, and was perhaps especially influential in India, which he visited in 1905 as part of a Far East tour. Joseph Alter has suggested that it was Sandow, rather than Vivekananda or Aurobindo, who exerted the greatest influence on popular modern yoga (2004: 28), partly due perhaps to his method's reputation as a universal practice available to all, and not as inherently 'western' (Budd 1997: 85). Pratinidhi did not 'invent' *sūryanamaskār*. Mujumdar traces Pratinidhi's technique back to Rāmdās (seventeenth-century saint and guru of the Maratha king Śivāji), who he claims first popularized it, and to Balasaheb Mirajkar, the Raja of Miraj (Mujumdar 1950: 453). So while here as elsewhere it would be wrong to talk of *invention* (as if Pratinidhi had developed the practice out of whole cloth), it is clear that his revival represents a vital moment in our history – not least because the presentation

of the subject, both in his 1938 book *The Ten-Point Way to Health* and in Pratinidhi's other writings, frames *sūryanamaskār* within discourses of modern physical culture such as those made prevalent by Sandow. Alongside this, Pratinidhi's nationalist and eugenic intentions can be clearly discerned. Eugenics is a markedly modern trope in modern yoga writing of the twentieth century (Singleton 2007). For example, writing in the preface to Mujumdar's *Encyclopedia*, he asserts that if girls and boys practise *sūryanamaskār*, 'there will shortly be produced a type of humanity that shall excel in body, mind and soul any that the earth has yet brought forth and shall set a new standard for the race' (Mujumdar 1950: vii). Pratinidhi's cultural-nationalist intent is also in evidence, and he seems to have been directly inspired in his thinking by B.G. Tilak (1856–1920), extremist social reformer, physical culture advocate and 'Father of the Indian Unrest'. Although Pratinidhi does not himself appear to consider *sūryanamaskār* to be a part of yoga, its influence on modern transnational yoga systems is enormous.¹² Pratinidhi himself recommended adding *daṇḍas* (lit. 'stick') and other exercises to *sūryanamaskār* in order to make the body graceful (in Mujumdar 1950: vi), and in certain other modern variants of *sūryanamaskār* such as those of K.V. Iyer and T. Krishnamacharya (see below) this seems to be precisely what occurred.

Rajaratna Manick Rao (1878–1954) is also worthy of note here, insofar as he was in some ways the epitome of the new, political and revolutionary renaissance of physical culture in India, and because he trained more than one key figure in the modern postural yoga renaissance. One noteworthy student is Sri Raghavendra Rao, pen-named 'Tiruka', who studied with Manick Rao and Pratinidhi Pant as well as other renowned teachers of yoga (notably Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh and Paramahansa Yogananda) as part of a training in physical culture and martial combat techniques (see introduction to Tiruka 1977). However, Manick Rao's most influential student was undoubtedly Jagannath G. Gune (1883–1966) who would later become famous as Swami Kuvalayananda. Gune began as early as 1914 'to evolve a system of physical culture based on Yoga and to take steps to popularize that system' (Gharote and Gharote 1999: 14). He was ultimately very successful in this endeavour, establishing in 1921 what was to become perhaps the foremost institute of scientific yoga research and education in India – Kaivalyadhama in Lonavla, near Pune – and championing the cause of yogic physical culture throughout the country, in particular within the education system. His mass 'yogic' exercise schemes were subsequently employed in schools across the United Provinces (see Kuvalayananda 1936).¹³ Kuvalayananda's work was to have a profound effect on the perception of yoga as a regimen of physical culture and hygiene.

