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PROSTRATION OR POTENTIATION? HINDU RITUAL, PHYSICAL CULTURE, AND THE "SUN SALUTATION" (*SŪRYANAMASKĀR*)

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Abstract

The so-called "Sun Salutation" (S. *sūryanamaskāra*, H. *sūryanamaskār*), is one of the most ubiquitous and iconic of all modern yoga practices. As Alter (1992, 2000), Goldberg (2006, 2016), and Singleton (2010, 2016), have discussed at length, the modern history of yoga, and of the *sūryanamaskār* in particular, is deeply rooted in the soil of Hindu ritual, Indian nationalism, and the emergence of a cosmopolitan middle-class physical culture in late 19th and early 20th century Europe and India. The goal of this paper is to explore three interrelated issues connected to the *sūryanamaskār*. First, we will further explore the genealogical and morphological relationships between the *sūryanamaskār* exercise and Hindu traditions of ritual worship. Second, we will examine the thesis forwarded by Mujumdar (1950) that the *sūryanamaskār* was taught in a communal exercise (H. *akhāṛā-vyāyām*) mode by Samarth Rāmdās to the Maharashtrian culture-hero Shivaji (Śivajī), considering his principal work, the *Dāsbodh* (17th century CE). Lastly, we will discuss the tensions between religion and physical culture associated with the *sūryanamaskār* and with yoga as understood in the work of Bhavanrao Pant and Swami Kuvalayananda, key proponents of the respective systems. We will conclude with reflections on the ways in which the modern *sūryanamaskār* and modern postural yoga demonstrate an ongoing process of interpretation and expression between the poles of the demonstration of religious piety (prostration) and empowerment through physical culture (potentiation), and why their conjunction, particularly in the modern era, makes sense historically and philosophically.

KEYWORDS

Yoga, *Daṇḍ*, *Vyāyām*, Sūrya, *Namaskāra*, Sun Salutation, Physical Culture, Nationalism, Rāmdās, Kuvalayananda, Pant.

Introduction

The iconic global role that yoga has taken on in recent 21st-century history was amply demonstrated by the advent in 2015 of the "International Day of Yoga" as a United Nations-sponsored festival. Building upon the success of yoga-informed nationalism in India embodied and championed by popular figures such as Swami Ramdev, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has sought to consolidate India's claim to the legacy of yoga on an international scale (Sarbacker 2021: 186). In addition to his role in establishing the International Day of Yoga, Modi also established a Department of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH) as a formal unit of the Indian health ministry in 2014, aiming to consolidate yoga's formal role within Indian public health policy.[1] Yoga has been suggested as a universal requirement in the Indian public school curricula, and in some cases States have implemented their own agendas for integrating yoga into public education (ibid.: 186–187). Among the most prominent of modern yoga practices discussed in debates over yoga in Indian public life has been the so-called "Sun Salutation" (S. *sūryanamaskāra*, and the more common vernacular H. *sūryanamaskār*). The Sun Salutation, a series of formulaic movements (*vinyāsa*) in which a sequence of physical postures (*āsana*) is linked together by the movement of the breath, is one of the most iconic formulations of modern yoga and at the root of modern transnational traditions of "Vinyasa," "Flow," and "Power" yoga. The iconic status in India of yoga in general, and of the *sūryanamaskār* in particular, is illustrated by the fact that travellers entering the Indira Gandhi airport in New Delhi are greeted with a modern sculpture highlighting the postural sequence of the *sūryanamaskār* (ibid.).

But despite these prominent public roles, the *sūryanamaskār* is not a universally beloved practice throughout India. Much like yoga as a whole, it is a topic of considerable, and sometimes heated, controversy. In Madhya Pradesh, for example, the observance of Surya Namaskara Day, represented by government authorities as a public health initiative, led to protests by both Christian and Islamic communities who viewed the Sun Salutation as a thinly-veiled mode of Hindu worship of the god Sūrya, cynically propagated by Hindu nationalists (ibid.). Likewise, the practice of the Sun Salutation, along with the chanting of the mantra *oṃ*, was removed from proposed International Day of Yoga observances in both 2015 and 2016, due to protests by non-Hindus—and it might also be noted that the event is linked to the summer solstice as well as to an

[1] This is further extended by the formalisation of teacher training and certification by the Indian federal government, which is currently underway (Sarbacker 2021: 191).

important date in the history of Hindu nationalism (ibid.: 187, n. 26).[2] At the heart of the debate over the mass public performance of the *sūryanamaskār* is the question of whether it is principally a religious ritual act—what we will refer to here as "prostration"—or, alternately, a mode of physical exercise leading to physical health, strength, and empowerment—what we will refer to as "potentiation." Building on the work of Alter (1992: 75, 98–103, 106; 2000: 83–112), Singleton (2010: 124–129 and 175–210; 2016: 176–207), and Goldberg (2016: 180–196 and 285–319), this essay will further demonstrate that the *sūryanamaskār* has historically played both these roles, which over the centuries manifested physically/practically in different ways, and that the boundary between the two has been, in fact, fluid and dynamic, transforming over time in its shifting cultural and semantic contexts. Over time, the factors informing these transformations include the role of the Hindu deity Sūrya in *brāhmaṇa* and sectarian, especially Saura, Smārta, and Vaiṣṇava, ritual practice and modern appeals to nationalist and physicalist forms of political and public health discourse, leading to the coexistence of different forms of practice and different understandings.

Sūrya and Related Solar Deities: Theology and Ritual

A logical starting point for contextualising the practice of *sūryanamaskār* as prostration in Indian religion and culture is to begin with a larger discussion of the theology and worship of Sūrya within the Hindu tradition, expanding upon the research of Alter (2000: 83, 95–96, 109–112), Goldberg (2006; 2016: 185–187), and others on the Brahmanic roots of the practice. One simple, albeit imprecise, way to identify the major themes of sun liturgies in India is to examine the role of Sūrya within Vedic (*vaidika*), Classical (*paurāṇika-smārta*), and Tantric (*tāntrika*) modes of practice, corresponding to three major strata of Hindu ritual and theology. This basic framework illustrates the major religious themes that have informed the development of sun-worship and its related physical culture in India and serve as the cultural location of *sūryanamaskār* in contemporary yoga practice in India.

Within the Vedic context, the god Sūrya stands out as an important nature-deity, having ten *Ṛgveda* hymns dedicated specifically to him, many of which became, over time, of great importance in *brāhmaṇa* daily practice (Macdonell 2000: 30). As a term, *sūrya* refers in the Vedic context to both the deity and to the physical orb of the sun, pointing to a deeply-rooted dynamic between the natural and preternatural that

[2] McCartney 2018 further connects the date of the solstice to the date of the death of Keshav Baliram Hegdewar, the founder of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist organisation. The solstice is also the beginning of the second yearly Hindu solar-cosmological phase of *dakṣiṇāyaṇa*.

extends out of the sun's luminous, if not numinous, physical presence (ibid.). Sūrya is referred to as the "face of Agni" as having an "eye" or as being the eye of another deity, such as Mitra and Varuṇa, as a "rouser" of humanity, and as having one or seven steeds that drive his chariot across the sky (ibid.). Sūrya is the dispeller of darkness, prolonging life and driving away sickness and disease (ibid.: 31). In *Ṛgveda* 1.115, one of the most often-recited verses of Sūrya worship, just as Sūrya yokes his horses to initiate dawn, pious men are said to engage in "yoking" the sacrifice (Atkins 1938). Sūrya is often homologised with Savitṛ, a deity that represents radiance or effulgence, and with Viṣṇu, whose three great strides are akin to the journey of the sun across the sky and whose role as sustainer mirrors that of the sun (Macdonell 2000: 38). Sūrya-Savitṛ's liturgical significance cannot be overstated, given the import of the Gāyatrī mantra in Hindu ritual practice, which is perhaps the most important of all *vaidika* mantras, if not all mantras altogether, in the Hindu tradition (ibid.). Sūrya is also identified as one of the Ādityas, the sons of the goddess Aditi, which include Mitra, Varuṇa, and Aryaman, a connection that is made frequently in the Brāhmaṇas and later Hindu literature, where the sun is referred to as "Āditya" (Macdonell 2000: 43).[3] Some scholars have connected Sūrya to attributes of the deities Pūṣan, Vivasvat, the Aśvins, Veṇa, and Rohita, among others (ibid.: 41, 160). The literature of the later Vedic tradition, including the Upaniṣads, articulates elaborate homologies between Sūrya and Prajāpati, and, by extension, Hiraṇyagarbha and Brahmā, and of Āditya with both Puruṣa and Brahman (Pandey 1971: 39).

