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Downward facing dogs, core Indian values and institutionalised rape of children

Abstract

The Royal Commission into institutionalised child abuse in Australia has, for the first time since the Catholic Church, included other faith-based organisations within its exploratory gaze. Case number 21 focused on the yoga-related, Hindu-based Satyananda Yoga. During the 1970s and 1980s, children were systematically abused at the Satyananda Yoga ashram just north of Sydney, Australia. This abuse was rationalised and excused as being an essential part of the 'core Indian values' passed down through the guru-disciple tradition that was a gift to those children fortunate enough to have their spiritual evolution occur at a faster pace than the less fortunate children who were not abused. Through the context of discussing 'core Indian values' at the heart of Hindutva's argument that 'rape does not occur in Bharat, only India', this article continues by exploring the contest over commodifying what constitutes legitimate 'yoga' as Narendra Modi has asserted yoga is 'India's greatest export good to the world'Irani and Bapna. This article then discusses to the unbalanced power relationship between gurus and disciples, finally expanding to a broader discussion of the more infamous cases of hyper-gurus and their falls from grace.

Keywords: yoga, ashram, Satyananda, child abuse, institutionalised, core Indian values

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Introduction

'Core Indian values' is a post-colonial phrase often heard repeated by ethno-nationalist, Hindu supremacists that suggest, 'rape does not occur in Bharat, only India'. Beginning with the fiasco surrounding the abuse of children in an Indian institution in Australia, this article explores brand equity, and the contest over commodifying what constitutes legitimate 'yoga', as Narendra Modi has asserted yoga is 'India's greatest export good to the world'.[1] In the following sections, we discuss the unbalanced power relationship between gurus and disciples. Finally, this expands to a broader discussion of the more infamous cases of hyper-gurus and their falls from grace. The 'downward facing dog' yoga posture is probably the most iconic of all the yoga postures. With feet and hands placed on the floor, straightening the legs and pulling the hips back and up towards the sky, one drops their chin to the chest and feels a nice stretch through the hamstrings as the weight of the body moves into the hands. This posture is meant to resemble the action a dog performs after getting up from its slumber, as it stretches in preparation for whatever comes next in the idealised dog's life. During December 2014 in Australia, the Satyananda Yoga organisation was at the centre of a government run Royal Commission into institutionalised child abuse. As[2] explains, 'The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse is the largest royal commission in Australia's history and one of the largest public inquiries into institutional child abuse internationally'. As one of several case studies exploring the responses of institutions where abuse occurred:[3] The main focus of the hearing is on the response of the Satyananda Yoga Ashram at Mangrove Mountain (the Ashram) to complaints of sexual abuse made against its former spiritual leader, Swami Akhandananda Saraswati (Akhandananda), in the mid to late 1980s.

The abuse occurred during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1987, the main perpetrator, Swami Akhandananda, the spiritual head of the organisation in Australia was 'charged with sexually abusing teenage girls while they were residing at the ashram. He denied all charges. This lead to a period of great conflict and anguish for all involved. He was imprisoned for fourteen months for his role in orchestrating this abuse under the guise of assisting in the spiritual evolution of the victims.[4] In 2012, Satyananda Yoga rebranded its Mangrove Mountain ashram where the abuse took place as Mangrove Yoga Ashram claiming it is the largest yoga ashram in the southern hemisphere.[5] Trying to change the spots or teach an old dog new tricks is perhaps not as effective as having it lay still…and quiet, however, as the theory of karma asserts, everything comes back to bite you eventually.

Renouncing abuse as a crime

At the centre of the investigation is the organisation known as Satyananda Yoga, which was named after its founder, an Indian man, Tantric guru and yoga apostle, who first came to Australia in the 1960s. Swami Satyananda Saraswati died in 2009. He was one of the three main disciples of Swami Shivananda Saraswati from the Divine Life Society in Rishikesh. 'Swami' is a title bestowed on individuals designating the vows of renunciation they have taken. It symbolises the ritualistic social 'suicide' of their former identity, as they are ritually reborn through their vows into a position traditionally considered outside of India's caste system. This included severing all familial ties. The British East-India Company lamented on several occasions the efficacy such a transformation offered to criminals who used renunciation as a way to avoid arrest and prosecution. Not only did the individual replace their old name and identity, but all forms of identifying paperwork were also offered to the ritual fire. In India, today, and across the world, the spiritual capital someone accumulates through becoming a renunciant normally starts with people trying to touch their feet. This ancient performance of reverence and obedience for 'holy' men and women can still be seen across South Asia, today. Sadly, as this case before the Royal Commission demonstrates, it has come to light t hat people, or should I say, children, were forced to touch more than just feet. While we may think in the 'enlightened' 21st Century we are capable, as a society, of seeing a child molester as simply that, the evidence presented this week shows how easily children, their parents, and the larger community can be convinced of the spiritual merits of institutionalised child abuse, because it is framed as a type of spiritual evolution the children are certainly fortunate to receive.

