

Magdalena Kraler

# Yoga Breath

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Magdalena Kraler

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Prāṇa and Prāṇāyāma in Early Modern Yoga

With 19 figures

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*To everyone who inspires me  
And to the god of flutes*



*Lächeln, Atem und Schritt  
sind mehr als des Lichtes, des Windes, der Sterne Bahn.  
Die Welt fängt im Menschen an.*  
Franz Werfel (c. 1913)

*To those who see the All, there is no difference except formal when Life is materialised, or when Matter is vitalised, or when Spirit is materialised, or again when everything is spiritualised.*  
Pramathanatha Mukhyopadhyaya (1922)

*Obviously, breath has everything to do with nothing.*  
Maria Engberg (2019)



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## 6 The *Prāṇāyāma* Grid

Part I of this study has provided a base for conceptualising *prāṇa* and yogic breath cultivation by discussing the contributions of various contexts. This comprised a discussion of the premodern roots of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma*; the notable contributions of the Hindu reformers; and those by representatives of occultism and physical culture. Cosmological and anthropological speculations of Stebbins, Prasad, and Vivekananda were particularly seminal in providing an epistemic framework for yogic breath cultivation. Part II will first be concerned with contextualising the practice of *prāṇāyāma* in given socio-cultural environments (chapter 6); then with the corporeal aspect of the practices and the question as to how they can be described and classified (chapter 7). As a core aspect of this study, I will analyse how *prāṇa* and yogic breath cultivation were enacted in the careers and teachings of modern yoga pioneers (chapter 8). By highlighting two case studies, Part II ends with the dissemination of yogic breath cultivation and related concepts within occultism and the arts in the twentieth century (chapter 9).

In this chapter, the socio-cultural contexts of religion and physical culture, and also the appeal to tradition and innovation of modern yoga pioneers provide crucial reference points. To put these cultural factors and trends in perspective, I conceptualise them as arranged in a coordinate system, formed by a horizontal axis between religion and physical culture, and a vertical axis between tradition and innovation. The result is an analytical tool that I term the “*prāṇāyāma* grid”, the details of which will be further expounded below. This chapter also discusses the impact of nationalism, scientism, and media culture/translation which accelerated the dissemination of yogic breath cultivation. I therefore term these aspects “catalysts”. All these categories are derived from previous scholarship (Alter 2004; Hammer 2004; Green 2008; Baier 2009; Newcombe 2009; Singleton 2010; Goldberg 2016), but they are tailored here to the topic of yogic breath cultivation. They serve as a kind of compass that suggests how to navigate through the field. Viewed through the grid, these socio-cultural environments constitute the prior context for yogic breath cultivation, but these environments

are also *assimilated* into the practices when it comes to determine the motives that lie behind promised outcomes and goals of practices. After all, influential statements in the discourse also affect the bodily practices. In utilising these categories and thereby extending the theoretical discussion of chapter 2, this chapter aims to add to a multifaceted discussion of *prāṇa* and yogic breath cultivation. The grid further helps to explain how innovative approaches were integrated into yogic breath cultivation, i.e., modern yoga's entanglement with other disciplines such as hygienic culture and occultism.

## 6.1 Between Religion, Hygiene, Tradition, and Innovation

The grid suggested here spans between the poles of religion and hygienic culture on the one hand and between tradition and innovation on the other hand. These poles are represented by specific cultural factors and trends and the resulting discursive strategies to which yoga pioneers appealed. Religion and hygienic culture occupy the horizontal axis – that is, a synchronic spectrum – since these poles were often simultaneously enacted by yoga pioneers in the main phase of early modern yoga (figure 5). *Prāṇāyāma* as religious practice is, for example, evidenced in the daily *sandhyā* rite which was, among others, promoted by the Hindu reformer Dayananda Sarasvati (chapter 4.1.2). Often understood as a self-enhancement technique that fosters health and healing as well as mental poise, yogic breath cultivation is, however, also conceived as part of hygienic culture. To denote the spectrum of benefits of yogic breath cultivation, modern yoga pioneers have often explained *prāṇāyāma* in psycho-physical terms. The psycho-physical effect of the practice at times even appears to include religious aspects, when it is, for example, used to describe *prāṇāyāma* as understood by Patañjali (chapter 4.4.3; chapter 8.3). Thus, the axis constituted by religion and hygienic culture represents in fact a continuum, and the simultaneous appeal of modern yoga pioneers to these poles will be further expounded below.

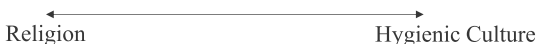


Figure 5: *Prāṇāyāma* Grid, Horizontal Axis (Author's Illustration).

It should however be mentioned here that this continuum is also reflected in the multiple ways that individual practitioners approach their practice. Depending on the religious and/or cultural setting the students of *prāṇāyāma* are placed, they will consider breath cultivation as part of religion, hygienic culture, or both. *Prāṇāyāma* may or may not be practised together with *āsana*, relaxation techniques like *śavāsana*, or other movement practices. It may or may not be understood as a practice that leads to higher states of meditation or to soteriological

goals. In any case, from this perspective, breath practice is a personal enterprise, often located in an environment of studying from a teacher, in a group, or part of a daily exercise and/or religious regimen. However, this personal practice is tied into larger socio-cultural environments, as this chapter aims to discuss.

The tradition-innovation axis, then, constitutes a more vertical spectrum, involving a diachronic aspect (figure 6). This spectrum reflects the yoga pioneers' understanding of preserving "tradition" by means of alluding to the historical past of South Asian traditions. Yoga traditions are an actual part of the religious history of South Asia, but they are simultaneously presented in often highly imaginative ways. The tendency within modern yoga to accentuate the continuation of tradition is, in many cases, disjunct with the etic historiography of premodern and (early developments of) modern yoga, thus reaching into the realm of the mythical and the imaginative. As Olav Hammer has noted, the emic appeal to tradition is often a powerful argumentative pattern that enforces the reliability of a given claim or practice, connoting stability and authenticity (Hammer 2004: 23–24, 34). However, in this study I also show how certain "traditional" frameworks of the practices including their hygienic and soteriological goals as well as a particular set of practices (e.g., alternate-nostril breathing and some of the eight *kumbhakas* like *śītalī* and *bhastrikā*) are maintained.



Figure 6: *Prāṇāyāma* Grid, Vertical Axis (Author's Illustration).

In contrast to invoking the past, innovative trends often aim to be up-to-date through embracing the latest methods of biomedicine and generally have an inkling for what is *en vogue*. Therefore, in many cases, innovative trends reflect the yoga pioneers' understanding of what their students were looking for in changing times. The tension between tradition and innovation concerned all yoga pioneers, and it can be safely said that all of them were innovative in some ways, and none completely ignored what yoga meant as part of the Indian traditions. For example, the Bombay-based gurus had a traditionalistic under-



standing of *prāṇāyāma*, but tried to explain it in biomedical and scientific terms. What is more, the appeal to tradition and innovation is frequently combined in the work of one and the same author (e.g., invoking Patañjali as an authority while applying scientific empirical methods, as in the case of Kuvalayananda). This results in some of the fractions in the understanding and description of yogic breath cultivation, which could be nevertheless presented as continuity or authenticity within a tradition. However, the appeal to innovation via scientific progress also follows some imaginative trajectories; for example, when Kuvalayananda opted for investigating the workings of *prāṇa*, but in trying to do so, had to rely on the measurability of oxygen and carbon dioxide, because *prāṇa* itself proved to be immaterial and immeasurable (Alter 2004: 91). Although Kuvalayananda was, in this case, in the paradoxical position of “proving nothing” (*ibid.*: 101), his experiments were nevertheless highly influential for the yoga community and informed several subsequent yoga pioneers.