His yoga guru, Shri Madhvadasji (1789–1921),¹⁴ was also the guru of another pioneer of scientific research into yoga and yoga physical culture, Shri Yogendra (1897–1989), whose books, pamphlets and teachings were to contribute enormously to the development of yoga as a kind of public health and hygiene discipline, in explicit opposition to the secretive, mystical practice of 'sinister' *hathayogins* (Rodrigues 1997: 12). His yogic exercise is clearly influenced by non-Indian physical culture luminaries like Sandow, the Danish physical culturist J.P. Müller, American 'harmonial gymnasts' inspired by Delsarte (more below) and the pre-eminent American physical culturist Bernarr MacFadden, whom Yogendra knew personally from a sojourn in the United States between 1919 and 1924 (Rodrigues 1997: 105). Yogendra plays a key role in sanitizing the practices of *hathayogins* and making them available for an ordinary, householder public within the general frame of physical culture. Indeed, as an early emissary of *yogāsana* in the United States (giving perhaps the earliest āsana demonstrations in that country from 1921. Rodrigues 1997: 96), and later as an influential India-based proponent of the kind of alternative medicine, naturopathy and physical culture that he was exposed to in the US, Yogendra is in many ways an epitome of the trans-cultural

flows and negotiations that have characterized the development of (postural) yoga ever since. In spite of misgivings later in life regarding yoga's by then established identification with physical culture and hygiene (see Singleton 2010: 119, n.3), and notwithstanding his deep engagement with the traditional texts of yoga, Yogendra was instrumental in establishing a new, modern form of *hathayoga* practice that was at least in part explicitly opposed to traditional modes of practice and life.

The 1920s and 1930s were a time of intense experimentation within Indian physical culture, and also a key moment in the refashioning of yoga as physical culture. Alongside Kuvalayananda and Yogendra we might briefly here consider B.C. Ghosh, whose impact on transnational networks of yoga practice continues to be felt in contemporary yoga practice, particularly in the United States. Ghosh was the brother of Paramahansa Yogananda, who was perhaps the most influential and well-known teacher of yoga in the United States after Vivekananda and before the arrival in the mid-to-late 1960s of a wave of Indian gurus like Swami Satchidananda and Swami Muktananda and, later in the 1980s, Osho. Yogananda's renown was in large part due to the success of his book *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946). Ghosh was a physical culturist, and promoted a system of bodybuilding called 'muscle control'. In his 1930 book of the same name (co-authored with K.C. Sen Gupta), Ghosh states that he learned muscle control when he was very young from his brother Yogananda, as well as from one Chit Tun, a Burmese teacher who had settled in Calcutta in the 1920s (Ghosh and Sen Gupta 1930: 52). Yogananda himself states that he had 'discovered' a method of 'muscle recharging through will power' in 1916, and tested it on students at his school in Ranchi (Yogananda 1946: 374), and he seems to have continued to teach and demonstrate the method in the United States from at least 1923 (see Yogananda 1925: 44). Yogananda and Ghosh's muscle control system is reminiscent of popular European bodybuilding techniques of the time, and shows the influence of the popular offshoot of Transcendentalism known as 'New Thought'. It also seems evident that the name and the principles of the method derive from the world-famous bodybuilder Maxick, who authored two books in 1913 and 1914 entitled, respectively, *Muscle Control; or Body Development by Will Power*, and *Great Strength by Muscle Control*.

Ghosh became fascinated with the intersection of *hathayoga* and physical culture and developed a system which was a fusion of the two. Yogananda's biographer, Sananda Lal Ghosh, writes that B.C. Ghosh,

was the first Indian of contemporary times to introduce and make popular a system of *Hatha Yoga* that appealed greatly to the general public. He brought the ancient science of *Hatha Yoga* out of the hermitages and into the courtyards of homes and the fields of villages [... He was] a genius in the field of *Hatha Yoga* and physical culture. He was a pride of India, and will ever be remembered for introducing yoga exercises to the masses.