The modes of worship of Sūrya and solar deities in the *vaidika* context included various domestic (*gṛhya*) and ordained (*śrauta*) modes of sacrifice (*yajña*), with Sūrya playing an important role in sacrifices such as the Aśvamedha, Agnihotra, and various Soma rites, and initiations (*dīkṣā*), such as the sacred thread ceremony (*upanayana*). Perhaps the most profoundly influential mode of Vedic sun-worship is derived from the domestic daily actions (*nityakarman*, lit. "perennial action") of the Saṃdhyā rites, sometimes referred to as "transitional worship" (*saṃdhyāvandana*), which take place during different parts of the day, most notably at sunrise when the Gāyatrī mantra is performed to the rising sun in repetitions (*japa*) of ten, twenty-eight, or one hundred and eight times (Vasu 1991: 33). Other formulae include offerings of respect (*arghya*), especially of water, the performance of salutations (*praṇāma*, *namaskāra*), primarily

[3] Oldenberg theorised that the Ādityas may have originally represented the sun, moon, and five planets, representing celestial radiance and connecting Vedic to Avestan conceptions of celestial divinity (ibid.: 44).

through the recitation or action (*kāra*) of verses of praise (*namas*) (Dass 1984: 13).[4] Within this framework, the recitation of verses referred to as "approaching Sūrya" (*sūryopasthāna*), derived from *Ṛgveda* 1.151, feature prominently as an expression of the centrality of Sūrya in the Saṃdhyā ritual process, especially for the *Ṛgveda-saṃdhyā* (Vasu 1991: 59–60). In the context of the *Yajurveda-saṃdhyā*, the sun is saluted (*namaskāra*) through the use of a special mantra referred to as the "one-wheeled" or "one-eyed" (*ekacakra*) (ibid.: 66–67).

Important late Vedic texts include the *Aruṇapraśna* of the *Taittirīyāraṇyaka*, which is sometimes referred to as the *sūryanamaskāramantra*, and the *Sūrya Upaniṣad*, an Upaniṣad of the *Atharvaveda* that is frequently appealed to as a primary source for solar devotion. Within the context of the major Upaniṣad literature, the worship of the sun via the Gāyatrī formula appears in the early strata in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 6.3.6, and the sun and its rays appear in various formulations in reference to contemplative processes, one of which is a transcendence into the primordial person (*Puruṣa*) via the "door of the sun" (*sūryadvāra*) or the "door to the [other] world," such as is found in *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.11.87–88 and *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.6.4–6.[5] In the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (2.1–7), Savitṛ is invoked as a patron of yogic-ascetic discipline and liberating knowledge, specifically as related to the cultivation of mental discipline (Hume and Haas 1921: 397–398). Some modern commentators draw from these various examples the conclusion that a range of Hindu practices, including *sūryanamaskār*, have their roots in the prostrations, observances, and contemplative practices evident in the Vedic Saṃhitā and Upaniṣad literature (Srivastava 1993: 169).

The Epic and Narrative (Itihāsa-Purāṇa) literature builds upon the Vedic foundation, integrating sun-worship, including that of Sūrya, Savitṛ, and Āditya, into the mainstream of the emerging classical, i.e. *śrauta* or *paurāṇika*, model of Hindu practice. Piety towards the sun in the *Rāmāyaṇa* includes the performance of *saṃdhyopāsanā*, specifically the worship of Savitṛ, by Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Sītā, and various Ṛṣis, as well as the offering of homage to Sūrya by Hanumān (Pandey 1971: 54–55). In the *Ādityahṛdaya* of the Yuddhakāṇḍa of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma is instructed to worship Āditya prior to his battle with Rāvaṇa, with the sun god being identified in the text with Brahmā, Viṣṇu,

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[4] The larger framework of Brahmanic practices consolidated in *dharma* literature include *japa*, respect [offering] (*arghya*), sipping (*ācamana*), *prāṇāyāma,* cleansing (*mārjana*), confession (*aghamarṣana*), and attendance (*upasthāna*) within the *sūryasaṃdhyā*, as represented in the Gṛhyasūtras and Dharmasūtras (Srivastava 1993: 167).

[5] See, for example, Olivelle 1998: 278–279. Note the connection in 8.6.4–6 of the rays of the sun, the door, and the subtle body reference (connected with *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* as well).

and Śiva as a type of supreme deity, bearing, among other names, Hiraṇyagarbha (Pandey 1971: 56; Srivastava 1993: 180).[6] The *Mahābhārata* contains references to emerging theistic sectarian traditions, including Śāktas, Gāṇeśas, Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, and Sauras, anticipating the integration of such theisms in the formal Smārta tradition of the fivefold worship of the *pañcāyatanapūjā* (Srivastava 1972: 177).[7] Sauras are numbered among the followers of the Pāṇḍavas, and a *Mahābhārata* hymn provides one hundred and eight names of the sun god, including the names Sūrya, Aryaman, Soma, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Yogī, and Mokṣadvāra (Pandey 1971: 57–58; Srivastava 1993: 177–178). In one passage, Yudhiṣṭhira praises the sun as the self (*ātma*) of all bodies (*dehī*), as the final goal (*parāyaṇa*) of Sāṃkhya-Yogīs, and as the repository of ascetic knowledge.[8] White argues that the term *yoga* becomes associated in the *Mahābhārata* with the ascension at death of warriors and hermits, the solar rays being a vehicle for transcendence and liberation through a process of "solar apotheosis" (2009: 67–73; 2010: 291–302).

Sūrya appears as an object of praise and veneration in the Mahāpurāṇas, including the *Mārkaṇḍeya*, *Agni*, *Garuḍa*, *Brahmāṇḍa*, *Liṅga*, *Brahma*, and *Skanda Purāṇa*s (Pandey 1971: 131–140). Sūrya takes on a particularly central role as a supreme deity in parts of the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa*, which have been derived from the *Sāmbapūraṇa*, one of the Upapurāṇas (Rocher 1986: 217–229). The *Sūryapurāṇa* or *Saurapurāṇa*, typically classified as a Upapurāṇa, is a Śaiva, rather than a Saura, Purāṇa, and may be distantly related to the *Ādityapurāṇa*, a non-sectarian text of Sūrya-worship (ibid.: 115).[9] Chapters 47–215 of the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* are focused on the worship of the sun, including a discussion of *namaskāra* and *pūjā* found in a larger discourse on the role of Sūrya as the progenitor of *kriyāyoga*, a devotional mode of liberating spiritual discipline (ibid.: 151–154).[10] The *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* focuses extensively on the story of a Sūrya-devotee named Diṇḍi, who is instructed in yogic-ascetic practice by Sūrya and Brahmā and is freed from the sin of Brahminicide due to his devotion and austerities (*Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* 2, 415 ff). The *Sāmbapurāṇa*, the principal source for the material in the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa*, illustrates the

[6] Hiraṇyagarbha is credited in various texts as being the progenitor of the Yoga *darśana* (Jacobsen 2005: 14).