The spectrum between tradition and innovation moreover covers the notion of guru-disciple relationship versus the anonymisation of teachings through easily available print media (Green 2008: 287) as well as the integration of physical culture and hygienic practices (Alter 2004; Singleton 2010; Goldberg 2016). But hygienic culture itself had an appeal to religion, and it was partly merged with certain strands of nineteenth-century occultism (Baier 2009: 451–497; Ruyter 1999: 89–101; Singleton 2010: 143–162). The occult understanding of breath as a vitalistic principle, for example, is found in certain religious/occult practices within Euro-American Delsartism and gymnastics. As mentioned above, the poles are therefore understood to represent a spectrum that could easily be traversed by modern yoga pioneers and practitioners. In other words, the grid allows for various combinations within two distinct sets of features, and helps to analyse these combinations.

In this chapter, I argue that through the intersection of the two axes analysed above four quadrants are formed that, for the current discussion, sufficiently can describe yogic breath cultivation (figure 7). By combining “religion” and “tradition”, quadrant A encompasses *prāṇāyāma* as described in Pātañjalayoga, Haṭhayoga and in Advaita-related movements (the latter implies the *Yogavā-siṣṭha*). Quadrant A also includes *prāṇāyāma* as part of the *sandhyā* rite as promoted by Dayananda Sarasvati and others (chapter 4.1.2). As for quadrant B, it can be described as comprising “hygienic culture” in South Asian traditions. As far as *prāṇāyāma* in traditional hygienic contexts is concerned, these practices are mainly found within Haṭhayoga and within ritual settings that incorporate *prāṇāyāma* next to certain cleansing actions and diet regulations. The Haṭhayogic practices that are directly breath-related include, for example, alternate-nostril breathing for purifying the *nāḍīs*, *kapālabhāti* as one of the six cleansing actions (*ṣaṭkarma*), and some of the eight *kumbhakas* that are prescribed to cure

certain ailments. Such hygienic concerns in Haṭhayoga also encompass the regulation of semen, prescriptions of right diet, clothing, and the ideal place of practice, and they are often viewed as preliminaries for achieving higher states of yoga. All the practices of these religious and hygienic frameworks that lie in quadrant A and B are incorporated in texts that describe yogic breath cultivation (chapter 8).

Moving to the upper half of the grid, in quadrant C, we find concepts and practices of Euro-American hygienic culture that have informed yogic breath cultivation. These are, for example, practices like deep breathing (often to involve the idea of a threefold division of breath-space), rhythmic breathing, and breath cultivation in standing positions or while walking (e.g., chapter 8.2; chapter 8.3.2). These forms of breath cultivation are often combined with movements of limbs and/or transitioning between poses. The innovation factor here also lies in integrating Euro-American biomedicine, which was utilised by both physical culturists as well as yoga pioneers to improve training systems (e.g., chapter 8.3). Finally, quadrant D represents the influence of nineteenth-century occultism on yoga. Here we find practices like rhythmic breathing and the idea of drawing up and storing reproductive energy in the solar plexus as well as the concept of *prāṇa*-as-mesmeric-agent (chapter 8.1.1; chapter 8.2.2). These are contexts that most vigorously introduced the idea of reconciling science and religion, and these practices and ideas have been crucially shaped by the influence that occult organisations like the Theosophical Society and the H. B. o. L. had (chapter 4.2.2.; chapter 4.3; chapter 5.3; chapter 6.3).

A brief note on the role of “the arts” is due here. In this grid, I refrain from giving the arts – i.e., dance, singing, and acting as evolved in American Delsartism and related contexts – a specific place. It is one of the shortcomings of the grid, as they definitely impacted modern yogic breath cultivation (see also chapter 5.2; chapter 8.2; Appendix): Dancing, singing, and acting all imply theory and practice of breathing, and these arts borrowed from nineteenth-century occultism as well as hygienic culture as much as they influenced it.<sup>290</sup> In fact, their role needs to be examined separately, as partly done in Foxen (2020), Kraler (2025), and in Marissa Clarke’s forthcoming work on the phenomenology of breath and sound in contemporary yoga practice.

Returning to this analysis, if we were to locate the work of yoga pioneers within the grid, it is reasonable to investigate which concepts and practices they adopted in their texts and talks. In other words, what should be assessed is not a certain degree of a generalised appeal to, for example, tradition or innovation in their work, but to show where various statements in their work can be located. For example, Vivekananda’s *Rāja Yoga* mostly engages quadrants A and D, because

290 Hence, in the grid they could be placed in a middle position, connecting quadrant C and D.

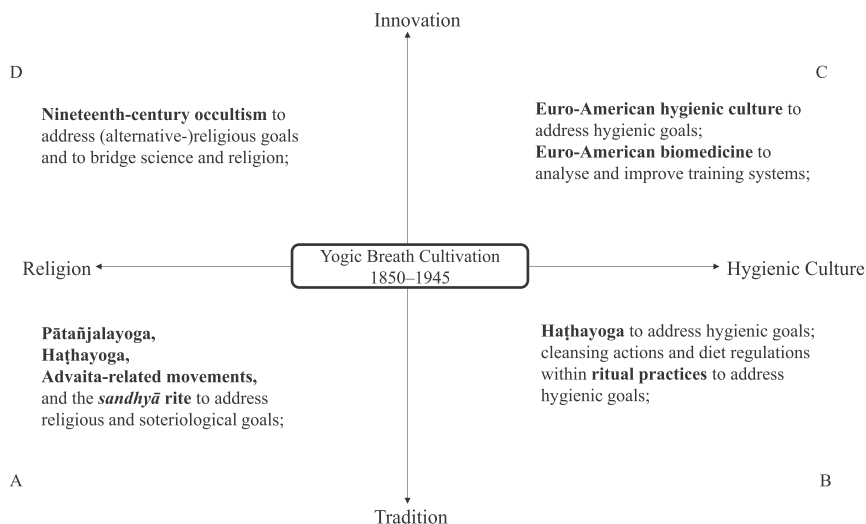


Figure 7: *Prāṇāyāma* Grid: Four Quadrants to Define Yogic Breath Cultivation (Author's Illustration).

he interprets *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* against the backdrop of Pātañjalayoga and Advaita-related movements (A), but also weaves occult thought into it (D); Vivekananda also slightly touches on quadrant C, since he appears to be aware of some Delsartism-styled practices (chapter 5.4.4; chapter 8.1.1). The most salient areas that are addressed by Kavalayananda are Pātañjalayoga and Haṭhayoga as “spiritual culture” (A), Haṭhayoga and some aspects of Euro-American hygienic culture as “physical culture” (B, C), and his investigation of *prāṇāyāma* in the labs (C). Yogendra follows similar trajectories (for both, see chapter 8.3). Sivananda utilises all four quadrants to explain *prāṇāyāma*. He draws on translations of several premodern texts (A, B), Euro-American hygienic literature (C), occult texts (D), and theosophical translations (A, D). While I will not plot the work of every yoga pioneer here, this scheme is worth keeping in mind when we discuss the contributions of various yoga pioneers in chapter 8.

