

Significance of yoga in ancient India

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Abstract: Multicoloured subcontinent with varied heritage, culture, religions one thing that binds together is the deep spirituality that is vividly seen in India. It is the birth place of Hinduism. It holds the philosophy of yoga. Yoga helps for oneness of human with God. Yoga was simplified by Patanjali who is considered as the author of the Sutras and father of Yoga. Yoga sutras were composed by 200 CE and include philosophical positions and meditation techniques from the Samkhya, Jain and Buddhist traditions. There are many types of Yoga categorized and the main systems of yoga are Hatha Yoga, Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. Yoga teaches to develop inner harmony.

Key Words: Yoga, India, patanjali, Hinduism and significance.

1. INTRODUCTION:

India is a multicoloured subcontinent with varied heritage, culture, religions, languages, states, lifestyle, etc. but one thing that binds India together is the deep spirituality. India is the birth place of many religions like Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. We can see the religious spirit in the day-to-day activities of the people. The philosophy of yoga is deeply religious. Study of this world manifestation by means of science and research is of greatest value. How? "Matter melts into mystery, force resolves into something else, the secret stuff of living forms elude us but the mind is something even finer. By losing these things of appearance and manifestation, we find the reality."⁽¹⁾ Meditation is a universal spiritual wisdom and a practice found at the core of all the great religious traditions, leading from the mind to the heart. It is a way of simplicity, silence and stillness. It can be practiced by anyone, wherever we are on our life's journey. Today we see a great interest in the Eastern methods of meditation, particularly *Yoga* and *Zen* meditations. Here there is integration of body into the prayer. The philosophy of yoga is deeply religious.

Reality is *One* that underlying all forms and manifestations there must be one reality from which all things flow. ⁽²⁾The fundamental objectives of yoga physical exercises are; to acquire good health, to evolve gradual control over both voluntary and involuntary functioning of the body, to strengthen the moral, mental and spiritual character and to achieve the highest value of life.⁽³⁾ In this chapter, one can alight to look into the origin, types and its importance of yoga in one's life. If we look deeper and practice regularly, the ultimate purpose of human existence can be materialized in our lives.

2. The Oneness:

"All Philosophy that counts is based upon some form of Monism-Oneness. The Materialist claims that this *one* is matter that contains within itself the potentiality of matter, energy and mind. The Idealist claims that *one* is something called mind and the matter and force are but ideas in that one mind. The Naturalists claim that this *one* is something called nature which manifests itself in countless forms. Occultists in their Oriental and Accidental Schools taught that the *one* was a being whose life constituted the life of all living forms. Theologians claim that the *one* is a personal god to whom they attribute certain qualities characteristics etc., varying with their creeds and dogmas."⁽¹⁾ The oneness of human with God is yoga.

3. History and Origin of Yoga:

Yoga as one of the philosophies of India with an identifiable Sanskrit textual heritage is closely related to a companion system of philosophy in Sanskrit, a *Samanatantra* known as the *Samkhya* philosophy.⁽²⁾

Yoga comes from the Latin word '*Jugum*'⁽⁴⁾ and Sanskrit word '*Yug*' means to join/yoke or to unite as one. So *yoga* means union. That means the union with oneself, union between human beings, union between man and nature and union with the Creator.⁽³⁾ *Yoga* is an ancient system of spiritual practice in traditions of Archaic folk, *Buddhist*, *Jaina*, *Epic*, *Theistic*, *Saivas*, *Vainavas*, *Tantric* and also in *Vedic* and *Upanisadic* heritage.

Yoga was simplified by Patanjali in 500 A.D. He was considered as the author of the Sutras and father of *Yoga*.⁽³⁾ Patanjali emphasizes more on the sutras and mantras. *Yoga* sutras were composed by 200 CE and include philosophical positions and meditation techniques from the *Samkhya*, *Jain* and *Buddhist* traditions.

4. Types of Yoga: There are many types of *Yoga* categorized by many gurus. The main systems or paths of *yoga* are *Hatha Yoga*, *Raja Yoga*, *Jnana Yoga*, *Karma Yoga* and *Bhakti Yoga*.⁽⁵⁾ Patanjali enumerates eight steps in *yoga* which is also known as eight limbs of *Raja Yoga*. The first five limbs of *Astanga Yoga* comes under *Bahiranga Yoga* known as External and the last three under *Antaranga Yoga* which is called as Internal *Yoga*. These steps are given below.⁽⁶⁾ *Bahiranga Yoga* keeps the body strong, supple, and healthy and the emotions under control.