[7] See, for example, *Mahābhārata* 3.287.16.2, for a specific reference to the (general) practice of *sūrya-namaskāra*.

[8] Referring to *Mahābhārata* 3.3.36–37, see Srivastava 1993: 179, and Pandey 1971: 59.

[9] See also Winternitz 1962: 512; Pandey 1971: 152–153.

[10] I use here the *Bhaviṣhyapurāṇa* edited by Purṇaprajña Das, translated by Bhumipati Das 2007: 410. This framework of *kriyāyoga* may have a relationship with models of the practice found in Vaiṣṇava Purāṇa literature. See Swami Parmeshwaranand 2001: 29–34.

import of the sun as a unique object of worship, particularly in its dual capacities as a remover of disease and as purifier of sin (*pāpa*). Sūrya is represented as both a physical and spiritual deity, serving as the resort of the Yogīs and Sāṃkhyas who enter into the sun after abandoning their bodies, with yoga represented as the method for achieving that goal (Hazra 1955: 66). The protagonist of the narrative, Sāmba, the son of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, is cured from his father's curse of leprosy by performing Sūrya-dedicated *yātrā* and *vrata* under the guidance of the sage Nārada, ultimately building Sūrya-temples and bringing *maga* (*magi*) priests from Śākadvīpa to establish a Sūrya-liturgy (ibid.: 66–72). Sūrya is also understood to be overseer of the forest of *tapas* (*tapovana*) or "sun grove" (*sūryakānana*), and is portrayed as identical with Maheśvara (Śiva), Viṣṇu, Brahmā, and the highest essence or ultimate reality (*parabrahman*) (ibid.: 71–73).

Temple worship to Sūrya in the *Sāmbapurāṇa*, as well as in the larger Puranic literature, is rooted in the Vedic performance of Saṃdhyā and *yajña-homa*, with particular emphasis on sacrificial rituals associated with Agni and various modes of *paurāṇika* image-worship (*pūjā*) utilising *mantra* and auspicious offerings and donations.[11] Puranic conceptions of sun worship extend from the *vaidika* to the *paurāṇika* sphere through the inclusion of formal rituals of *pūjā* utilising an image (*mūrti*), *bhakti*, and sectarianism, and the use of vows (*vrata*) and pilgrimage (*yātrā*).[12] In the mediaeval era, the invocation of Sūrya in temples was, at least in some cases, associated with the patronage of *brāhmaṇa* ritual practice denoted by the rubric of *namaskāra*.[13] Goldberg, drawing on the work of Gupta, presents a related contemporary practice of *sūryanamaskāra* by *brāhmaṇa* temple priests in Andhra Pradesh, presumably at the temple of Arasavalli at Srikakulam, as illustrating a possible religious precursor to the modern physical (*vyāyāma-namaskār*) form.[14] European travellers to India as early as the late 16th century took note of the practice of solar prostration rituals, noting the actions of practitioners raising their hands up towards the sun and then fully prostrating themselves on the ground.[15]

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[11] Including flowers, fruit, water, and sandalwood paste, and the practice of *namaskāra*. Hazra 1955: 80; Pandey 1971: 171. See, for example, *Matsya Pur*. 79.6.1.

[12] See Srivastava 1991: 167–169. Srivastava also notes that Hazra and others see the use of *vrata* as also continuous with *vaidika* practice.

[13] See Sarkar 2010: 76; Srinivasulu 1996: 328; Belli Bose 2018: 36–37.

[14] Goldberg also provides a description of a priestly *namaskāra* based upon anthropologist Roxanne Gupta's 2005 video of a ritual performance (2016: 185–186). Note the highlight on the temple website: http://www.arasavallisungod.org/aboutsun.html, and that *sūrya-namaskāra-sevā* is available.

[15] In 16th-17th centuries, Foster shows how elements of this practice include turning thirty-forty times with the right leg always before the left: "[...] for their penance they lie flat upon the earth, and rise up and

Similarly, a late 19th-century Indian scholar of Indian medicine noted the vigorous nature of the daily Hindu worship of the sun, which was tantamount, in his opinion, to physical exercise.[16]

Contemporary practices of *sūryapūjā* and *sūryavrata*, drawn from *paurāṇika* traditions, often involve prostration before icons of Sūrya or forms of penance which involve repeated measuring of distances, such as between one's home and a river, through complete eight-limbed prostrations (*sāṣṭāṅganamaskāra*) (Huyler 2004: 227).[17] Kane notes the significance of the *aṣṭāṅganamaskāra* as a mode of full-body prostration to deities, and points to the modern adaptation of both the twelve-deity Sūrya mantra (also commonly referred to as the *sūryanamaskāramantra*, beginning with an invocation of Mitra) and the *tṛcākalpanananamaskāramantra*, which utilises *bīja-mantra* variants (Kane 1968: 735–765).[18] It might also be noted that the worship of Sūrya was historically well-represented in Maharashtra, a region critical in the development of modern Indian physical culture, in part due to the pervasive influence of the Smārta *pañcāyatana* mode of ritual, which included Śiva, Viṣṇu, Devī, Gaṇeśa, and Sūrya as the principal objects of worship (*pūjā*).[19]

The Puranic literature also provides glimpses of emerging *tāntrika* modes of sun-worship. In the *Sāmbapurāṇa*, Tantric principles, devices, and practices such as the *mahāmantra*, *tattvanyāsa*, *mantranyāsa*, and *maṇḍala* appear, along with the so-called "six rites" (*ṣaṭkarman*), which appear in later sections of the text.[20] Tantra-focused Puranic passages, such as those found in the *Agni* and *Garuḍa Purāṇa*s, sometimes identify Sūrya with Śiva (Pandey 1971: 143). The *Sāmbhapurāṇa* refers to the use of *mantra*, *maṇḍala*, *mudrā* and *nyāsa*, and the term *tantra* is used to signify both practice and class of text,

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turn themselves about 30 or 40 times, and use to heave up their hands to the sunne, and to kisse the earth, with their armes and legs stretched along out, and their right leg always before the left. Every time they lie down, they make a score on the ground with their finger, to know then their stint is finished" (Foster 1975: 19; see also Rajagopalan 1964: 174; Birch 2018: 139 nn. 98, 99).

[16] See Simhaji 1977: 61; Birch 2018: 139 nn. 98, 99; Goldberg 2016: 188.

[17] See also the image depicted in Huyler 2004: 224.

[18] See also Pant 1929: 160–162. These variants are, in association with the performance of the Gāyatrī mantra, framed within the rubric of *sūryanamaskār* and performed at holy sites such as Varanasi as a popular mode of Hindu ritual in the contemporary context (Malville 1985: 207–221).

[19] With *pūjā* being performed in temples that had these five deities situated in a hierarchical arrangement (Pandey 1971: 262).