Related to the idea of the grid, I will also introduce a category of “catalysts” that have tended to accelerate certain developments. These are nationalism, the impact of biomedicine and science discourses, and media culture/translation (Alter 2004; Green 2008; Partridge 2020). In many cases, these catalysts amplify the factor of innovation, but sometimes also reinforce the appeal to tradition. Translations, for example, accelerated the distribution of arcane knowledge and functioned as a bridge between premodern and modern practices. Several yoga pioneers relied on translations of Sanskrit texts, thereby giving their teachings a traditional feel. In addition, it should be noted that some related notions, particularly “science”, are subject to a rather broad interpretive framework, and that

modern yoga discourses and adjacent ones tend to stretch these notions.<sup>291</sup> Moreover, these catalysts are not isolated categories, but are mutually dependent. For example, yoga-as-science emerged as part of a discursive battle between British colonialists and South Asian nationalists, in which yoga was portrayed as the older and better version of science than Western approaches. The factor of translation also reinforced and reflected the appeal to science: as Alter has noted, a variety of Sanskrit terms like *vidyā*, *vijñāna*, and, I would add, also *śāstra*,<sup>292</sup> have been translated as “science” (*ibid.*: 42–43). These examples are notable, considering the production of knowledge-power relations in these discourses. As Foucault has pointed out, one of the main “external” forces to direct and control a discourse is the appeal to science (chapter 2.4.1), which is also apparent here.

To recapitulate, yoga pioneers taught and wrote about yogic breath cultivation in light of their appeal to religion, hygienic culture, tradition, innovation, nationalism, and science. These categories are associated with powerful discursive strategies that were utilised by modern yoga pioneers, as will be further outlined below. Additionally, they both drew on and disseminated their teachings via a contemporaneously expanding media culture, amplifying the impact of their teachings on a transnational level. This was possible only through their reliance on the English language as their main medium of communication. The remainder of this chapter will delve into the discursive relations between the cultural factors and trends presented within the grid and the catalysts that have been instrumental in the reinvention of yogic breath cultivation.

## 6.2 Catalyst I: Nationalism

In discussing the cultural and religious capital of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* it is useful to employ a wide lens to capture the broader connotations of breath practice. We have already briefly touched on the implications of turn-of-the-century physical culture as a movement often interlaced with the idea of nationhood and nationalism in chapter 4.4. Though a global movement, physical culture was extensively intertwined with the building of national pride, milita-

291 Due to the semantic flexibility of the term science in these discourses, it could be relevant to always use quotation marks for the term; instead, the reader is asked to keep in mind that the notion of science is a stretchy term. Alternatively, I also speak of “science discourse” that includes scholarly, popular, and occult readings of science.

292 See, for example, the translation of *śāstra* as “science” in the introduction by Tukaram Tatya to the theosophical translation of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* (Tatya 1972 [1893a]: viii). The earliest reference to “yoga *vidyā*” as science is probably found in the translation of the autobiography of Dayananda Sarasvati in the October 1879 issue (which is the very first one) of *The Theosophist*.

ristic discipline, and eugenics. One could argue that from 1880 onwards, at the latest, “muscle building” was “nation building”. In terms of discourses on breath, on the physical plane this was linked to an expansion of the chest, representing ideal posture in military settings (Goldberg 2016: 111). Considering breath as a vitalistic or “energetic” phenomenon, notions of breath cultivation were moreover built, as in Vivekananda’s case, upon ideas of omnipotent power and multilateral enhancement of “gross” and “subtle” force that comprised both the physical and the mental.

As has been shown, the Arya and the Brahmo Samaj were at the forefront of the development of Hinduism as a superior and “scientific” religion (chapter 4.1). Such superiority is, of course, only achieved in comparison with other religions or cultures, or in this case, even nations. Along these lines, nationalism decidedly informed the reinterpretation of Hinduism. For example, the renaming of the “national fair”, which became the first “Hindu Melā” in 1867, led to an interchangeability of attributes like “Hindu” and “national” (Heehs 1997: 118; cf. Strube 2022: 156). Remembering Hinduism as a Vedic uniform religion, as in Dayananda’s *Satyarth Prakash*, with its superior incantations, and as in several examples found in the Brahmo Samaj, was one of the most powerful weapons against the perceived grinding force of British colonialism.

In this milieu, the Bengali writer Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838–1894) also fabricated a strong tie between “religion” (*dharma*) and Hindu nationalism. He was one of the most prominent figures of Bengali religious nationalism to also influence the later Vivekananda (Hees 1997: 118). In his *Dharmatattva* (“Principles of Religion”, 1888), Chatterjee links the spiritual to the national and affirms patriotism to be “the highest *dharma* other than absolute devotion (*bhakti*) to God” (*ibid.*). Nationalism implied the call for freedom from the British, which necessitated home rule (*svarāj*). Among the participants of religious-nationalist discourses, nationalism acquired even “supermundane significance” (*ibid.*: 121), due to the spiritual superiority of India and the inherent spiritual nature of its people. What may lie at the root here was the common assumption that the Indian or “Aryan race” was inherently spiritual in nature (*ibid.*: 119).<sup>293</sup> In any

293 As part of this complex political and socio-cultural situation, nationalism surfaced adjacent discourses on race and patriotism, resulting in a (at best) questionable construct of Arya-hood (*ārya*, in Sanskrit literally meaning “noble”, deriving the meaning of “the noble ones” as the “Indian people”). Furthermore, it could be directly linked to the remembrance of the Vedic teachings mediated by the same Aryans, and their alleged world rule in a former Golden Age (Sharma 2015: 31–32). Arya-hood was propagated by nationalists in their quest for freedom and home rule, by Brahmins in their socio-religious pride, and by theosophists in their call for a universal brotherhood in the period under study. For a detailed discussion of the history of Indian Arya-hood, see Bryant (2001: 267–298).

case, India's prescribed mission was to teach the world, and it could teach the world best when it was free (*ibid.*: 121).

In the context of nationalism, even the notions of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* became forces powering upheavals in Indian politics. One of the factors supporting the notion of Hindu superiority was a European orientalist perception of the East in general and India in particular. India was the bright star of a centuries-long fascination with “the spiritual East” (exemplified in the phrase “*ex oriente lux*”), which was additionally magnified by a romantic orientalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (King 1999: 124–135; Partridge 2020). Notions of *prāṇa*- and *prāṇāyāma*-induced power were thus intimately related with concepts of a “reversed orientalism” of the oriental other (Baumann 2004). In the case of modern yoga discourses, the pioneers’ reversed orientalism utilised the fascination with and perception of a “spiritually highly developed East” (orientalism), thereby creating a now “spiritually superior India” (reversed orientalism).

As has been noted, the “nation” that was India in colonial times was a complex conglomerate of various ethnical and religious influences. The most relevant of these included the Indian Hindu and the Indian Muslim, as well as the British Hindus and Muslims. The following analysis, which considers negotiations within this “polemic triangle” (Green 2008: 295) is indebted to Nile Green’s remarkable study *Breathing in India, c. 1890*. His work has set the foundations for a discussion of the “indigenisation of physical culture” (*ibid.*: 285) in opposition to imperial hegemony. In one of the few scholarly works mapping breathing and meditation techniques, Green highlights aspects of Hindu reform as “new ways of being” (*ibid.*), as opposed to a mere intellectual doctrinal dispute along the lines of reformulating Hinduism. In doing so, he points at demarcations and polemic relations between the above mentioned ethnic and religious parties and their respective receptions of yogic practices.