Ghosh 1980: xvii

It is difficult to assess the truth of the statement that Ghosh was the first Indian to make *hathayoga* exercises appealing to the masses (Yogendra and Kuvalayananda surely have a sizeable share of that honour), but it is clear that his influence within India was enormous. He was well known to India's most famous yoga teacher of the period, Swami Sivananda, and may have helped Sivananda develop a sequence of *āsanas* for health and fitness (Sanchez 2004). Ghosh's influence extended well beyond India, however. He had an international

reputation as a bodybuilder, and throughout the 1930s regularly appeared in physical culture publications like the British magazine *Health and Strength*. His student, Bikram Choudhary, has become one of the most successful international yoga entrepreneurs of all time, teaching an intensely physical series of *āsanas* throughout the world.¹⁵ Another ‘modern yoga lineage’ stemming from Yogananda and Ghosh is that of Walt Baptiste (1918–2001), whose uncle was a close disciple of Yogananda. Baptiste began teaching yoga at the age of seventeen, and went on to develop a system of yogic physical culture that combined weight training, *āsanas* and meditation (Rosen 2001). Like Ghosh, Baptiste was a competitive bodybuilder (winning the Mr America title in 1949) and was also connected to Swami Sivananda, who bestowed on him the title ‘Yogirāj’ (ibid.). Baptiste’s children – Baron, Sherri and Devi Ananda – are now also well-known yoga teachers in their own right.

Harmonial gymnastics

There are many other examples from the first half of the twentieth century of innovators who blurred the discursive and technological contexts of yoga on the one hand, and modern physical culture and its allied fields like naturopathy, ‘alternative’ medicine and curative gymnastics on the other. Given that the majority of the figures considered above have been male gurus – teaching predominantly, it seems, to male students – it may seem initially surprising that the practices of transnational yoga today are in fact dominated by women. Indeed, according to the 2012 *Yoga Journal* survey quoted at the beginning of this chapter, 82.2 per cent of yoga practitioners in the United States are women. There are many factors that contribute to this phenomenon, although it is not possible to go into the matter in any detail here. However, we can nonetheless note that one of the most important strands of yoga’s transnational development is the tradition of women’s gymnastics which grew up in Europe and America during the nineteenth century, and which I will refer to here as ‘harmonial gymnastics’, with reference to Sydney Ahlstrom’s term ‘harmonial religion’ (Ahlstrom 1972). These gymnastics practices, often developed by and for women, emphasized the physical as the locus of access to the divine, variously conceived. Flourishing most usually in para-Protestant, ‘unchurched’ milieux which today might fall under the category ‘spiritual but not religious’, these movements were often in explicit reaction to the body denial that was seen to be a component part of Calvinist Protestantism (see Fuller 2001). The practices, which combined rhythmic breathing with postural stretching, exercise, concentration and prayer, were in many respects forerunners of the systems which abound in the modern metropolis (including urban centres in South and East Asia, of course) under the name of ‘Hatha Yoga’. It may be, in fact, that the typical transnational Hatha Yoga class of today owes more to these traditions of women’s gymnastics than it does to the *hathayoga* systems handed down in the history of India.

The American harmonial gymnastics tradition is exemplified in the person of Genevieve Stebbins (1857–c.1915), a dancer and gymnast who was inspired by the French drama and voice trainer François Delsarte (1811–1871), and who reworked his ideas into a new synthesis which drew inspiration from ‘oriental’ dance and yoga, as well as contemporary practical occultism (she was a member of the Church of Light, an occult order with close ties to the better known Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor: see Godwin *et al.* 1995). Her ‘American Delsartean training regimen’ initiated a Delsarte craze in America. When, in his book *Raja Yoga* of 1896, Swami Vivekananda declares that the postures of *hathayoga* can be found in ‘Delsarte and other teachers’, he is very probably thinking of the harmonial gymnastics regimens popularized by Stebbins (Vivekananda 2001 [1896] 20). Stebbins’s

mélange of callisthenics, deep breathing, relaxation and creative energy, all aiming to develop the ‘body, brain and soul’ of the practitioner, contains many of the elements that one would expect to find in a modern Hatha Yoga class. Other influential figures in the merger of yoga and harmonial gymnastics include the Memphis-born, self-styled *yoginī* Cajzoran Ali (b. 1903), whose method, as set out in her *Divine Posture Influence Upon Endocrine Glands* of 1928, locates the key to the ultimate spiritual truth of yoga in the individual body, and draws deeply on the understandings of the body popularized by New Thought. Her course of posture training and ‘breath culture’ is designed to bring one into harmony with the God who is ‘individualized within you’, and her ‘harmonial’ yoga model is an important early precursor of New Age versions of (postural) yoga which emerged in the West from the 1970s onwards (Ali 1928: 15; see also De Michelis 2004: 184–186).