[20] Including *vasīkarana*, *ākarsana*, *māraṇa*, *uccātana*, *vidveṣana*, and *stambhana* (Srivastava 1991: 169).

indicating the clear integration of that mode of practice into the mainstream ritual traditions of Hinduism (Hazra 1955: 80).[21]

In sum, a thread of Sūrya worship, devotion, and asceticism runs through all three strata of *brāhmaṇa*-based religious liturgies of the *vaidika*, *paurāṇika*, and *tāntrika* modes of religious practice in the Hindu tradition. Sūrya, who is identified with a range of other gods, perhaps most notably Savitṛ and Āditya, is a deity that is associated with physical health and spiritual purification and by extension with martial skill and with yoga. Devotion to Sūrya is most strongly associated with paying homage (*namas*, *namaskāra*, *praṇāma*) through *mantra* recitation accompanied by physical acts of reverence directed towards the orb of physical sun, including *sāṣṭāṅganamaskāra*, drawing upon the foundation of verses from the *Ṛgveda* utilised in the various *vaidika* Saṃdhyā rituals and the *paurāṇika* modes of *pūjā* and *vrata*. Tantric methodologies supplement *vaidika* and *paurāṇika* modes of worship and practice through the adaptation of their nexus of ritual techniques to the sphere of Sūrya-worship. Thus, from this "birds-eye" perspective, we can see that the modern conception of *sūryanamaskār* as physical culture is framed within a much larger context of Hindu ritual and theology with ancient, classical, and mediaeval roots.

Sūrya and Physical Culture: Samarth Rāmdās as Sadguru of *Sūryanamaskār*

One of the few explicit attempts to link the physical culture practice of the *sūryanamaskār*, i.e. *namaskār* as physical empowerment or "potentiation," to pre-modern traditions of the *namaskār* is found in Mujumdar's *Encyclopedia of Indian Physical Culture* (1950).[22] A discussion of the practice is found in his survey of physical culture in Part 1, "History of Physical Culture in India," specifically in Sub-section 6, "The Maratha Period" (Mujumdar 1950: 18). Using superlative language, noting the "simply amazing" conquests of Śivājī and others through the reorganisation and propagation of physical culture along military lines, Mujumdar associates the success of Śivājī with the efforts of the "religious magnet" Samarth Rāmdās (ibid.). Rāmdās is then said to have facilitated the construction of 1,200 temples in honour of the god Hanumān, the patron saint of athletics (S. *vyāyāma*, H. *vyāyām*) in Indian and Hindu culture, and the installation of innumerable images of Hanumān in gymnasiums all over the

[21] Hazra also notes references to practices of exorcism (*abhicāra*) as evidence of the significant impact of Tantra within Saura tradition.

[22] See Alter 1992: 73–74, 98, 102; Bühnemann 2007: 33 n. 69; Singleton 2016: 176–177; Goldberg 2016: 187.

region (ibid.). Mujumdar also states that Rāmdās is said to have popularised *sūryanamaskār*, having himself practised 1,200 *namaskār* exercises per day "after the daily ablutions" (ibid.).[23] He notes that "Namaskars are meant for worshipping the God Sun and thus even today the exercise of Namaskars is viewed as a religious practice [...] [if] the people practice Namaskars in sufficient numbers regularly, they are sure to build their bodies strong and longevity of life would favor them as a natural consequence" (ibid.: 18–19). Mujumdar concludes that "Ramdas, therefore, may be considered as the pioneer of organized gymnastic institutions in Maharashtra" and subsequently quotes Rāmdās' work *Dāsbodh* in support of Rāmdās' valuation of strength, particularly as exemplified by Śivājī (ibid.: 19). In a later part of his text, Mujumdar repeats the claim that Rāmdās practised *namaskār* 1,200 times daily and adds that his disciples likewise had "strong but supple bodies" (ibid.: 453). He states that in the 19th century the practice of *sūryanamaskār* was in decline, and it took the work of Bhavanrao Pant, the Mahārāja of Aundh, inspired by Balasaheb Mirajkar, the Mahārāja of Miraj, in the 20th century to restore the practice to its rightful place in Indian physical culture and society (Mujumdar 1950: 453; Goldberg 2016: 188). Mujumdar additionally links the "Namaskar" to the concept of "Sashtang Namaskar," indicating the import of the contact of all eight "limbs" to the ground (including the forehead, chest, two palms, two knees, and two sets of toes) (ibid.).[24]

This presentation of the history of the physical culture *sūryanamaskār*, what might be referred to as the *vyāyām-namaskār*, or athletic *namaskār*, though lacking in academic rigour, provides some insight into how Indian physical culturists of the 20th century sought to root the practice in the world of Maharashtrian and Hindu nationalist culture heroes. However, the larger association between Rāmdās and Śivājī may be significantly more tentative than Mujumdar suggests. Laine, for example, questions whether Rāmdās and Śivājī ever met, or whether this confluence of holy man and military leader serves principally as a literary and religio-political device (2013: 52–53). In this vein, he notes the literary association of both Tukārām and Rāmdās to Śivājī, including parallels in the stories linking them to the culture-hero, particularly with respect to the trope of the submission of the storied military leader to the revered religious *guru* (ibid.). Laine argues that references to the association of Rāmdās and Śivājī have not been found in

[23] Perhaps suggesting an iconic status of the number 1,200 (Alter 1992: 102).

[24] In connection with this, Singleton argues that the modern physical culture version of the *sūryanamaskār* links together the culture of religious prostration of the *sāṣṭāṅganamaskāra* to the practice of *daṇḍ*s, so-called Indian "push-ups," noting that the *sūryanamaskār* sequence is presented in the rubric of "Ashtang Dand" in Bombay physical education literature of the 1930s (2010: 205–206). For further exploration of the connection between the practices of *namaskār* and *daṇḍ*, see Jerome Armstrong's chapter in this volume.

any 17th century texts, though he does acknowledge that Rāmdās' *Dāsbodh* includes a section offering generic advice to a king (ibid.).[25] Nonetheless, Śivājī is portrayed in the hagiographic literature as an ardent devotee of Rāmdās who was dedicated to bringing his spiritual life to bear on his worldly endeavours, akin to Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgītā* (ibid.: 54). Lutgendorf points to parallels between the narratives of Vyāsarāya and Rāmdās, particularly in their roles as royal advisors (*rājaguru*) to kings exemplifying a "muscular" Hindu *dharma* (2007: 74–78). He also notes hagiographies that credit Rāmdās with establishing 1,100 monasteries (*maṭha*) and a number of Māruti (Hanumān) temples, numbered from as few as eleven to as many as 1,200 (ibid.). As such, Lutgendorf argues that the Rāmdās-Śivājī relationship falls squarely within a common trope found in Vaiṣṇava hagiographic literature of the era, one that is extended into a modern Maharashtrian, and ultimately Indian, Hindu nationalist discourse that emphasises a "great national war of Hindus" (ibid.). He also notes that the earlier hagiographies and biographies of Rāmdās emphasise his religious piety, and in some cases religious populism, over his role in political machinations (ibid.). Lastly, he points to the important link between Rāmdās and Hanumān, in the form of Māruti, given in the form of Rāmdās' identification as an *avatār* (S. *avatāra*) of the monkey-god, solidifying his connection to the military culture of the Marathas as well as to Vaiṣṇava devotion (ibid.).