By analysing vernacular meditation manuals, Green has shown that so-called Islamic and Hindu practices were rather intermingled before the rise of such identity demarcations.<sup>294</sup> As a result of this emerging “Hindu” agenda, yogic practices were increasingly connoted with Sanskrit language, and the practice of the yogi and the fakir were often understood to be substantially distinct. By creating an exclusive Hindu yogic tradition, Vivekananda and subsequent interpreters eliminate the Islamic contributions, thereby falling short of reference and recognition. Additionally, the living tradition of cross-culturally grown

294 In considering vernacular discourse, Green also examines Urdu and Hindi equivalents of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* (an endeavour which is beyond the scope of this study). These are *dam*, *habs-e-dam*, meaning “breathing” and “breath control” in Urdu; and *sans*, or *shwans*, meaning “breathing” or “breath” in Hindi (Green 2008: 303–304). For a further discussion of the cross-pollination between yogic and Islamic ideas, see also Ernst (2005; 2012).

practices of meditation and breath control and their mutual ecumenical contribution to India's premodern pluralistic society is marginalised in favour of a neo-classical and Sanskrit tradition.

Vivekananda is indeed a case in point for analysing yogic breath cultivation in its political implications. His almost ubiquitous correlation of *prāṇa* and power in *Rāja Yoga* has been subsequently played out in several vernacular yoga and Sufi meditation manuals (Green 2008: 303–306). This formed an alliance of *prāṇa*-generated Hindu national self-confidence. It is significant that modern yoga pioneers like Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Swami Kuvalayananda influenced each other, by direct or text-based acquaintance, in perceiving nationalism as their shared political habitat.<sup>295</sup> In their nationalist agenda, yoga represents the “indigenous” homegrown potential for India to attain to its original and legendary heights, and, as could be argued with Vivekananda, *prāṇa* is its accelerating “turbo” agent. Although other Indian pioneers discussed here, such as Yogananda and Yogendra, were not directly engaged in political spheres, they also acquired the inflationary, often *prāṇa*-induced, notion of an Indian-yogic superpower-to-attain-superiority, as already promoted by the early Hindu reformers. All these pioneers shaped modern yoga transnationally either by travelling outside South Asia to spread the yoga gospel (as encouraged already by Swami Dayananda) or by propelling transnational anglophone discourse and exchange through journals and letters.

As noted by Peter van de Veer, yoga increasingly became a “national symbol of true Indianness” (van de Veer 2007: 321). Indeed, in most cases, nationalism was the additional force that pushed the yogis onto the transnational stage to proclaim the superiority of the new national hero – the yogi who had mastered *prāṇa*. An early example of this Hindu hero is, again, Dayananda, who was said to have had a specific radiance gained from his celibacy and penance (Dobe 2011: 97). Given that Vivekananda featured *prāṇāyāma* in the context of *Rājayoga* as a unique means of attaining power, modern yoga's kick-off was theorising *prāṇa* as an omnipotent power, and *prāṇāyāma* practice as part of the royal path to gain and utilise it. Thus, “*prāṇa*-building” was “nation-building”. The mastering of *prāṇa* was on some discursive levels linked to ideas of nationhood, and was an emblem for the yogi's superiority over the West.

295 For further discussions on Aurobindo's nationalism see Green (2008) and Heehs (1997). For a transition from Kuvalayananda's nationalism to transnationalism as well as nationalism in modern yoga in general, see Alter (2004: 73–108). A detailed discussion of Vivekananda's political agenda and influence is given by Sharma (2015: 84–146, 2013).

### 6.3 Catalyst II: Science Discourse

*When a religious method recommends itself as “scientific”, it  
can be certain of its public in the West.  
Yoga fulfils this expectation.  
C. G. Jung (1958 [1936]: 532)*

In light of modern yoga’s reversed orientalism, India’s mission was to reach out to the world, imparting supreme knowledge to the “spiritually inferior West”. Meera Nanda pointedly termed this theme India’s “*jagat-guru* (world-guru) complex” (Nanda 2010: 286). To fulfil this mission, modern yogis had to keep up with science and its hegemonial status as a system of superior knowledge. The appeal to science, however, had a significant prehistory in nineteenth-century occult thought, because, for its exponents, the mingling of science and religion was patent. Occultism partly developed as a countermovement to Christian worldviews that were on the wane since they began to be out-competed by theories of evolution and doctrines of materialistic science (Hammer 2004: 501; Bergunder 2016). Moreover, as noted above, leaders of the Brahmo Samaj also propagated Hindu religion as a universal or even superior form of religion because it was “scientific” (De Michelis 2004: 56–73). Brahmos, theosophists, and modern yogis utilised the semantic flexibility of the term “science”. This included the progress and techniques of physics, biomedicine, and psychology, as promoted mainly by Western scientists, and was aligned with reviving the age-old yoga tradition as a form of superior science, understood, for example, as “psychology”.

As Olav Hammer has shown, most of the science discourses used in the context of alternative religion – and this also holds true for modern yoga – are appropriated as a discursive strategy that he has termed scientism (Hammer 2004). To enforce religious claims and their verifiability, scientism employs a language that includes scientific terms, references, and stylistic features to the point of integrating mathematical equations and formulae (Hammer 2004: 206). Additionally, as Joseph Alter has observed, the meaning of “science” in the nineteenth century differed significantly from today’s understanding of the term and applied different forms of knowledge production (Alter 2004: 29–30). For example, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) had established the notion of an “objective truth of the world” (Stuckrad 2014: 4), but already at the beginning of the twentieth century it had been acknowledged that (even) natural sciences do not produce objective meaning but are dependent on “thought styles” and “thought collectives” of a given era (Fleck 1979 [1935]). Moreover, during the twentieth century hegemonial claims of science have, on the one hand, been deconstructed by the social sciences (Stuckrad 2014: 7), while on the other the



quantifiability of data through technological advancements and digitalisation is a powerful motor to further propel hegemonies of science. While this discussion cannot be extended here, it is generally helpful to distinguish between scholarly and popular approaches to science, and most of the science discourse within modern yoga appropriates the latter. Alter concludes that yoga adopted “a scaled-down, fragmented image of science that is much more realistic and true to the world of human experience” (Alter 2004: 30). He probably points here at the “empiricism” that yoga provides on an experiential level (as highlighted by Vivekananda and the likes) as the lowest common denominator for what could be subsumed under this umbrella. This was an attempt to partake in a discursive struggle for dominance. In brief, although yogis appealed to science, their appeal mostly acted as a discursive strategy to include “science” as part of a modernist reinterpretation of yoga.

Zooming in on modern yoga, the earliest attempt to explain yoga in contemporaneous Western biomedical and scientific terms in South Asian contexts was probably made by N. C. Paul in 1851.<sup>296</sup> In his *A Treatise on the Yoga Philosophy* (first published as early as 1851, the second edition appeared in 1882), the Bengali physician claims that the reduction of “carbon acid” produced during exhalation is the central aim of the yogi, to which all aspects of his life-style contribute: the habitat, the diet, the exercises including various forms of *prāṇāyāma* pursue the achievement of higher yogic states like *samādhi*. In doing so, he relies on a concept and a jargon that could not have been developed without an understanding of modern chemistry and physiology. This is remarkable, since, in Haṭhayoga, *prāṇāyāma* was earlier read against the backdrop of yogic subtle physiology, emphasising the role of the *nāḍīs* for the efficacy of *prāṇāyāma* (Alter 2005: 123). Paul understands *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi* (for him, all advancements of *prāṇāyāma*) as “self-trance” (Paul 1882 [1851]: 14).<sup>297</sup> He further equates *samādhi* and yoga in general with “human hybernation” (*ibid.*: iv). For Paul, hibernation is a prerequisite for yogis to survive being buried alive for days. While buried, yogis inserted the tongue into the cavity above the palate (*khecārimudrā*) and suppressed the breath and vital functions to a great extent. Paul defines yoga, and thereby its essential tool *prāṇāyāma*, as “suspending the circulation and respiration” (*ibid.*: 28).<sup>298</sup> Although Paul does

296 N. C. Paul is also known as Nobin Chander Paul in Anglicised Bengali, or Navin Candra Pāl in Hindi. For a discussion of his work in theosophical contexts, see also chapter 4.3.3.