Similar experiments were going on at the same time in Britain, with the likes of Francis Archer and Mollie Bagot Stack, the founder of the most influential of women’s gymnastics organizations in pre-World War II Britain, the Women’s League of Health and Beauty. Stack had learned some yoga postures and relaxation techniques during a stay in India in 1912, and later incorporated them into her exercise regimes for modern British women (though never referred to as ‘yoga’; Stack 1931). Like Stebbins and Ali, however, Stack’s method presents a combined program of dynamic stretches, rhythmic breathing and relaxation within a ‘harmonial’ framework which closely mirrors the creative modulations of many of today’s Hatha Yoga classes. One compelling hypothesis is that they developed in the context of modern traditions of quasi-mystic body conditioning, breathwork, concentration and callisthenics devised for women during the early part of the twentieth century. The fact that ‘harmonial’ forms of exercise were the accepted and dominant modes of practice for women in the West well prior to the yoga booms of the 1960s and the 1990s may also help to explain why contemporary Hatha Yoga classes are, demographically speaking, also dominated by women. Here, once again, I am speaking of contexts rather than origins, in which the recursive, densely synthetic growth of practices and discourses over time and across cultures makes it difficult to speak of unilateral sources or mere ‘invention’. The gestation of yoga within the context of harmonial gymnastics traditions (itself, of course, just a theoretical term designating an internally varied cluster of practices and beliefs) represents a key moment in the religious cultural history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and a significant habitus for the mutation and growth of yoga within transnational contexts.

Conclusion

Shigehisa Kuriyama (n.d.) proposes a thought experiment in which a late Ming-dynasty scholar discovers an illustrated sixteenth-century European gymnastics manual – *De Arte Gymnastica* by Mercuriale – in the archives of the Forbidden City: a gift from a foreign emissary. For centuries already in China, there has been an active ‘gymnastics’ tradition, known as *yangshen*, ‘the cultivation of life’. In spite of this, the scholar is unable to make sense of the images of sinewy, straining physiques that are so different from the relaxed, unmuscular figures typically pictured in *yangshen* texts, and does not interpret the exercises depicted as disciplines for the cultivation of life. The conceptions of the body and its health contained within these images (and within the text that he cannot read) speak of different worlds, which require interpretative tools that the scholar does not possess. The same, *mutatis mutandis*, would of course apply to the foreign emissary were he to be granted a viewing of the *yangshen* texts.¹⁶ With reference to the possibility of ‘a global history of medicine’, Kuriyama notes that the most ‘fundamental puzzle’

is the astonishing diversity in conceptions of the body – a diversity not just in philosophical schemes and medical theories, in ideas about what makes up the body and how it works, but also in practices, in techniques of diagnosis and therapy, and in the disciplines that we broadly call exercise.

n.d.

The body may seem to be our fundamental, shared reality as human beings, and yet its structure and workings, as well as its function and purpose, can be worlds apart when considered through different cultural or chronological lenses, to the extent that they are almost mutually unintelligible. Such is the situation when we consider the body as it is conceptualized, tended and disciplined in the divergent ancient and modern somatic traditions known as ‘yoga’. The body of modernity (and therefore the somatic technologies that surround it) is in many respects different from other bodies, from other eras and places.