Rāmdās' work *Dāsbodh* (Wisdom of the Servant) is a twenty-part work that provides some insight into Rāmdās' apotheosis as a formative figure in the development of Indian physical culture. Mujumdar's quotation of Rāmdās, which is represented as a paraphrasing of the *Dāsbodh*, emphasises the notion of physical strength leading to health, worldly success, and the enjoyment of pleasures (1950: 19). However, it is not clear which verses Mujumdar is translating or paraphrasing, and the manner in which they are framed seem at odds with the emphasis in the text on renunciation. The *Dāsbodh* presents a syncretic Vedānta- and *bhakti*-informed form of renunciation, and includes various references to the accomplishments of yogis, including both *rāja*- and *haṭhayogī*s and many other types of spiritual aspirants and their practices.[26] Chapter 4.1, for example, catalogues a wide range of modes of practice to be understood and mastered, including *kīrtana*, *smaraṇa*, *karma*, *jñāna*, *yātrā*, *vrata*, *mantra*, *tapas*, *tapasyoga*, *haṭhayoga*, and *aghorayoga*, as well as various arts, sciences, and medicine (e.g. *Dāsbodh* 4.1). Concern for the body is expressed at numerous points in the text,

[25] Laine further indicates how there are significant debates over when the two would have met, whether Rāmdās' principal patron was Śivājī or his half-brother, or even whether stories of Śivājī's devotion were a plot to associate Śivājī with *brāhmaṇa* tradition over the non-*brāhmaṇa* tradition of Tukārām (2013: 52–54).

[26] See, for example, *Dāsbodh* 3.9.28, 4.1.13, 5.1.11, 5.4.24, and 5.10.64 (Rāmadāsa 1993; Rāmadāsa 1997).

exemplified in a (perhaps Buddhist-influenced) passage on the suitability of a human life for spiritual development and the need to seize the moment given the body's frailty and the inevitability of death (e.g. *Dāsbodh* 1.10). As such, it is difficult to reconcile Mujumdar's emphasis on Rāmdās' role in the development of Indian physical culture with the emphasis on contemplation and renunciation at the heart of the teaching of the *Dāsbodh*.

A link to the Hindu culture of the *sūryanamaskār* is nonetheless evident in the text. Section 6 of Chapter 4 of the *Dāsbodh* focuses on the practice of *namaskār* within the context of the nine modes of devotion (*navavidhabhakti*), providing a window to the history of the practice of *namaskār*. The components of *navavidhabhakti* are listed by Rāmdās, via a Sanskrit *śloka* from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 7.5.23, as hearing (*śravaṇa*), singing (*kīrtana*), recollection [of Viṣṇu] (*smaraṇa*), foot-washing (*pādasevana*), worship (*arcana*), reverence (*vandana*), service (*dāsya*), fellowship (*sakhya*), and self-dedication (*ātmanivedana*).[27] The practice of *namaskār*, which is discussed under the category of *vandana*, is represented as a practice to be performed in honour of deities, Sants, *sādhus*, and noble persons (*sajjan*). The first admonition is to perform *namaskār* to Sūrya, indicating the preeminence of that deity with respect to this form of worship, followed by Devas and by the *sadguru*. This, in turn is followed by an emphasis on the necessity of such *namaskār* being eight-limbed (*sāṣṭāṅga*), whether for an image (*pratimā*), deity (*deva*), or a teacher (*guru*) (*Dāsbodh* 4.6.1–4).[28] Deities to be offered *namaskār* in addition to Sūrya include Paśupati, Viṣṇu, Māruti, Gaṇeśa, and various Avatārs; the various gurus include the *bhaktas*, *vītarāgīs*, and *yogīs* (*Dāsbodh* 4.6.5–11). Performing *namaskār* is said to bring humility, friendship, satisfaction, remove doubt, pardon injustice, and drive away faults (Rāmdās 1991: 66–67; 2010: 86–87). It is also said to generate blessing, provide pleasure, please the guru, and destroy blemishes, and the sinner becomes pious, injustices are forgiven, and the cycle of birth and death (*janmamaraṇ*) is kept away (ibid.). The *namaskār* is said to be without economic cost, requiring no external supports, and providing an easy path to the supreme. The practice of *namaskār*, as such, is said to be the most excellent (*śreṣṭh)* mode of practice (*Dāsbodh* 4.6.25). The superlative language of *namaskār* in the *Dāsbodh* thus anticipates later descriptions of

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[27] On the nine modes of devotion (*bhakti*), see Mahīpati 1933: 440.

[28] More broadly, the *sāṣṭāṅganamaskāra*, also referred to as the *daṇḍavat-praṇāma*, *sāṣṭāṅgapraṇāma*, and *aṣṭāṅgapātama*, can be seen as part of a culture of respect and reverence that is demonstrated in a variety of modes of salutation to deities and gurus, which include variants such as a five-limbed (*pañcāṅga*) form mentioned above. They represent a subordination of the performer to the object of the salutation, a recognition of at least the equality, if not the superiority, of the other in the hierarchy of beings that extends through human society into that of the gods. In this respect, even performing *namaskār* or *añjali-*

the *sūryanamaskār* found in the context of Indian physical culture. In addition to the symbolic import of placing Sūrya at the top of the hierarchical exposition of those worthy of *namaskār*, the notion of salutations as being a purificatory practice links it to both the Vedic-Puranic modes of sun-worship and to later developments in physical culture, where it is associated with health and the purification of the body.[29] Rāmdās' notion that the *namaskār* is an "easy path" and a complete practice that does not require external accoutrements but simply the willingness of the aspirant is echoed in the framing of the *sūryanamaskār* by 20th-century physical culturists such as Bhavanrao Pant who presented the *sūryanamaskār* as a complete system of mind-body fitness.

Majumdar's assertion that the *sūryanamaskār* had faded as a practice prior to its revival by Pant and others in the 20th century also calls for closer inspection. O'Hanlon notes a reference to the practice of *namaskār*, which she extrapolates as referring to *sūryanamaskār*, in the *Peshwa Daftar* from 1759, in which a soldier and avid gymnast describes how a wound in his back is preventing him from performing his regimen of *daṇḍ* and *namaskār* (or, perhaps, simply *daṇḍnamaskār*) (2007: 512).[30] She also notes how a painting from the *Gentil Album*, commissioned in the 1770s, appears to portray a figure

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mudrā while speaking the greeting *namaste* taps into the notion of the relationship between the human and divine, one that is represented in modern yoga discourse as the notion that *namaste* means "the divine in me bows to the divine in you," though literally meaning simply something akin to "I salute you." According to Abbot and Godbole, within the context of Maharashtrian *bhakti* traditions, the eight limbs (*aṣṭāṅg*) of the body include the head (*śira*), the chest (*vakṣa*), the heart (*hṛdaya*), the arms (*bāhu*), the thighs (*ūrū*), the shanks (*jaṅghā*), the elbows (*ḍhopar*), and the toes (*pādāṅguli*), a set that is distinct from what Pant, for example, in his *Surya Namaskars: Sun Adoration for Health and Longevity*, identifies as the parts of the body utilised in "Sashtanga Namaskars" (Mahīpati 1993: 440). Pant's list includes the forehead, chest, legs and feet, arms and hands, knees, sight, vocal organs, and mind and will, comparable to a list found in *Skandapurāṇa* 2.9.29.28 (1929: 11). On the *namaskāra* as a general form of greeting, the modes of response to greetings, and the various counterparts to *namaskāra* of *praṇām* and *abhivādana*, see Shukla 1994: 39, 55, 231 and Fuller 1971: 3–4. A larger question to be asked would be to what degree the *sūryanamaskār* in the modern context is a salutation without a clear referent, i.e. removed from the conception of devotion to Sūrya (either the deity or the physical sun), or in what ways might other objects be implicitly suggested—i.e. such as Alter's notion of the "Salute to Village Democracy" or, perhaps, a salutation to the Indian state, Indian nation, or perhaps even to nationalism itself (2011). It may be noted that in the context of modern transnational forms of yoga, it is quite common for students after exchanging salutations to the teacher at the end of the class, to bow more deeply in a sort of approximated full-body prostration to the teacher.