297 In inexplicitly following premodern texts like the *Vivekamārtaṇḍa* 94–95 and others (cf. Mallinson & Singleton 2017: 287), for Paul all higher states of yoga are defined by the exact *duration* of breath retention. For example, breath retention in *pratyāhāra* is said to be twice as long as in *prāṇāyāma* (Paul 1882 [1851]: 14).

298 Strictly speaking, Paul refers only indirectly to *prāṇāyāma* as a technique to suspend circulation and respiration. Offering a broader definition, he avers that “by yoga I understand

not seem to connote a metaphysical principle with *prāṇa* itself, but defines *prāṇa* as the out-breath, he nevertheless holds that *prāṇāyāma* induces *siddhis* including the overcoming of death (*ibid.*: 9). Paul further reports that *prāṇāyāma* is the “daily practice of the Brahman mendicants who aspire to human hybernation or Yoga” (*ibid.*), thereby likely pointing at *prāṇāyāma* as part of the *sandhyā* rite.<sup>299</sup>

The Bengali physician grounds parts of his theory of hibernation and the application of biomedical terminology, though inexplicitly, on *Observations on Trance: Or Human Hybernation* (1850) by the Scottish surgeon James Braid (1795–1860) (Baier 2009: 249). This work lists various case studies of yogis or “fakirs” buried alive in India. Already Braid called this process “human hybernation” induced by certain states of “trance”. Both physicians attempt to explain yogic techniques in biomedical terms and to study yogic phenomena with positivistic accuracy. However, Paul correlated the phenomenon of “suspending circulation and respiration” more directly with yoga practice and *prāṇāyāma* than Braid. Braid relied on second-hand accounts about these yogis observed and documented by physicians in India and only speaks about the “fakirs” and their “hybernation” in general terms. In contrast, Paul claims to have been an eyewitness of the case documented in Calcutta (*ibid.*: iv). As for the scientific aspects, Paul’s documentation includes data on the nutritional values of milk, rice, and wheat, and on the carbon acid of exhaled air during normal respiration and *prāṇāyāma* (Paul 1882 [1851]: 9–11, 22). Without giving the exact source, he quotes, regarding the latter, from “Vierordt” (*ibid.*: 9). Most likely, his source is Karl von Vierordt’s *Physiologie des Athmens: Mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Ausscheidung der Kohlensäure* [“Physiology of Respiration: With Special Remarks on the Expulsion of Carbon Acid”] (1845), which talks about the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> in self-experiments and in phenomena of hibernation. Braid is also aware of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction during hibernation, but does not cite Vierordt.

To shed some further light on James Braid it should be noted that he was the founder of a technique that became known as “hypnosis”, which was developed

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the art of suspending the circulation and respiration” (Paul 1882 [1851]: 28) and that *samādhi* is “the total suspension of the functions of respiration and circulation, but not the extinction of those functions” (*ibid.*: 49). However, since in Paul’s system, the “suppression of respiratory movements” points at *prāṇāyāma* as well as all further stages of Pātañjalyoga, I argue that this “medical” definition of yoga and *samādhi* as *pars pro toto* also defines *prāṇāyāma*.

299 Dayananda Sarasvati described the *sandhyā* rite in association with the householder’s daily fire ritual (*agnihotra*) (Baier 2009: 312). However, Kane (1941: 313–314) explains that *sandhyā* was also prescribed by several texts (e.g., *Baudhāyana-Gṛhyasūtra* 2.4.1) for the non-householder. Additionally, the sixth chapter of the c. seventh-century *Brhadhyogiyā-jñavalokyasmṛti* integrates the *sandhyā* rite into yoga practice, which probably also addressed ascetics.

out of his practice of mesmerism. Originally interested in mesmerism, Braid rejected the existence of the magnetic fluidum, and he tried to explain magnetic phenomena in terms of physiology and psychology (Braid 1850: vi; Goodrick-Clarke 2008: 184). In the detailed description of yogis buried alive, Braid attempts to underscore the efficacy of his own method of hypnosis. In his technique, the patient was to stare on a small bright object held above their eyes inducing “a fixed stare, absolute repose of the body, fixed attention, and suppressed respiration, concomitant with that fixity of attention” (Braid 1843: 19). According to Braid, the phenomena that appeared during yogic hibernation were similar to the symptoms that occurred during “trance” induced by his technique, namely a scarcely perceptible pulse and breathing rate (Braid 1850: 7–8, 49–50). The state of “trance” into which yogis and Braid’s patients were reported to fall was also confirmed by Paul. He explains that “the Yogis are recommended to fix their sight on the tip of the nose or upon the space between the eye-brows. These peculiar turns of the axes of vision suspend the respiratory movements and generally produce hypnotism” (Paul 1882 [1851]: 4).<sup>300</sup>

Although Paul copied most of Braid’s reasoning about yogic techniques, he does not refer to Braid’s theories as his direct model. Nor did he explicitly acknowledge others influencing his study (the only exception being Vierordt). But Paul certainly encountered yoga through various sources. First, the Bengali surgeon is said to have learnt about yoga practice through a British informant, a certain Captain Seymour in search of yoga (Neff 1937: 94–95; Singleton 2010: 52–53), but he also had extensive textual knowledge of yogic practice and had studied it for over thirty years (Neff 1937: 94). Furthermore, it can be assumed that, as a Bengali native interested in yoga, he was at least basically familiar with ritualistic *prāṇāyāma* practice, which was thoroughly disseminated and well-documented in Bengal at that time (Belnos 2002 [1851]). Indeed, the Bengali physician was able to describe a variety of yogic techniques in much greater detail than Braid. Paul remains loyal to the yoga traditions, correlating his theories with Pātañjalayoga, Haṭhayoga, and the concept of Rājayoga. With some precaution, it may be held that Paul’s detailed description of various forms of *prāṇāyāma* practice, for example, the eight *kumbhakas* (Paul 1882 [1851]: 32–41), constitute the first of its kind in English. However, the *Treatise* is not written in the style of later turn-of-the-century yoga manuals since its overall appearance is that of a scientific study – and the advanced practices described would have been next to impossible to perform by merely following these descriptions. Though not an easy read, Paul’s work was directly influential for the subsequent development of yogic breath cultivation.

300 For an interpretation of Paul’s involvement in mesmerism and proto-medical science, see also De Michelis (2004: 136–137).