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Shishananda ("Shishy"), the second in charge at the Satyananda ashram, became known as the 'whistleblower'.[6] Herself, first abused at age seventeen by Akhandananda,[7] and later groomed to become Akhandananda's 'handmaiden' and 'mistress';[7] eventually evolved to recruit other children in her care, and adults, to participate in sexual acts with the senior members of the organisation, including Satyananda; who, it is alleged, had several female consorts;[7] and, that it was regarded a great honour to have sex with him. Shishy eventually fled the ashram during the night after confronting Akhandananda about his serial abuse. She travelled to India to speak with Satyananda directly about the abuse; however, she explained to the Commission that she was locked in a room and, 'overheard a conversation between Satyananda and his successor, Swami ...jan, in which they discussed what a great danger to SwA and the organisation I was- that I was trouble, and that "it would be best if she ended up floating downriver on the Ganga (Ganges)." The Ganges River flowed right outside the ashram which was a converted old fortress with massive walls and very tall, locked gates. I took that to mean I would be best dead. I made it look like I was sleeping in my bed, left my belongings (besides the essentials), went over the Ashram wall at night and escaped. I was followed across India - it was a cat-and-mouse of on-and-off trains etc. I got to Delhi and got on the first plane back to Australia'.[7]

Ultimately, Shishy was considered to be 'just as much a victim as the girls' by the police, whom she spoke to as the initial whistleblower.[7] This was also because, having escaped India, there was another conspiracy to assassinate Shishy back in Australia, allegedly ordered by Satayananda.[7]

Another key witness, Bhakti Manning, explained to the Royal Commission how 'what was done to me by these people was not going to be considered a crime. The only person who was going to be considered criminal, if I reported to the people at the ashram, was me, for being a bad disciple and not accepting what the guru had chosen to do to me for my own good. In that environment, I could see no point in identifying as a victim unless there would be somebody within that community who would see what had happened to me as a crime and not a privilege'.[8] Manning, continued when asked about her delay in reporting these crimes, 'Well, when you are reporting a crime, there has to be a crime. And crime is defined by a society. In the ashram society, what a guru does is done for the good of a disciple. If he beats somebody, he is doing it for their good. If he turfs you out of the ashram, he is doing it for your good. If he places you in a position of power, he is doing it for your goo... thus-what was done to me by these people was not going to be considered a crime. The only person who was going to be considered criminal, if I reported to the people at the ashram, was me, for being a bad disciple and not accepting what the guru had chosen to do to me for my own good'.[8] Her abuse involved other male swamis, including the organisation's founder, Satyananda, who, even though he preached chastity and abstinence 'was having sex with multiple partners' (Aird 2014).[9] M...ng also said that, 'In a way, I feel the entire ashram was groomed in a place of powerlessness. For example, my mother, who was a beautiful, strong, creative woman, was somehow brought to the point where she couldn't trust her ability to make decisions. And in the ashram, she didn't need to make decisions; they were made for her by the structure of the day. For someone who had had a marriage failure and wanted somewhere safe to raise her children, the ashram probably seemed ideal because it ran to a predictable structure and there were many people who could help with us kids. There were a lot of single parents at the ashram'.[8]