Let us consider, for example, several interpretative transformations of the *cakra* system of the body as it traverses centuries and continents. In the eighth-century Kashmir tantric Kaula cult of Kubjikā known as the *Pāścimāmnāya* (western transmission), there arose a system of six ‘power-centres’ (*cakras*), equivalent to six variant forms of the goddess Kubjikā and her consort, which are invested in the body of the yogin. As Alexis Sanderson points out, with the exception of the cult of the goddess Tripurasundarī, this conception of the body, which was later to become so predominant in models of yoga, ‘is quite absent in all the [other] Tantric traditions’ (1988: 687). Leaping forward to early twentieth-century Bihar, Swāmī Haṃsasvarūpa published a book entitled *Ṣaṭcakraṇirūpaṇacitram*, which reinterprets the six *cakra* system, perhaps for the first time, along the lines of western anatomy, such that the Kubjikā ‘power-centres’ are transformed into empirical physical realities consonant with plexuses and nerve endings (Haṃsasvarūpa c.1902). This anatomical interpretation of the *cakras* was subsequently to gain enormous popular currency within anglophone modern yoga and remains prevalent today. And finally, we leap from India to Europe, where, in Switzerland in 1932, C.G. Jung took the originally *Pāścimāmnāya* deity power-centres and re-envisioned them as universal psychosomatic realities corresponding to his own archetype theory (see Jung 1999), a vision which has endured within contemporary psychotherapeutic systems sympathetic to ‘Eastern’ thought (however creatively interpreted). Many more such key creative moments could be adduced here – and a cultural history of the *cakras* remains to be written – but let us stick with these three for the time being, merely on account of their strangeness to each other.

We can imagine the moment when, like Kuriyama’s Ming-dynasty scholar poring over the renaissance gymnastics manual, exponents of each of these distinct phases in the global history of the *cakras* encounter the foreign or chronologically removed scheme. We can also imagine that after a period of initial confusion when faced with the strangeness of the remote other’s model, our scholar sets to work to make it make sense within the frame of the reality which is proper to him, and is eventually able to find a satisfactory explanation in his own terms. In the history of yoga, particularly within the modern period and in its transnational instantiations, this is of course exactly what happened, what continues to happen, and perhaps what has always happened. Clearly, the process takes on increasing complexity and rapidity in the modern age as knowledge about yoga is disseminated across the globe by travelling teachers and print media, and as formerly alien forms of thought and practice are assimilated into the body and intention of the yoga practitioner. The history of yoga’s interactions with the international physical culture movement is only one aspect of this complex process, wherein worlds interpenetrate but remain mutually intelligible only through interpretative work – during which new significations, inevitably filtered by the naturalizing gaze of the practitioner

or theorist, are brought to bear on the body. It is, nevertheless, an important history, insofar as many of today's contemporary expressions of yoga, both in India and abroad, bear the clear traces of this interpretative work. As well as furthering too our understanding of the modern history of yoga, such a cultural history of yoga as one somatic discipline among others may also serve as a contribution to a global history of therapeutic and religious sciences of the body through time.