Paul can be seen as one of the earliest exponents of a science-religion debate within modern yoga. For all his allusions to scientific discourse, it is notable that, in his *Treatise*, he nowhere utilised the term “science”. Explicit mentions of science in the context of *prāṇāyāma*, however, gain momentum after Paul. Subsequently, various occultists and exponents of early modern yoga explicitly coupled discourses of *prāṇāyāma* with “science”, or even with the “occult sciences”,<sup>301</sup> most often encapsulated in the phrase “the science of breath”. This phrase was likely coined by the theosophist Rama Prasad in his influential *Occult Science: The Science of Breath* (1884) (chapter 5.3). This intricate study of the breath flowing alternately in the nostrils (*svara*) which was used for prognostication was a “science of breath”, according to Prasad. Another theosophist who contributed to the discourse of yoga-as-science was Sris Chandra Vasu who applied Paul’s proto-biomedical definition of *prāṇāyāma* (Basu 2004 [1887]: xlv). The analysis provided above about the interdependence of occultism and science discourses can be applied to Vivekananda’s seminal outline of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* in *Rāja Yoga* (chapter 5.4; chapter 8.1.1). In his indebtedness to occult thought, Vivekananda retained the programme of the theosophists and the Brahmos of a “scientific” yoga, superior to any other science, because it had its foundation in two invincible pillars merged in *one* — the age-old yoga tradition, which ultimately *was* science. Traces of Paul’s work can also be found in the scientific pamphlets of second-generation yogis like Swami Kuvalayananda and Sri Yogendra. The “cold-blooded and hybernating philosophers of the East” (Paul 1882 [1851]: iv) and their techniques remained the object of scientific study throughout the twentieth century.

## 6.4 Catalyst III: Media Culture and Agency of Translation

As chapter 4.3 has shown, part of theosophy’s programme was to compare – and therefore translate – various philosophical and metaphysical ideas derived from different languages and cultures.<sup>302</sup> This becomes especially evident when it comes to translating yogic and tantric texts from Sanskrit to English. Editors and translators seeded various cultural networks with theosophical convictions. Most of these translations were paid for by the Bombay Theosophical Translation Fund, which, at the flip side, meant that Western theosophists attempted to “own the core metaphysical ideas of the Orient” (Partridge 2020: 16). Moreover, the translations often directly cited Blavatsky’s texts, thereby explicitly disseminat-

301 On this notion, see Hanegraaff (2013a).

302 On the notion of translation within theosophy, see the scholarship of Malin Fitger (2020) and Mriganka Mukhopadhyay’s forthcoming dissertation.

ing theosophical teachings. However, this prompted some readers to turn to sources or translations that were conceived as “purer” than the theosophical ones. Nevertheless, the theosophical translations raised the discursive power of South Asian translators, because with regard to yoga texts, these were indeed the only translations available at that time. In following Bourdieu (1992), it can be argued that the agency of translation was a form of cultural capital that produced social distinction for the translators within a field.

Indeed, in a field where knowledge was enshrined in Sanskrit, these South Asian translators gained tremendous agency through their language skills. Translated Sanskrit terms were often charged with occult connotations. One example is the translation of “yoga” as “concentration” in Ballantyne’s and Deva’s English rendering of the *Yogasūtra* from 1852/53 (chapter 4.3.1),<sup>303</sup> which was so influential that the two terms became almost synonymous thereafter (Baier 2009: 247). Another example is the translation of *ākāśa* in a widely acknowledged Sanskrit dictionary by the Pune-based Vaman Shivaram Apte (1858–1892). In line with a theosophical interpretation of the concept, he translated *ākāśa* as “ether”, but more specifically as the “subtle and ethereal fluid pervading the whole universe” (Apte 1890: 221). This translation by Apte shows the dissemination of an occult-scientistic concept linked to ether speculations of that time (chapter 5.1). It could be argued that the authoritative translation that a dictionary usually offers accelerated the dissemination of an occult-scientistic reading of *ākāśa*.

Theosophical translations certainly shaped the conceptual landscape of modern yoga. When theosophy was in its early phase and at the peak of its innovative power and influence, three main texts were established as a “classical triad” of Hāṭhayoga: the fifteenth-century *Śivasamhitā*, the fifteenth-century *Hāṭhapradīpikā*, and the eighteenth-century *Gheraṇḍasamhitā*, all translated by South Asian theosophists on behalf of the Bombay Theosophical Translation Fund before 1900. One of the major players here was Sris Candra Vasu, who translated the *Śivasamhitā* as early as 1884 and the *Gheraṇḍasamhitā* in 1895. The *Hāṭhapradīpikā* of Svātmārāma was translated by the South Indian T. R. Srinivasa Iyengar and edited by Tukaram Tatya in 1893. This chapter will not go into the details of specific wording in these translations. Instead, it elaborates on some aspects regarding *prāṇāyāma* that have been purported alongside the translations in introductions and commentaries thereon. The influential Sris Candra Vasu is treated here as the main example of “agents of translation”,

303 Considering various “classical” texts on yoga in this section, early translations of the *Yogasūtra* like the one edited by Tatya (1885 [1882]) that draws on Ballantyne and Deva could be included, which is however beyond the scope of this study. For discussions on commentaries on and translations of the *Yogasūtra* in the modern period see, De Michelis (2004: 236–247), Baier (2009: 359–360), Singleton (2008), and White (2014).

followed by Tukaram Tatya and Srinivasa Iyengar and their collaborative project of translating the *Haṭhapradīpikā*.

The scholar-translator Sris Chandra Vasu (Bengali: Śrīś Candra Basu, 1861–1918) was a Bengali expatriate growing up in Lahore.<sup>304</sup> There, he came in contact with theosophy and with some of its defining figures of the early phase, Blavatsky, Olcott, Dayananda, the publisher R. C. Bary, and a South Indian yogi associated with the Theosophical Society, Sabhapati Swami (c. 1828–1923/4).<sup>305</sup> After graduating from the Government College of Lahore in 1881, he moved to Meerut, where he occupied a position as a lawyer and started to collaborate with the theosophist Rama Prasad. As one of his last translation projects, Sris Chandra Vasu and his brother Baman Das Basu (1867–1932) worked with Prasad on a translation of the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra* that resulted in Prasad's *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras: With Commentary of Vyāsa and the Gloss of Vāchaspati Miśra* (1912).

Vasu's earliest work is the translation of the *Śivasamhitā*, published serially from 1884 onwards in the journal *Arya* by R. C. Bary (Vasu 1975 [1914]: i), and subsequently in book form in 1887. The *Śivasamhitā* is a tantric work by an author with leanings toward Śrī Vidyā, a Śaiva and Goddess tradition today more prevalent in South India (Mallinson 2007b: ix–xiv), and was compiled in its current form in the fifteenth century (Birch 2018: 6, n. 18).<sup>306</sup> It consists of five chapters, of which the third deals with *prāṇāyāma* and *āsana*. Together with the Introduction, it constitutes the most influential translation by Vasu. Although Vasu conceives of the *Śivasamhitā* as a tantric text, the Introduction is almost entirely, as far the yoga traditions are concerned, discussed on the terminological basis of *Pātañjalayoga*. Vasu tends to caution his readers against Hatha yoga as well as some of the advanced *prāṇāyāma* practices (Basu 2004 [1887]: iii, xlix), warnings that are entirely absent from his Introduction to the later published *Gheraṇḍasamhitā*.<sup>307</sup> The practices described in the *Śivasamhitā* are, according to Vasu, designed for the householder yogi, and “chastity” rather than “celibacy” is recommended, while a strong tendency toward asceticism is altogether dismissed (*ibid.*: xx, xvii).<sup>308</sup>

304 This paragraph is based on Cantú (forthcoming), which gives a detailed account of Vasu's life and work including its influence on occult networks.

305 For details on these figures (except Sabhapati Swami), see chapter 4.1; chapter 4.3; chapter 5.3. For an in-depth analysis of Sabhapati Swami, see Cantú (2023).

306 As for the roots of the *Śivasamhitā*, Mallinson (2020: 412) explains that it is “much the biggest borrower from the [c. eleventh-century, M.K.] *Amṛtasiddhi*, sharing 34 verses with it”.