Controlling and commodifying yoga

The trans-global yoga and spiritual tourism industry is worth billions of dollars a year.[10–12] The regulatory powers differ between countries particularly when considering ...ication of qualified yoga teachers. While there is no doubt about the some of the benefits yoga has for reducing stress and 'battling the bulge' of ever expanding waistlines. The various interpolations and struggles to determine what 'yoga' represents continue from the frontier to the heartland of the industry. Over the last couple of millennia, the 'yoga' sign has come to signify a multitude of identities and practices. From anti-brahminical Śramaṇic practices through to the ascetic yoga sūtras and arguably the 'classical' yoga identity of Patanjali to its contemporary reformulations that focus on fitness; or, as a 'traditional' vector for redefining the individual or collective identity by adopting the floating lexical signifier of the 'Vedic' lifestyle.[13–23] One wonders what the new Yoga minister, Sripad Naik considers the legitimate form of yoga to be during the process of trying to commodify yoga, while restricting usage of the 'yoga' sign by a 'geographical indication' for a 'region-specific good;' like what other countries, such as France, has done with Champagne or Florida has done with oranges?[24] While yoga might make its practitioners flexible and relaxed, one wonders as to its own semantic versatility as it is stretched across several fields from being a vehicle that will transform the youth into super humans a la Vivekananda to the 'eat, pray, love' set with their yoga mat rolled up under one arm and a latte macchiato in the other hand. When someone asks, 'What is yoga?' or 'What type of yoga do you do?' these are, considering the cultural and temporal complexity ingrained in this cultural field of practice, not such easy questions to answer. A survey of the Yoga Journal's magazine covers shows the development of a discourse that goes beyond the ancient ascetic practices to promote a 'yoga lifestyle' that is particularly empowering to the modern woman.[16] In 2008, Penman[18] conducted a national survey of yoga practitioners in Australia. His findings suggest there are more 'yogis' than amateur players of Australia's national sport Australian rules football (www.afl.com). Five years later, anecdotal evidence would only suggest yoga is even more popular, particularly amongst women aged 30-40 who have at least a bachelor's degree. Yoga, in Australia, is part of an urban middle class lifestyle where 90 percent of attendees at just about every class are upwardly mobile modern women with disposable incomes. It would be interesting to know how this Royal Commission is changing people's perception of yoga.

Although, thanks to the commodification and plethora of trademarks, it is easy to pronounce allegiance to a particular brand such as Ashtanga, Bikram or Power Yoga to name just a few. Like the mythical Greek animal, the Lernaean Hydra, whose snake-like appendages, once severed, gave rise to two more; once a yoga practitioner has completed their teacher training course, they are essentially free to create their own style and brand of yoga. However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's claim that yoga is made in India and is 'an invaluable gift of India's ancient tradition,' which is '5,000 years old,' and, in agreeance with many others, that it is one of its greatest exports, is yet another strategy to qualify and determine what yoga is, or, rather, should be.[1,25] A self-confessed yoga practitioner, Modi, like so many yoga apostles wish that everyone ought to enjoy the benefits of a regular yoga practice. Perhaps, then, it is pertinent to ask more about the culture of yoga, or particular aspects, at least, and how they can be potentially damaging? ...rning to the institutionalised child abuse in the Satyananda organization, we cannot mistake this for being a problem found in the west and exported to India. Perhaps the problem is more endemic to institutions in general regardless of the

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location, cultural affiliation or faith-based denomination, as particular monastic orders, where members are forced into being celibate seem to have been embroiled in controversy at some point or another? It should be noted that Satyananda Yoga is the first Hindu faith-based organization after the Catholic Church to go in front of this Royal Commission.

How do we understand the source of this issue? Who is at fault? Can we blame the West for the institutionalised child abuse occurring in ashrams in India and around the world? Following Modi's logic, any ashram located outside of India is an Indian export, and the abuse occurring, or that has occurred, is part of the culture inherent in the religious practices of the yogis, especially those that follow a Tantric lineage. RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's analysis leads to a positive response to the question responding that 'such crimes hardly take place in Bharat, but they occur frequently in India' and that 'all of this is happening due to exposure to western values' values'.[26] But is this really the fault of 'western countries or culture'? If we accept his assessment and remedy that 'it is important to go back to core Indian values,' we first need to understand what 'core Indian values' are?[26] It would seem that Hindutva ideologues cannot have it both ways. They cannot say it is the West's fault that these crimes of child abuse are being committed in Hindu institutions in India, while suggesting they are also the bastions of a pure set of core Indian values when it is these values which are underwriting and rationalising such abuses as being divinely inspired and sanctioned.[27] One might assert, as Dasgupta[27] does, that yoga ashrams and guru's are not involved as guardians of these core values as: The organizations of Hindu nationalism have misread the sources of Hindu energy. Just as the influence of the abstruse Upanishads is easily overshadowed by the Puranic tradition, the real energy of contemporary Hinduism does not lie in Brahmanical institutions. What drive Hindus are either venerated temples or individual preachers and 'living saints'.