4.1. Yama (Self Restraint): *Yama* is the very foundation of *yoga*. It is the Social or Ethical discipline, consisted of five steps. *Yama* enables the users to achieve command over speech, mind, body and emotions.

4.1.1. Ahimsa: It means non-violence that is not only in action but also in speech and thought. Even a single word or a sign or an even a look with non-violence is enough to disturb the whole community.⁽³⁾ *Ahimsa* is perfect harmlessness. Estimate the best nature within. It is a positive cosmic love and wonderful quality of the heart. It is supreme love and weapon of the strong.

4.1.2. Satya: “It means truthfulness in action, word and thought. Be truthful in everything.”⁽³⁾ As Gandhiji followed this virtue in his life, every human should practice to lead a happy life in this world. Truth is the highest form of conduct and makes a man successful in his aim.

4.1.3. Asteya: Means non-stealing. Do not think or ask or take what one should not have. Not stealing other people’s thoughts, honour, time also is *Asteya*.⁽³⁾ One who practices it will get wealth comes to him on its own, but he may not accept it.

4.1.4. Brahmacharya: It has the meaning of keeping control of one’s desires, especially sexual desires that is celibacy. One can break it easily through words or thoughts or in action.⁽³⁾ It gives vigour and strength, ensures good health and paves way to achieve peace and a long life.

4.1.5. Aparigraha: *Aparigraha* means non-covet. Accept what you have and don’t ask for more. The nature of human is so greedy and we must be satisfied with our basic needs.⁽³⁾ Accumulations disturb the mind which is the root cause of all unhappiness.

4.2. Niyama: It is the Individual discipline, self purification or observance of peace, both inward and outward. It consists of five steps.

4.2.1. Saucha: “It means total cleanliness in internal and external.”⁽³⁾ Both internal and external means thought, word and deed. Cleanliness and purity needed in body and mind. Physical purity which is external leads to mental purity. Sympathy, happiness, good habits are internal purity.

4.2.2. Santosha: Be content with what comes to you, good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant with a continuous flow of happiness, the internal balance.⁽³⁾ When the mind is balance, intellect functions normally that fetches peace of mind.

4.2.3. Tapas: It means ‘to burn or become hot’ in Sanskrit, an inner fire or energy which enables one to control the body and the mind. This power is created by ascetic practices like fasting, silence and self-discipline. The supreme *tapas* are fixing the mind on the Supreme Self.⁽³⁾ It gives individual realisation at a higher level by strict discipline and austerity.

4.2.4. Swadhya: Literally means the study of the self. One attains the knowledge of the self through the study of the scriptures and uttering the name of God. He gives heed to the self in everybody and receives knowledge from everyone.⁽³⁾

4.2.5. Isvara Pranidhana: *Pranidhana* means devotion to the Lord. *Isvara*’s role in *yoga* is as great Guru or Master, who can bring *Samadhi* to the *yogin* who takes him as the object of his concentration. His only object is *Isvara*. The Lord’s holy name will always be in the hearts and lips of his devotees.⁽³⁾

4.3. Asana: The posture for meditation must be *Sthira-Sukha* *Asana* that means being in a steady and pleasant posture. If one wants to be in steady and pleasant posture, one’s body must be healthy, well balanced and controlled. Once we sit in one posture, there should not be any disturbance from any part of the body. The whole attention must be fixed on the meditative point.⁽³⁾ *Asanas* are divided into two group namely meditative postures and the other postures which give exercise to the various parts of the body. The names of *asanas* are derived from the postures of different animals, birds, mountains and trees. A few examples are cited here; *Simhasana* from Lion’s posture,⁽⁷⁾ *Mayurasana* from Peacock’s posture,⁽⁷⁾ *Sarpasana* from Snake’s posture,⁽⁷⁾ *Matsyasana* from Fish posture,⁽⁷⁾ *Tadasana* from Mountain posture⁽⁷⁾ and *Vrikshasana* from Tree posture.⁽⁷⁾