[29] The practice of modern postural yoga (including *sūryanamaskār*), more broadly speaking, is in many cases arguably closer in some respects to the practice of *tapas* than it is to a formal, systematic yoga discipline. See Sarbacker 2008: 174–175.

[30] It should be noted that the reference might alternately be read as "Staff Salutations" (*daṇḍnamaskār*), and there is not mention of *sūrya* in the passage. See "Selections from the Peshwa Daftar" 1930: 11. See also the discussion of Singleton on *sūryanamaskār* and *daṇḍ* (2010: 205–206).

performing *namaskār* among other gymnastic and athletic feats, including an *ūrdhvapadmāsana*-like posture (ibid.: 496–497). If this is, in fact, a representation of *sūryanamaskāra*, it illustrates its integration in *vyāyām* form into military and athletic culture in the late 18th century; at minimum it illustrates the adoption of *namaskār* practice into military physical culture. Testimony to the vitality of the specific practice of *sūryanamaskār* from the 18th to early 20th centuries in Maharashtra can be found in the writings of Swami Kuvalayananda (J. G. Gune). As Goldberg has indicated, Kuvalayananda, in an essay entitled "The Rationale of Yogic Poses" (1926), states that the practice of "Namaskāras" had been in vogue in Maharashtra for the past several centuries, being associated with the upper class of society, presumably the *brāhmaṇa-varṇa*, and with sun-worship (2016: 187).[31] He notes that 20th century advocates of the *sūryanamaskār* claim that it is "an entire system of physical culture," and that in the 18th century "it was not unusual to find youths performing as many as twelve hundred prostrations every morning," or even two thousand during competitions in Nasik, paralleling Mujumdar's superlative descriptions of its practice (Gune 1926: 212; Goldberg 2016: 187). Bhavanrao Pant, who might be referred to as the "Father of the Modern Sun Salutation," claims in his book *Surya Namaskars* to have learned the *sūryanamaskār* in 1908 from Gangadharrao Balasaheb, the Rāja of Miraj, and made modifications to the physical postures to make it more vigorous and cyclical before publishing his groundbreaking work in 1928 (Pant 1929: 92, 98–100).[32] Pant also claimed that his father practised the *sūryanamaskār* for fifty-five years, which would date that particular example of the practice as far back as at least the 1870s (Goldberg 2016: 184–185).

Lastly, a curious feature that may link the earlier and later representations of the *sūryanamaskār* is the use of a mat to place the hands on while performing the movements. Such a prop may be evident in the *Gentil Album*, where the figure performing the *namaskār* uses what appears to be a piece of cloth or animal skin below his hands.[33] Intriguingly, in *Surya Namaskars*, Pant instructs the practitioner of *sūryanamaskār* to first "[s]pread a piece of woolen, silk or cotton cloth 22 inches square on the floor," which in the second edition of the book, *The Ten Point Way to Health: Surya*

[31] See also Gune 1926: 212; Bühnemann 2007: 33.

[32] See also Goldberg 2016: 184–185.

[33] Alter has suggested, alternately, that the imprint on the ground may be testimony to the vigorous nature of the practice, in which the wetting of the ground with sweat indicated the seriousness of austerity. On this practice, see Alter 1992: 88–89, 159. It is interesting to note that in his biography of the Hindutva formulator V. D. Savarkar, Keer states that Savarkar practised *namaskār* until it left a mark of his sweat on the ground (1966).

Namaskars, has been replaced with the admonition to "[s]pread cloth on floor" (Pant 1929: 12; Pant and Morgan 1938: 43). In *Surya Namaskars*, a photograph depicts Pant performing the *sūryanamaskār* on a rectangular rug with a small square of fabric under his hands (Pant 1929: 12–21). In the *Ten Point Way to Health*, we see a similar device used in photographs of Appasahib Pant and Rita Brynteson while they perform the *sūryanamaskār* movements (Pant and Morgan 1938: 12–13). In *The Ten Point Way to Health*, which was edited by Louise Morgan, there are additional instructions to utilise a piece of rubber as a mat, if practising on linoleum, due to the potential for slippage, perhaps inaugurating the use of the rubber "yoga mat."[34] It is interesting to consider the possibility of a genealogical link between the use of a skin or cloth mat by Peshwa soldiers in their military training and that of the "sticky mat" by modern practitioners of postural yoga systems. This would provide another vector for the culture of the yoga mat, in addition to that of the premodern use of animal skins by various ascetic traditions.[35]

The Practice of *Sūryanamaskār*: Prostration or Potentiation?

The status of the *sūryanamaskār* as a mode of religious prostration or a means to physical potency is a problematic dichotomy, as the two are clearly not mutually exclusive. Ritual behaviour reinforces a religious worldview, making it tangible and visible, building inner conviction and a sense of communal identity. Physical activity also promotes physical health and emotional well-being, and, in its more vigorous forms, supports martial skill, whether or not that is the primary goal. Nonetheless, the propagation of the *sūryanamaskār* in the modern era was driven, in part, by a desire to articulate a vision of its practice that could be placed within an Indian, if not global, physical culture framework. As Goldberg has noted, in "The Rationale of Yogic Poses," Kuvalayananda addresses this issue with some ambivalence, demonstrating a deliberate struggle to define the parameters of yoga and of physical culture in reference to its religious content (2016: 187). With respect to the popular practice of the *sūryanamaskār* in Maharashtra, Kuvalayananda states "[n]ow as these prostrations form a part of Sun worship, they can never be looked upon as a system of physical culture in the modern sense of the word, for the moderners require such a system to have no other end except that of body-building" (Gune 1926: 212). However, Kuvalayananda goes beyond this

[34] This might also be associated with the issue of the pooling of sweat under the practitioner (see n. 33). Pant and Morgan 1938: 36; Goldberg 2016: 288–89; Sarbacker 2021: 206 n. 50. Angela Farmer is often given credit for the creation of the yoga mat as well. See Ruiz 2007.

[35] See, for example, the discussion of the topic in Birch and Hargreaves 2016.

critique of the notion of *sūryanamaskār* as physical culture to candidly state: "[c]oming to Yogic exercises for physical development, we have to at once admit that they were never meant for body-building exclusively [...] [t]hey were always prescribed for so training the body as would easily lead to spiritual development. [...] [h]ence if any of the Indian systems of physical culture least approaches the modern idea of the science, it is the Yogic system" (ibid.). He then goes on to state that "[e]ven in India—the home of Yoga—supreme ignorance prevails, especially in the educated circles, about Yoga in general and Haṭha Yoga in particular [...] [t]he latter is looked upon as merely physical having no spiritual counterpart at all! [...] [t]his radically wrong conception of Haṭha Yoga is due to want of direct knowledge either of the Yogic literature or the Yogic tradition" (Gune 1926: 212–213). Kuvalayananda goes on to discuss why, in the face of these assertions, Kaivalyadhama is trying to develop a yogic system of physical culture (ibid.: 215ff).[36] But Kuvalayananda's critique of the *sūryanamaskār* system goes much further, as he states "[t]he advocates of Namaskāras have, indeed, imported much from outside their system; but as they have tried to accomplish everything within the narrow compass of one exercise and as they want to ever tack that exercise on to Sun worship, there is little chance of their system ever being accepted as a system of physical culture in the modern sense of the word" (ibid.: 214).[37] This statement is footnoted, quizzically, with the assertion that "[t]his statement has been made from a particular point of view and as such should not lead to misunderstanding [...] [t]he exercise of Namaskāra, as it is being developed by its advocates, has a definite purpose to serve and has certainly a large scope in India [...] [w]e wish them success from the bottom of our heart" (ibid.).[38] Kuvalayananda's arguments against the adoption of *sūryanamaskār* as physical culture are ultimately that: 1) the *sūryanamaskār* is a mode of Sun-worship, an inherently religious practice, and thus counter to the principles of modern physical culture; and 2) that yoga offers a more complete, and broad, set of parameters for the development of Indian physical culture, superior even to that of European systems (ibid.: 215, n. *). Despite acknowledging yoga's spiritual applications, Kuvalayananda views the *sūryanamaskār* as inherently religious and as narrow in physical scope, features that disqualify it as a candidate for a complete system of Indian physical culture and mark it as an inferior competitor to yoga for the role. Similarly, as Singleton notes, Sri Yogendra, another important authority of the day on yoga and