It is worthwhile considering how the 'yogi-sadhu' sign of today intermingles with a Billion-dollar health and lifestyle industry and a nationalist agenda that, since the colonial period, has been used to represent the ideal armed ascetic patriot in the fight to rescue a golden age of Indian glory from the clutches of foreign invaders.[28] The domestication of itinerant armed sadhus into sedentary 'other-worldly' philosophers was central to the aims and ascendant power of the British East India Company to create a steady income stream. As Pinch[28] explains: Armed sadhus were the very antithesis of the world the company-state was endeavouring to create in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, namely, a settled peasant society that would render forth vast agrarian revenues on a regular basis with as little resistance as possible. The modern state in India could not countenance recalcitrant sadhus wandering about the countryside armed, dangerous, often naked, and claiming to represent an alternate locus of authority. The Company needed a modern sadhu: a priestly monk unconcerned with worldly power and given over completely to religious contemplation and prayer. The abode of the renunciant is a type of liminal domain or gateway between the sacred and profane worlds, where this imagined Hindutva utopia is able to spring forth from. It is from such an ashram that the iconic and controversial Baba Ramdev has reignited the use of the 'holy army' through his demands to build a 11,000-strong militia from India's youth.[29]

Unbalanced power relationships

As a budding yoga teacher, myself, I became more enamoured by the effects a consistent yoga practice was having on my health and general well-being. This led me to spend a few months in one of the Satyananda ashrams in Australia in the early 2000s, and, later, a year in their Bihar ashram in Monghyr, as well. At some point, an ex-devotee swami explained how, like many others, he felt betrayed by the organisation and guru he had devoted himself to when the systematic abuse of children perpetrated by Swami Akhandananda came to light. Akhandananda claimed that it was from within core values and with the permission of his guru, Swami Satyananda, that these crimes were committed. Akhandananda's rationale was that his guru was doing it and that he was only doing what his teacher had instructed him to do. Over the past two decades, I have met several people who are ex-devotees. I heard from them how they poured their own money into the organisation to help with Akhandananda's legal fees, selling cars and houses. They were told by the organisation that he was innocent and that their guru needed help.

By selflessly helping the guru, without any thought of reward, it is believed that the spiritual energy or grace of the guru will return beyond measure.[30,31] The grace of the guru is apparently immeasurable and infinite.[32] In this unequal power relationship between master and disciple, it is easy to understand how people can give everything to their spiritual master. People willingly gave their life savings, minds, hearts, and bodies. Sadly, however, this even included the bodies of their own children in some instances as they felt the honour and opportunity to accumulate spiritual capital too good to pass on. People felt betrayed as the truth eventually emerged during the court proceedings that found Akhandananda guilty and incarcerated for some time. People on the verge of personal bankruptcy and shamed by the organisation's culpability apparently left the organisation in droves. How could I separate my ideal concept of the pristine 'yogic lifestyle' I was experiencing with the crimes people within this organisation had systematically conducted and tried to hide? Perhaps, here lies the moral loophole that enables such crimes to occur. It is easy to look beyond a 'few bad apples' pinning the blame on individuals instead of the organisation. How could the organisation be blamed? How could the founder and spiritual head be blamed? After all, was Satyananda and his swamis not doing these children a favour?

When people come to see their spiritual masters as beyond reproach excusing them and their colleagues of crimes against defenseless children, the question must be asked, how can people be indoctrinated to believe they are facilitating in the spiritual evolution of a child through participating or averting an eye to such practices? It is even more difficult to understand how parents could willingly send their own child to a pedophile. The answer is found in the fact that these acts are never framed as abuse. Pedophiles hide behind the spiritual capital of their honorific titles, using methods that include secrecy and specialty grooming victims and their families to believe they are chosen, that it is in their best interests and would aid the 'spiritual growth' of children.[33] Also, Shishy explained how, "Blind devotion was heavily encouraged, and this involved being obedient without question. Part of the doctrine was that everyone needed a guru to progress spiritually because no one can have success without one. The guru/disciple relationship was upheld as the ultimate aspect of the spiritual path. For years I thought I would be spiritually damned by turning away from the gurus and supporting the girls instead. This was the level of indoctrination. The guru's authority was absolute. Utter devotion, being a good disciple, was upheld as the highest goal".[34] It seems that people in positions of authority at some point realise they can say and do almost whatever they want with impunity, always putting the blame or doubt back on the devotees as a test of their own fidelity and commitment. The routinised and institutionalised imbalanced power structure lends itself to the possibility of abuses

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of power no matter how pious an image an individual or organisation projects. According to Dr Pemberton, who is an expert on cults and exploitation, 'a charismatic leader can quite easily take advantage of them, especially in an environment which is physically and geographically isolated…unfortunately, these leaders can and do take advantage of their followers and often their authority is never questioned by other members of the group'. Kramer & Alstad[35] who are experts on power and the guru-disciple relationship assert that:... Behind much of the appeal of such authorities lies the primitive and essentially childish hope of an external and magical answer to the existential problems and fears around living and dying. The guru/disciple relationship is a formal structure of extreme authoritarianism. It thus offers a quintessential exemplar of control and surrender, displaying mechanical processes that reinforce predilections toward submission.