307 The Introduction to this translation otherwise mostly echoes the themes of the Introduction to the *Śivasamhitā*.

308 This is, on the other hand, aligned with the *Śivasamhitā*'s negotiation between mundane and soteriological ends. The text concludes with a recommendation that the yogi “may amuse himself” after having accomplished the teachings prescribed in the text (Birch 2020b: 223).

In his Introduction, Vasu dedicates a whole chapter to the subject of *prāṇāyāma* (Basu 2004 [1887]: xliii–xlxiii). This chapter can be partly read in continuation with N. C. Paul’s *Treatise*, which is explicitly quoted once (*ibid.*: xv). Vasu also draws on Braid’s theories of hypnotism and trance,<sup>309</sup> but the influence of Paul is more obvious. Like Paul, Vasu also defines *prāṇāyāma* essentially as “reducing the beating of the heart through restraining the breath” (*ibid.*: xlv). What becomes evident here is that translating Sanskrit texts also meant the dissemination of specific concepts. In Vasu’s case, *prāṇāyāma* as linked to the concepts of circulation and respiration is explained by physiological data such as the functions of the heart, the lungs, and the brain (*ibid.*: xlv–xlv). As Vasu urges, “[t]o understand fully the action of respiration on life, some knowledge of physiology is absolutely necessary” (*ibid.*: xlv).

Unsurprisingly, Vasu’s Introduction is overall clearly aligned with *prāṇāyāma* discourses tinged by theosophy. It is one of the many examples that echoes the pseudo-Swedenborg quote to exemplify the intimate connection between the breath and the mind (Basu 2004 [1887]: xlv–xlv; chapter 4.3.1). As is typical of theosophical thought, Vasu further correlates *prāṇāyāma* and *prāṇa*-related themes with occult ones, particularly, mesmerism. In mentioning one of the effects of *prāṇāyāma*, he states that it removes the covering of the light as described in the *Yogasūtra* 2.52 (*ibid.*: xlx). According to Vasu, this light is perceived by the Yogi “in his heart when in deep contemplation. It is the same light which the mesmerised subjects of Baron Reichenbach saw issuing from the poles of magnet, &c.” (*ibid.*).<sup>310</sup> What may seem to be a big leap – from Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra* to a specific phenomenon of subtle perception in mesmerism – is indeed the blueprint of theosophical reasoning about yoga and *prāṇa*-related themes. The section that deals with *prāṇāyāma* also includes a comparative discussion of various forms of breath cultivation, as is similarly found in the “Appendix” to the *Yogasūtra* edition of Tukaram Tatya (chapter 4.3.1). However, other than Tatya, Vasu mentions the “Persian” *habs-i-dam*<sup>311</sup> of which some techniques, according to him, closely resemble alternate-nostril breathing (*ibid.*: xlv–xlix). Next to all these elements, Vasu explains the significance of *svara* for prognostication as well as the functions of the *cakras* and the five *vāyus*. Not only does Vasu read *prāṇāyāma* against a yogic-occult background, but he holds that

309 Vasu also speaks of a “hypnotic trance” induced by “fixing the attention on a luminous object”, tacitly drawing on Braid (Basu 2004 [1887]: xxii). Another influence of Braid is the repeated translation of *samādhi* as “concentration”.

310 The German chemist and mesmerist Karl von Reichenbach coined the term “Od”, which, like the fluidum, was said to be a vital force that permeated the cosmos and animated organic life. His “sensitives” allegedly observed emanations of Od in form of a luminous glow from magnets, crystals, and human beings (Coddington 1990 [1978]: 67).

311 *Habs-i-dam* or *habs-e-dam* means “breath control” in Urdu (Green 2008: 304).

the “hygienic effect of pranayama is beyond doubt” (*ibid.*: xlxi). As such, his Introduction evidences the complex discursive strata that permeate *prāṇāyāma* discourses in the occult milieu at that time. It also represents the eclecticism of theosophy that compared and merged all these discursive, a tendency often found also in modern yoga.

Indeed, Vasu’s translation of the *Śivasamhitā* and the *Gheraṇḍasamhitā* remain influential throughout the subsequent emergence of yogic breath cultivation. The Austrian occultist Carl Kellner elucidates on “*habs-i dam*” in his *Yoga* (1896: 16) and mentions Vasu on the previous page. The *Śivasamhitā* may have caught Kellner’s interest due to tantric sexual practices that were described in verses of the 1887 edition, but omitted in later editions of the text. Vasu’s translation of the *Śivasamhitā* was also distributed among Vivekananda’s advanced disciples when he taught yoga and Vedānta in America (Deslippe 2018: 34). This could be read as a symbolic representation of the text’s fate in the modern era in which South Indian Śrī Vidyā goes global. Vasu had no small part in this.

Another widely influential publication is the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*<sup>312</sup> of Svāmārāma with the commentary *Jyotsnā* by Brahmānanda (d. 1842), which was translated by the South Indian T. R. Srinivasa Iyengar and edited by Tukaram Tatya (1836–1898) in 1893.<sup>313</sup> This edition of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* has four chapters, of which the second is concerned with *prāṇāyāma*.<sup>314</sup> Of interest here is the Introduction to this translation by Tukaram Tatya as well as the portions of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* and *Jyotsnā* commentary translated by Iyengar, both of whom were theosophists. Iyengar only translated parts of Brahmānanda’s *Jyotsnā*, omitting numerous verses of it. While the *Haṭhapradīpikā* dates to the fifteenth century (Birch 2018: 7), the *Jyotsnā* itself was written as late as c. 1830.<sup>315</sup>

312 The text published by the theosophists is titled *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*, but in scholarship the text is termed *Haṭhapradīpikā*. For a discussion of this, see the “Introduction” to the *Haṭhapradīpikā* as published in the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā* (1970), XIII (1–2), 1–14. I will use the title *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* when referring to this particular translation by Iyengar that also includes the *Jyotsnā* commentary by Brahmānanda. When I refer to the text as the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, it denotes the more generic textual tradition of the text.

313 For more on the features of this seminal text that was authoritative for most subsequent Haṭhayogic texts, see chapter 3.3. Strictly speaking, this is not the first translation of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*. Already M. N. Dvivedi in his *The Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali* (1890) had appended a partial translation of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*.

314 Scholars have unearthed various manuscripts of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* containing four, five, or even ten chapters (Birch 2018: 56; Gharote & Devnath 2017 [2001]: xvi).

315 The untranslated *Haṭhapradīpikā* together with the *Jyotsnā* commentary is henceforth referred to as the *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā*. According to an article on the *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā* by M. L. Gharote in the *Yoga-Mīmāṃsā*, the terminus ad quem of the commentary is 1830 (Gharote 1991). I thank James Mallinson for making me aware of this reference (personal correspondence, Dec 6, 2019).



As a general remark, Brahmānanda interwove numerous quotations from the Upaniṣads, the Purāṇas, the Yoga Upaniṣads, and the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. As such, this commentary evidences once more that the tenth-century *Yogavāsiṣṭha* was a quite influential text for yoga in the late medieval to early modern period (chapter 5.4.2).<sup>316</sup> Regarding *prāṇāyāma*, the *Jyotsnā* 2.48 cites the *Kūrmapurāṇa* (dated between the seventh and tenth century CE) and prescribes the *sandhyā* rite as part of the yogi's daily regimen.<sup>317</sup> This is also reflected in the translation (Iyengar 1972 [1893]: 31). In brief, the readers of the theosophical translation of the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* were introduced to a wide range of Indian traditions that originated outside of Haṭhayoga, but had, by then, been integrated into it.