[36] Gune (1926: 215 ff.) argues that scientific discoveries about respiration and the nervous system provide a unique validation to the theory and practice of yoga that sets yoga apart from other systems. See also Goldberg 2016: 204–205.

[37] See also Goldberg 2016: 204–205.

[38] Goldberg 2016: 205.

physical culture—and, along with Kuvalayananda, a disciple of the guru Paramahamsa Madhavadasji—viewed the *sūryanamaskār* as a confused mixture of religious sun-worship and gymnastics.[39]

As Alter (1992: 75, 98–103, 106) and Goldberg (2016: 180–196) have discussed, when we look at the framing of the *sūryanamaskār* in Bhavanrao Pant's work, on the other hand, we see the tension between prostration and potentiation being negotiated over time, with the *sūryanamaskār* increasingly represented as an adaptable, non-sectarian form of physical culture, through a series of stages. Pant and Morgan's willingness to tinker with and adapt the practice is evident in his statement that within a year of his initial instruction by Balasaheb Gangadhar (in 1908), he had already altered the physical movements of the practice in order to intensify the stretches and to facilitate repetition (1938: 84–85). Echoing the description of the *sāṣṭāṅganamaskār* in the *Dāsbodh*, Pant argues for the superiority of the *sūryanamaskār* as physical culture on the basis of simplicity and completeness, especially the lack of need for other participants, props, and machines, unlike European physical culture systems (1929: 6–10). In a manner parallel to the range of spiritual benefits of the *namaskār* articulated in the *Dāsbodh*, Pant lists a wide range of physical benefits of performing *sūryanamaskāra* and associates it with the avoidance of sin, which he argues is a "product of weakness and disease" (1929: 155).[40]

With respect to the use of mantra in his presentation of *sūryanamaskār* and the potential criticism of such a practice by non-Hindus, he states in *Surya Namaskars* (1929: iii–iv):

> Some non-Hindus might object to reciting Vedic hymns in performing the Namaskar exercise on the ground of sectarianism or religious faith. Some few might even go farther and say that mere repeating the names of the Sun as Mitraya Namah, Ravaye Namah, etc., would smack of idolatry, though the sun-adoration in the sense we take it, is far from it. To such we would recommend that they omit the Vedic hymns and the names of the sun and confine themselves to saying *Om, hram, hrim, hrum, hraim, hraum and hrah* only and do the exercise, these syllables connoting

[39] He also indicated that it was an object of criticism in the 19th-century *Jyotsnā* commentary to the *Haṭhapradīpikā*. See Singleton 2010: 180; 2016: 182 n. 12; Birch 2018: 139 n. 98. It is interesting to note that the criticism of *sūryanamaskār* hinges upon overexertion being harmful for the body, a critique that echoes traditional critiques of yoga, and especially *haṭhayoga*.

[40] See also Alter 2000: 99. These parallel the popular literature of yoga in the 20th century, which represents yoga as panacea-like cure for a wide range of ailments, largely based on the authority/experience of a particular teacher.

> neither religious faith nor idolatry. Because the correct reciting of these monosyllables possesses an inherent health-giving merit, too valuable and too vital to omit, whatever the religious faith of the individual performer.

In *Ten Point Way to Health* (1938: 32–33), this theme is discussed with a bit more subtlety:

> In India the Vedic hymns and names of the sun are recited by Hindus when performing the Surya Namaskars. To non-Hindus who on religious grounds might object to reciting the hymns, or who might consider that to repeat the names of the sun such as Mitraya Namah, Ravaye Namah, would smack of idolatry, we recommend the use of the meaningless monosyllables, *om*, *hram*, *hrim*, *hrum*, *hraum*, and *hrah*, known as *mantras*. These sounds possess an inherent health-giving virtue, and are too valuable in their physical effects on the body to omit, whatever the religious faith of the performer.

And, in another passage, echoed in both editions, Pant states (1929: 91):

> Some atheists and non-Hindus shun the exercise of Namaskars on the ground that it is a religious rite. It is true that the Namaskar exercise has an appearance but an appearance only of a religious rite. But it is not essentially a religious rite. Bathing and deep breathing are regarded by the Hindus as religious duties, as they give cleanliness, health and energy. Is bathing or deep breathing then ever taken objection to by atheists and non-Hindus? We must, with discretion, make a clear distinction between things essentially religious and those, which being good in themselves, are for that reason included in daily religious duties, and are, therefore, only apparently religious. Rules of health have nothing to do with dogma or blind religious faith.[41]

Here, Pant makes the argument that the inclusion of the *namaskār* as a rite was due to its potency as a health-giving exercise, and that there is nothing *inherently* religious about the movements and the use of mantra, as such. He further states that the "[r]ules of health have nothing to do with dogma or with blind religious faith," extending the assertion that one can make a distinction, in the context of the *sūryanamaskār*, between

[41] Goldberg 2016: 196.

what is either "technically" or "essentially" religious, and those things that are "good in themselves" (1929: 90–91; Pant and Morgan 1938: 26).

However, the softening of religious language and religious references between the publication of *Surya Namaskars* and *The Ten Point Way to Health*, perhaps inspired by the editor, Louise Morgan, demonstrates the widening of the intended audience of the method through appealing to a universalising physical practice.[42] In *Surya Namaskars*, Pant refers to the practice as the "practice of austerity" (*tapaścaryā*), rather than "mere exercise," and the work is infused with references to Brahmanic culture and tradition, most notably Vedic mantras and Vedic hymns, drawing upon the *Ṛgveda*, *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda*, and *Śukla Yajurveda* (1929: 11, 35–47).[43] In a passage introducing his *sūryanamaskār* mantras, he quotes a verse from *Bhagavadgītā* 6.13, in which Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna in the proper performance of yoga, including the restraint of behaviour, body, senses, and mind (Pant 1929: 48).[44] In discussing *praṇava* or *oṃ*, he again quotes *Bhagavadgītā* 8.13, which refers to the process of obtaining of *brahman* through reciting the *praṇava* and abandoning the body (ibid.).[45] The principal mantras that Pant introduces are *praṇava* or *oṃ*, six *bīja* mantras of *hrām*, *hrīm*, *hrūm*, *hraim*, *hraum*, and *hraḥ*, and the twelve names of the sun, including Mitra, Ravi, Sūrya, Bhanu, Khaga, Puṣan, Hiraṇyagarbha, Āditya, Savitṛ, Arka, and Bhāskara, which constitute a formal *sūryanamaskār* mantra (ibid.: 35–47).[46] He offers *Ṛgveda* 1.50.11–13 as an alternate set of mantras, the text of which is part of a larger passage on Sūrya (1.50). Pant indicates the significance of that passage to the "followers of the Rig-Veda and Yajurveda," and includes a translation by Griffith (ibid.: 44). Following the introduction of the *Ṛgveda* verses, he provides two additional verses from the *Vājasaneyi* (*Śukla*) *Yajurveda* (10.24 and 40.17) and another from the *Ṛgveda* (1.115.1) (ibid.: 44–45). Pant further indicates that the goal of the "sun-adorer" is "ultimately to identify with the Soul or Jīvātman" (Ibid. 45; Goldberg 2016: 196). Yet, at this point, he is also willing to

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[42] On the important role Louise Morgan played in adapting *sūryanamaskār* for a European, and increasingly female, audience, see Goldberg 2016: 285–304.