Yoga, gurus and sex

The Satyananda organization, is certainly not alone in the cases of yoga sex scandals. I remember one old time yoga enthusiast ruefully explaining two reasons to become a swami. 'Money and sex', he said. Swami Muktananda, a contemporary of Swami Satyananda, who died in 1982, was considered to be the 'guru's guru' for his charismatic performances as a spiritual savant and Tantric 'god [illegible]'. By the end of his life, Muktananda was also embroiled in controversy amid allegations of sexual relations with scores of young women that included threats of violence against potential whistle blowers.[36] The Siddha organisation steadfastly deny any accusations labelled at their guru, even though it was known by many people involved at that time to be Muktananda's open secret; which he rationalised by suggesting to at least one vulnerable devotee that, 'whatever happens now cannot be understood with the mind. Don't think about it a lot. This is just happening, that is all. Just know that this is the greatest day of your Life'.[36]

Most of these liaisons were non-consensual, as they involved an uneven power relationship. Unable to resist the advances of their 'god,' and sworn to secrecy, it is difficult to imagine what one would or would not do if put in the same position. Gurus use fear and threats to control. The disobedience and disrespect trope is used as leverage, as it is believed to have severe negative spiritual consequences that can bring potentially limitless lifetimes of pain and suffering for the devotee. Individuals, who facilitated, participated or kept quiet in several trans-national divine enterprises during the 'spiritual evolution' of young, vulnerable and impressionable women and men and boys and girls should be brought to justice. But, when high ranking politicians, business people and celebrities are in a guru's corner, what hope does one individual, or a collective of abuse survivors, with allegations on a website have against such hegemony? Lindholm,[37] a psychotherapist who specialises in abusive cults explains, Any claim to authenticity is assumed to be at best a 'misrecognition' of what is in reality an unwarranted assertion of hegemony. Culture is no longer the seat of a transcendent sacred order, but is contested, construed and contradictory; a never-ending battleground for superiority among competitors who use the notion of the holy as a ploy.

The long list of allegations of institutionalised abuse and rape at the hands of charismatic 'god men' and 'god women', or by people involved in their organisations, includes other famous gurus, such as the 'hugging saint' Mata Amritanandamayi and Sathya Sai Baba.[38] Together these charismatic figures have tens of millions of devotees all across the world; most of whom fervently deny any such allegations against their gurus, organisations or members from within their communities of faith. According to Nanda's guru typology these two would be considered Type 1 gurus due to the miracles they are said to perform.[39,40] Sai Baba is said to have amassed a fortune worth £5.5 Billion built on simple parlor tricks; which anyone can learn.[41] An explanation of Tredwell[42] book on her twenty-year experience as Amma's personal assistant, describes 'how a modest and traditional ashram metastasises into a business-oriented, bustling, mega-international organization. We also see how such a dizzying rise created vast opportunity for abuse, deceit, and hypocrisy'.[43] While Tredwell is only one voice, the voices speaking out against her are voluminous.[44]

The Leaving Siddha Yoga website is a collective of people's voices against a meditation empire they came to despise.[45] Similar stories of cover-ups, denials and censorship of media, threats of violence and extortion are all too often avoided by the devotees who claim to have a direct line to god through their guru. In fact, for most, they consider their guru to be god. The logic follows that if an individual thinks to question their guru, really, they are questioning god, and that is no way for a good devotee to earn the grace of the guru, or of god. Another example of the export of institutionalised child abuse through the guise of yoga and 'core Indian values' is [illegible]CKON, or Hare Krishna movement's $400 million-dollar lawsuit; which is a result of thousands of parents sending their children to 'traditional' gurukulas (boarding schools) to be educated.[46] The Satyananda Yoga Magazine explains benefits of sending one's child to an ashram or gurukula to be educated.[47]