4.4. Pranayama: *Pranayama* is a Sanskrit name which is derived from *Prana*-the divine mother energy, and *Yama*-control. It is the science of breath, that control the vital force or life energy in the air we breathe through inhaling and exhaling. According to the Bible, *prana* is closely connected with the spirit, literally means breath. “In the beginning God’s spirit moved over the water like a wind” (Gen.1:2), and “God breathed into man’s nostrils and man became a

living soul” (Gen. 2:7). *Yogis* learn to control their breathing and prolonged their life. ⁽³⁾ As the breath that inhaled helps to cleanse the impurities of air in the lungs, this type of *yoga* helps to cleanse and give long life.

4.5. Prathyhara: *Prathyhara* means withdrawal of the senses from the sense objects to the center of our being. It is to renounce the world outside and withdraw oneself like a tortoise. ⁽³⁾ It is control of the senses. Also it is considered to be the bridge between external and internal *Yoga*.

4.6. Dharana: *Dharana* means concentrating with all our heart and soul, mind and strength on the center where the outer world and inner world, the external senses and internal senses meet in a point, *Chakra i.e.*, the point between the eyebrows. ⁽³⁾ Concentration of the mind on a particular single point brings out full power of concentration.

4.7. Dhyana: *Dhyana* means a continuous meditation or deep thinking beyond the mind. It leads into the realization of the inner self, the centre of the soul in which the *Jivatma* and *Paramatma* meet together. ⁽³⁾ Being with God without any interruption in flow of thought results in forgetting oneself and being like Him.

4.8. Samadhi: *Samadhi* means contemplation or union. In this state we and the inner self become one. Here one discovers the meaning of union within oneself. It means the final state which is experienced differently in different religions. Sankaracharya calls this state as *Advaita*, Buddha calls it as *Nirvana*, Jains call this as *Kaivalya-isolation*, in Hinduism “*Aham Brahmanasmi*” that means ‘I am *Brahman*’. ⁽³⁾

5. SIGNIFICANCE OF YOGA:

Yoga teaches us to develop inner harmony. It enables us to realize oneness with all humanity. ⁽³⁾ *Rta*, the cosmic law keeps the harmony of man with nature, creature, fellowmen and the creator. This is the law of God. ⁽³⁾ The *Yoga* Philosophy has divided *Yoga* into four branches namely *Hatha Yoga*, *Raja Yoga*, *Gnani Yoga* and *Bhakti Yoga*. “*Hatha Yoga*” is a path that leads to develop, control and strengthen one’s physical body to render it a fit instrument of higher self. ‘*Ha*’ stands for Sun and ‘*tha*’ for Moon. Conscious (*tha*) reflected the light of the soul (*Ha*). ⁽⁷⁾ “*Raja Yoga*” is the study of one’s will power and mental faculties unfolding the inner sense and latent powers. “*Gnani Yoga*” is the path that helps to develop by “knowing” and “studying” the fundamental principles and wonderful truths underlying Life. “*Bhakti Yoga*” means the path that helps to grow into a union with one life by the influence of love. ⁽¹⁾ *Yoga* practice can neutralize the germs and viruses. ⁽⁸⁾ *Yogi* enjoys a balanced personality. If the backbone is supple, the central nervous system is strong and *prana* circulates freely preventing disease and promoting well being. ⁽⁹⁾ Physical body is well trained to reach self-realisation. *Yoga* postures exert a profound and salutary influence upon the internal vital organs of the body. ⁽³⁾ *Yoga* will lead to increasing self mastery which controls the mind and all its functions including speech. ⁽⁷⁾

6. CONCLUSION:

Yoga becomes simple when the theory of *yoga* is translated into practice. *Yoga* as one of the philosophies of India is revived as Sanskrit textual heritage. It demands curbing of our egoism, annihilation of selfishness and effective control of our mind and senses to function in tune with God. It leads to harmonize the self with society and with God. It integrates our personality by revealing our own inner nature, its potentialities and limitations. The transformation of the human heart takes place by the process of social service, worship of God, inward contemplation, health giving physical posture and breathing exercises and so on. It achieves the greatest miracle of a new transformed human, the God man.

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