Tatya's Introduction to Iyengar's translation of the *Haṭhapradīpikā* also quotes from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*. Surprisingly, in drawing from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, his translation employs the phrase the "science of breath", which was coined by Prasad in his translation of the *Śivasvarodaya* (chapter 5.3.1). The cited portion of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* explains the relationship between the breath and the mind, and the following behaviour is recommended to Rama (its main protagonist):

Therefore the wise should study the regulation of *prāṇa* if they desire to suspend the activity of the mind or concentrate will upon the achievement of Yoga. The regulation of *prāṇa* brings all happiness, worldly and spiritual, from the acquisition of kingdoms to *mokṣa* or supreme bliss. Wherefore, O Rāma! study the science of breath or *prāṇa* (Tatya 1972 [1893a]: xi–xii).

Tatya is one of the first authors to utilise the phrase "science of breath" outside the context of the *Śivasvarodaya*.<sup>318</sup> As in this quote, the relationship between the

316 Several scholarly works composed between the sixteenth and eighteenth century adopt passages from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, the most prominent examples being Śivānanda's *Yoga-cintāmaṇi* (late sixteenth century; cf. Birch 2024) and Bhavadeva's *Yuktabhavadēva* (seventeenth century). Moreover, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* was a source text for the *Haṭhapradīpikā*, and Śivānanda's *Yogacintāmaṇi* informed Brahmānanda's *Jyotsnā*, which explains several references to the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* in the *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā* (Jason Birch in a personal correspondence, Oct 7, 2020).

317 Birch & Hargreaves (2020). Generally, the connections between yogic practice and the *sandhyā* rite are probably as old as the original *Yogayājñavalkya* (composed in the seventh century CE). The original *Yogayājñavalkya* (as opposed to the c. fourteenth-century *Yogayājñavalkya*, a Vaiṣṇava yoga work) was first translated by the Kaivalyadhama in 1982 and then termed the *Brhadyogiyājñavalkyasmṛti* (Wujastyk 2017). Chapter six of this text deals with the *sandhyā* rite while *prāṇāyāma* is elaborated in chapter eight (Gharote & Bedekar 2010 [1982]: 32–35, 55–60). I wish to thank Jason Birch for these references (personal correspondence, Jan 2, 2021).

318 Apart from Prasad's usage of the phrase in the context of *svarodaya* practices, "science of breath" furthermore appears in Vasu's translation of the *Śivasamhitā* 3.29 (Basu 2004 [1887]: 18–19). Also, M. N. Dvivedi in his *Rāja Yoga* of 1890 (first edition 1885) mentions the "science of breath" not in relation to the *Śivasvarodaya*, but equates it with Haṭhayoga (Dvivedi 1890 [1885]: 14).

breath and the mind is the main theme in his Introduction. In echoing M. N. Dvivedi's *The Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali* (1890),<sup>319</sup> Tatya states that the Haṭha yogi controls the mind through the breath, while the Rāja yogi controls the mind directly, leading to a spontaneous cessation of the breath (Tatya 1972 [1893a]: xii–xiii; Dvivedi 1890: vii).

Moving on to an analysis of the translation, it is not always clear where the (original) Sanskrit commentary of Brahmānanda ends and Iyengar's own remarks on the material begin. Though it goes beyond this study to fully disentangle Brahmānanda's commentary from Iyengar's, it can be safely said that Brahmānanda cites the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* in 2.3, 4.41, and 4.58. However, Iyengar at times fully omits Brahmānanda's commentary,<sup>320</sup> but in 1.16 interpolates a long story from the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* that is not found in the Sanskrit version of the *Jyotsnā*. Although the *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā* itself draws on the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, both Tatya and Iyengar amplify the influence of the text through additional quotations. It is not surprising that Iyengar's translation evidences a number of theosophical influences, even quoting one of Blavatsky's articles that appeared in *The Theosophist* (Iyengar 1972 [1893]: 13). Additionally, his comments explain that *prāṇa* should not be understood as breath, but as the "magnetic current as it would be otherwise absurd to say that the breath must be made to go to every part of the body like the right toe, etc" (*ibid.*: 23), reminiscent of animal magnetism so prominent in early theosophical thought.

In sum, *Haṭhapradīpikājyotsnā* is a gold mine of *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* related themes. Together with the *Śivasamhitā* and the *Gheraṇḍasamhitā*, it certainly became an important text that provided modern yoga pioneers with pertinent techniques, practical information, and philosophical discourse. As to the role of the "classical triad", authors like Kuvalayananda and Sivananda explicitly draw on them as *the* authoritative texts of Haṭhayoga. However, several other important Haṭha texts were utilised by modern yoga pioneers, but in many cases, the sources on which yoga pioneers drew were completely veiled. As chapter 8 will show, most of the yoga pioneers relied on English (or vernacular) translations of these texts, though at least some of them also knew Sanskrit.<sup>321</sup> For example, Vivekananda was aware of Mitra's translation of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (chapter 5.4), Yogendra utilised Vijñānabhikṣu's *Yogasārasaṃgraha* in a translation by Jha of 1894 to describe the four phases of the breath (chapter 8.3.2), and Sivananda also drew on several theosophical translations (chapter 8.4.2). Tacitly

319 More specifically, Tatya draws here on the "Appendix" of Dvivedi (1890) which gives a summary of the *Haṭhapradīpikā*.

320 E.g., in *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* 1.4–9, 1.19–27, 2.13–24, 2.30–43.

321 An exception to the reliance on translations is certainly Kuvalayananda, whose exegesis of Sanskrit texts is well-documented. Also Krishnamacharya had academic training in Sanskrit.

borrowing from them, several yogis made it appear as if they cited the Sanskrit texts directly, which was meant to raise their cultural and religious capital. Some yoga pioneers like Yogendra and Krishnamacharya also utilised their (marginal or extensive) Sanskrit knowledge to cloak innovative practices in Sanskrit terms (chapter 8.3.2; chapter 8.5.2). Modern yoga was malleable in theory, terminology, and practice. In all these cases, knowledge of the “sacred language” that was Sanskrit was helpful for the mission of teaching and promoting yogic breath cultivation.

## 6.5 Summary

This chapter has introduced a theoretical outline to denote several cultural factors and trends that shaped concepts of yogic breath cultivation. The “*prāṇāyāma* grid” has served as a heuristic tool to highlight the most relevant cultural factors and trends, which are religion, hygienic culture, and the appeal to tradition and innovation. It constitutes several areas outlined in four quadrants on which yoga pioneers drew to recruit both conceptual and practical ideas. The “catalysts” of nationalism and science discourses were crucial discursive strategies for yoga pioneers to present *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* as powerful tools mastered by the accomplished yogi. Both catalysts were a product of cultural negotiations of late-colonial India, and, as such, *prāṇa* and *prāṇāyāma* were fundamentally reinvented through their impact, as several examples in this chapter have shown. Media culture and the agency of translation certainly accelerated yoga’s adaptation to modernity. First, one could increasingly rely on breath-cultivation manuals in English and vernacular languages that were already available through cheap print media at the turn of the century, which made *prāṇāyāma* teachings far more accessible than those imparted from guru to disciple. Second, translations can be viewed as located at the threshold between the premodern and the modern. The choice of words and concepts infuses the understanding of *prāṇāyāma* and related themes. In the subsequent analysis it will become particularly important to delineate their influence, since “citing” premodern works is often a tacit reference to modernist translations of Sanskrit texts. Since these translations are also situated between the global and the local, they subsequently informed South Asian yogis, the Indian English-speaking middle class interested in yoga, and occultists and aspiring yogis abroad.