[43] See also Deshpande 1992: 96. Alter argues that this emphasis on this Vedic context, especially the performance of mantras, may relate to ideas of the embodiment of *dharma* associated with Hindu kingship (2000: 107–112).

[44] I consider here Van Buitenen's edition of the *Bhagavadgītā* in the *Mahābhārata* 1981: 94–95.

[45] For the reference to the *Bhagavadgītā*, see Van Buitenen 1981: 102–103.

[46] The *sūryanamaskāramantra* is among a number of *stotra* utilised in popular contemporary Hindu practice, including the *Sūryāṣṭaka*, *Sūryaśataka*, *Sūryasahasranāma* (from the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa*), and the *Sūryāṣṭottara-śatanāma* (from the *Mahābhārata*).

substitute "similar combinations of sounds" for the *sūryanamaskār* mantras or even drop them entirely, to serve the propagation of the *sūryanamaskār* and its health benefits:

> Those who still object to saying the Bija mantras and Vedic hymns in doing Surya Namaskars, might substitute for Bija Mantras the vowel-sounds recommended by B. M. Lesser Lasario in chapter IX, or any other similar combinations of sound, or drop them without detracting much from the exercise. Omission of these mantra and hymns from the Namaskars will, we hope, smooth the non-Hindus' path to health, efficiency and longevity (Pant 1929: 91).[47]

Pant's work illustrates the multifaceted nature of the *sūryanamaskār* as an integral part of Indian physical culture at the turn of the 20th century, being connected to the deeper streams of Vedic ritual, most notably Saṃdhyā ritual practices, to Itihāsa-Purāṇa literature and sectarian devotion and worship in Maharashtra, and to universalist Neo-Vedantic themes drawn from the *Bhagavadgītā*, as well as to themes in European physical culture.[48]

Conclusion

The historical linkages between the modern practice of *sūryanamaskār* and its premodern precursors are slowly being uncovered as the religious, cultural, and political milieus of the late mediaeval era become more transparent. Additional textual and archaeological research will provide further insight into the development of the modern *sūryanamaskār* within the context of its historical cradle in Maharashtra, particularly within the mediaeval *bhakti* and Peshwa traditions that helped give rise to the modern global phenomenon. It is clear that the *sūryanamaskār*, even in its modern manifestations, exists within a larger *vaidika* and *paurāṇika*, if not also *tāntrika*, framework in India, particularly with respect to the performance of mantra and the association of the *sūryanamaskār* with *vrata* and *yātrā*. The connection between the *sūryanamaskār* and the performance of Vedic *namaskāra*, particularly Saṃdhyā ritual dedicated to Sūrya and Savitṛ, is deeply rooted in Indian Hindu culture and identity.

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[47] Goldberg 2016: 196.

[48] The complexity of the relationship of between religion and physical culture in Pant's work is evident in the teachings of a range of major modern gurus, including Swami Sivananda and T. Krishnamacharya and his student, K. Pattabhi Jois, who all link the religious and physical culture dimensions of yoga in unique and distinct ways (Sarbacker 2014: 95–114).

Similarly, the association of the sun with health, longevity, and the purification of sin is one that extends through the Vedic and Puranic traditions and perhaps even into the Tantric traditions. The practice of *sāṣṭāṅganamaskāra* is part of a larger Hindu priestly framework of ritual propriety, in which bowing down to Sūrya, gods, and gurus, particularly through the practice of *sāṣṭāṅganamaskāra*, is understood to be both proper and efficacious, and of which the *sūryanamaskāra* has held a unique and privileged position. Yet, it is also evident that the *namaskāra* was also being utilised in the mediaeval and early modern eras as a mode of physical fitness and as an accessory to martial arts, whether that be expressed through daily piety, integration into formal military training regimens, or in the form of displays at festivals and contests. As we have seen, the *sūryanamaskār* has been both prostration and potentiation, in some cases simultaneously, and its history within Indian and global physical culture has reflected an ongoing process of negotiation and reinterpretation of this fact. This has been particularly the case in the integration of *sūryanamaskār* into the traditions of modern postural yoga, which have sought to negotiate yoga's religious and sectarian roots and its application as an Indian and global physical culture. Like the *sūryanamaskār*, yoga has deep connections to Indian physical culture, including warrior-ascetic traditions, spanning from the Vedic *vrātya* traditions, through the apotheosis of the Pāṇḍava and other epic warriors, to the mediaeval traditions of warrior-ascetics and their various *akhāṛās* and *saṃpradāyas* and the modern Indian military.[49] Ultimately, the vigorous nature of the *sūryanamaskār* and its link to Sūrya—and, by extension, Agni—situate it strongly in the realm of *tapas*, harmonising with the vigorous and calisthenic traditions of modern postural yoga. The visible sun and its felt heat on the body serve as an excellent symbol for the physicalism of modern postural yoga practice, as the sun's physical presence, like that of the experienced human body, is a tangible and accessible gateway to health, success, and spiritual illumination for those who offer their effort and devotion.

Lastly, this essay would not be complete without mentioning the "elephant in the room" with respect to the mediaeval and modern practice of *namaskār* in Maharashtra and in India in general. That is the practice of the Islamic daily prayer (*ṣalāt*) in India, which is represented in Indic languages by the term *namāz* (Arabic *ṣalāt*). It is, first of all, interesting to note that the Persian-Urdu word *namāz* is cognate with the Sanskrit *namas*, pointing to a kind of semantic universalism in understanding the expression of

[49] Discussed in Sarbacker 2021: 57, 152. On the liminal figure of the *vrātya* as a prototype for later *sannyāsin* traditions, see Parpola 2015: 134–142.

piety through an act of prostration.[50] With respect to the culture of *sāṣṭāṅganamaskāra* and its elevation within mediaeval Puranic and *bhakti* traditions, might we see some influence of Islamic culture and piety on Hindu ritual life? Might it perhaps play into the enthusiasm that some Hindu nationalists have for nation- and state-based public *sūryanamaskār* programs, given its direct challenge to *namāz* (Goyal 2000: 73)? On the other hand, some Muslim practitioners have viewed the parallels between the actions of the *sūryanamaskār* and the *namāz* as a point of intersection between Islam and Hindu traditions to be celebrated and appreciated, rather than litigated or argued over (Jain 2015: 125–126). We might even point to the parallel between the prayer rug and the *sūryanamaskār*-yoga mat, and wonder if there is a functional, if not genealogical, relationship between the two as well. Both the *namāz* and the *sūryanamaskār* illustrate the intersection between prostration and potentiation, offering a temporary reprieve from daily responsibilities, orientation towards objects of value and meaning, connection with a community, and an opportunity to emotionally de-stress and physically mobilise the body. They point towards common human intentions and aspirations, even if their ultimate referents are theologically distinct, and whether prostration or potentiation is ultimately the intent and focus of their practice.

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