If a child is educated in an ashram, the education is a real one-the best possible preparation for life ahead. It is the greatest gift any parent can give a child. Parents, who are strong enough to forego the security and attachment they instinctively feel for their children, and allow them to spend a few months or a few years in the ashram environment, will never regret it. Their child will grow up as a most exceptional being, strong in mind and character, decisive in thought, with clear intuitive awareness. He will emerge a spiritual giant able to effectively lead others out of suffering and ignorance and towards a happier life. The ashram environment, under the direct guidance and supervision of the guru, is a most conducive atmosphere in which a child can be educated in this real sense. Here, free from the limitation of social expectations, the child has the chance to grow effortlessly in a totally self-enhancing way. He is able to discover and assert the many facets of his or her precious individuality in the positive, spiritually charged environment of the guru's home. The child who is fortunate enough to live with the guru for some time, grows into a man or woman in the truest sense, possessing greater self awareness, and higher spiritual understanding and responsibility throughout life. This child develops spiritual samskaras (saṁskāras) and avoids the negative impressions which result in suffering, under achievement and unhappiness later on in life. One wonders at how someone could turn a blind-eye or just dismiss claims because they believe their guru is certainly innocent. The spin that is created and logic of denial is evident when such transgressions are used as an opportunity to exert control by turning the question back on the congregation to consider their loyalty and faith in their spiritual master. In the end, allegations of rape and child molestation become a reflexive opportunity for the devotee to assess their own trust and commitment.

Kramer & Alstad[33] describe how 'the ostensible reason for fostering surrender is it detaches followers from certain deep conditionings presumed to be obstacles on the spiritual path. But it does not detach them from one of the most insidious and powerful conditionings of all-the predilection to look for an authority that one can trust more

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than oneself'. As a strategy to get out in front of the allegations, Sathya Sai Baba told his devotees that 'a great scandal is coming'.[37] Sai Baba's use of alleged divine knowledge of the future that disclosed where people would 'tell stories' became an opportunity for them to recalibrate their commitment. It was also a demonstration of his prescience at being able to see and fend off his enemy's plans before they had a chance to enact them, thereby, proving to his congregation his divine status. Shaw[48] explains, that: By surrendering the ego and the sense of doership to the guru, the sins of pride and selfishness are supposedly expiated. Practically, this means that experiencing oneself as a centre of agency and initiative, as a creative person capable of taking pleasure in the use of one's own talents and skills, should be a source of shame–because nothing belongs to oneself; it all belongs to and comes from the guru. On the other hand, one must always be ready to confess and take credit for one's sins and transgressions-which in this system, are the sole property of the follower and his small, impure, selfish ego. One of the most fascinating examples is of a wealthy devotee of Sathya Sai Baba. Isaac Tigrett is the co-founder of the Hard Rock restaurant chain and House of Blues. He donated millions of dollars to Sai Baba, the guru with a Jimi Hendrix style afro, to build a hospital. During an interview, filmed as part of a BBC investigation, Tigrett explained that, while he believes the allegations of pedophilia levelled at his guru have merit, and are probably true, it does not change the way he sees his guru or his relationship to him.[49] What makes someone turn a blind-eye, dismiss such allegations, or, in Tigrett's case, accept them as true, but do nothing to try and stop it from happening, is the control that a guru wields over their devotees. To question the guru demonstrates one's lack of faith; and, in this arena, the threat's of ostracism and excommunication have serious and potentially lasting implications on one's salvational goals.

Final comments

The profits derived from the sale of spirituality, salvation and health and well-being are no just reward for the institutionalised violence committed against children and other vulnerable people. I am certainly not suggesting that yoga teachers are complicit in these crimes simply for teaching yoga. As a former yoga teacher, myself, I find that assertion offensive. These crimes are the result of individuals colluding with each other within cloistered, institutionalised communities; who have come to believe that they were assisting in the spiritual evolution of children in their care by raping them as part of religious practice; which has a particular set of Tantric, albeit Indian values, at its core. While no amount of compensation will ever settle the injustices perpetrated by these apparently enlightened yogis, who, due to their spiritual capital and the logic of devotion, were beyond the rational gaze until the clarity of hindsight was able to wipe the 'guru goggles' clear of the pathological altruism and spiritual bypass occluding their perspectives. When considering what yoga signifies, people think of yoga pants, or, at least in the Australian yoga scene , a retreat on the tropical island of Bali with their friends, as they, perhaps, reinvent themselves as a yoga practitioner; or, take the next step to become a qualified yoga teacher. While this Royal Commission cannot undo what has already been done; perhaps, as a community, we can put a leash on this downward-facing dog before it rears its head and bites someone else's child.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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