Notes

- 1 On this latter, see Beckerlegge 2013: 327–350.
- 2 For a useful summary, see Christophe Jaffrelot's introduction in Jaffrelot 2007.
- 3 Indications are numerous and easy to find. As a single example, see <http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Yoga+exercise> (accessed 31 March 2013).
- 4 Pierre Bourdieu describes habitus as 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them' (1977: 72).
- 5 The term 'Muscular Christianity' was first used in a review of Charles Kingsley's 1857 novel *Two Years Ago*, and was taken up by Kingsley's friend Thomas Hughes in his *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1860), with reference to the training of the body for the advancement of God's work in the world.
- 6 On degeneracy narratives see Pick 1989; Rosselli 1980; Sen 2004.
- 7 The phrase is adapted from McDonald (1999). On eugenics in relation to physical culture and yoga, see Singleton (2007).
- 8 It is not clear to what extent Ling himself was influenced by Chinese sources. N. Dally's work of 1857 offers a fairly extensive biography of Ling and a lengthy reflection on Ling's possible influences. Dally writes: 'comme ce corps de doctrine [de Ling] ne diffère point de celui des Tao-Ssé, il faut bien admettre aussi que dans le même temps Ling avait entre les mains la Notice du P. Amiot ou quelque autre traité chinois original, rapporté soit par d'autres missionnaires, soit par des personnes attachées aux ambassades de l'Europe en Chine. La doctrine de Ling toute entière, théorique et pratique, n'est qu'une sorte de décalque daguéréotypique du Cong-Fou des Tao-Ssé; c'est le vase royal de Dresde, le splendide vase chinois, avec ses figures chinoises revêtues des teintes européennes' (1857: 155; see also Dudgeon 1895: 82 for a loose English translation of Dally's assertions regarding Ling). Dally is referring here to the work of Jean Joseph Marie Amiot (1718–1793), a Jesuit missionary to Peking (see Dudgeon 1895: 78). While Dally's assertions regarding Ling remain speculative, the influence of Kung-Fu (or 'Cong Fou' as it is usually spelled) is explicit in the work of influential Ling disciples G.H. Taylor (e.g. Taylor 1860: 33) and Hungarian exile M. Roth who was, according to Dudgeon, 'the most prominent exponent and successful practitioner of the [Ling] system in Great Britain' and who was also greatly interested in the application of Kung-Fu, as presented in Amiot's work, to curative gymnastics (Dudgeon 1895: 84).
- 9 Taking the analogy further, one might even say that in 'traditional' and 'modern' yoga alike there is a tension between corporate structures (traditional *sampradāyas* which practise yoga, or modern 'branded' yoga forms like Bikram™ or Iyengar Yoga ®) and non-corporate productions (freelance yogis developing practices in isolation from such corporate structures) reminiscent of the twenty-first-century dynamic between I.T. firms like Microsoft and Apple, and open source platforms like Linux. Such a dichotomy, however, should not obscure the fact that both function in a relationship of influence, inspiration and antagonism with the other (Apple's iconic user interface is inspired by Linux; Linux's native LibreOffice suite is modelled on Microsoft's Office etc.).
- 10 For example, Killingley (2014: 33): 'The yoga Vivekananda taught was hardly "fully fledged"; being more interested in doctrine than practice, he left it to later gurus to introduce more formal, and more recognizably yogic, practices'.
- 11 On the popular reputation of the yogi as rogue, see David White's *Sinister Yogis* (2009). For a summary of Vivekananda's statements on *āsana*, see Singleton 2010, Chapter 3.
- 12 There is a reference to *sūryanamaskār* in the *Jyotsnā* commentary on the *Hat̥hapradīpikā* by Brahmānanda (d. 1842?), which recommends against 'activities that cause physical stress like excessive *sūryanamaskārs* or carrying heavy loads etc.' (*kāyākṣēśavidhiṃ kāyākṣēśakaram vidhiṃ kriyām bahusūryanamaskārādīprūpām*

- bahubhārodvahanādīrūpāṃ ca*, 1.61). Later, modern yoga pioneer Shri Yogendra would lament the 'indiscriminate mix[ing] up' of yoga and *sūryanamaskār* by 'the ill-informed', asserting that such syntheses are 'definitely prohibited by the authorities' (Yogendra 1988 [1928]). Reading against the grain, however, we might speculate that such prohibitive declarations in fact point to a degree of popularity of *sūryanamaskār* within yoga practice prior to the advent of modern teachers like Kuvalayananda and T. Krishnamacharya.
- 13 Joseph Alter's 2004 book *Yōga in Modern India, between Science and Philosophy* is in part an anthropological analysis of Kuvalayananda and the work of his institution.
 - 14 For a short biography of Madhvadasji's very long life, see <http://www.yogadhama.com/ecole-yoga/?The-KAIVALYADHAMA-Centre&lang=en>. Accessed 2 July 2014.
 - 15 See Fish (2006) and the non-academic study of Bikram Yoga by Benjamin Lorr (2013).
 - 16 A situation perhaps not unlike P. H. Ling poring over diagrams of Chinese gymnastics in Amiot's text (albeit mediated by the French priest's interpretations).

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