

OUTLINE OF HISTORY OF YOGA

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ABSTRACT

The article gives the definition of Yoga and traces references to Yoga from very ancient period. Allusions to Yoga-directly or indirectly- are traced from Indus Valley Civilisation, Vedas, Brahmanas, Upanishads, Puranas and also from Kalidasa and Shankara.

Introduction:

The history of Yoga is immemorial and timeless as the man himself. Since the dawn of history, various extraordinary phenomena have been recorded amongst human beings. Man, however brilliant, is only a conduit for the infinite knowledge and power that lies dormant in him, but ready to be invoked by sustained *Sadhana* i.e. disciplined effort.

India stands unique among the nations of the world, because of its eternal culture, spiritual eminence and Yogic excellence. That is why people throng the country from all over the world in a never-ending stream, with a view to drink deep at the fountain of its inexhaustible knowledge. All the past great cultures of the world - Egyptian, Greek and Roman - have since perished leaving only legacies behind. India, and its culture too, had to pass through the same Modern Civilisation, and besides other additional crises, but it continued to remain because of its innate elasticity that succeeded in embracing all the dimensions and vicissitudes, through which Indian society had to wade through. Indian philosophy teaches one to stand on one's own feet.

Rigveda has fundamental knowledge, dealing with general sciences social sciences and day-to-day problems. After acquiring knowledge one should resort to action, and this action is described in Yajurveda. It deals with *karmakanda*, and hence may be designated as *karmaveda*. *Samaveda* is the Veda of assimilation and peace. Atharvana Veda contains powerful *mantras* for propitiating *pranasakthi* for winning wars, for reviving people seriously wounded and killed, and for causing death of enemies or unwanted people.

Differences existed between sages that held that the knowledge of *trayi vidya* i.e. Rig, Yajur & Sama Vedas, was sufficient, and those that held that the Atharvana Veda also should be joined to *trayividya*. In fact, Parashara, father of Vyasa, believed in the efficacy of Atharvana lore to be practised side by side with the other three Vedas. Like his father,

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Vyasa also felt that without Atharvana lore, the body could not be saved from ailments, nor royalty from disaster.

Vyasa maintained that the radiant power (*brahma tejas*) of the ' word ' should always remain allied to radiant valour(*kshatra tejas*) of kings. In the case of ordinary people, it may be interpreted as a combination of Yoga is not spiritual knowledge with physical health through Yoga.¹

Yoga and its Definition :

It is a common practice to derive Sanskrit terms from their roots. Yoga is derived from " yuj " meaning to join or to yoke. Hence the term Yoga conveys the sense of union - the linking or joining of the individual self with the Higher Self. In other words, Yoga is linking of the individual soul with the Supreme; and the system of Yoga suggests the method of bridging the gulf between the Higher Self and the lower self. The line of Yoga is not one of mere profession; it is one of confession and dedication².

Lord Siva, also called Adinatha Bhairava, is accepted as the primordial founder and propounder of all techniques of Yoga. Sage Yajnavalkya says "*Hiranyagarbho yogasya vaktha nanyah puratanaha*", which means that Hiranyagarbha is the earliest propounder of Yoga and none other.³

Allusions to Yoga :

Indus Valley Civilisation: According to some scholars, Yoga was a special feature of the Dravidian period, as revealed by Indus Valley Civilisation. The relics indicate that Yoga in some form was current in the remote antiquity as well. The Phallic symbols and idols of mother Goddess suggest a type of Tantra Yoga. Sir John Marshall says " The God is seated in a typical attitude of Yoga... .." Some of the seals, among the Mohanjedaro relics contain pictures of deities in Yogic postures. Scholars like Eliade maintain that Yoga owes much to the Pre-Aryan heritage⁴.

Vedas: The word Yoga occurs in the Rigveda in various senses, such as yoking, harnessing, achieving the unachieved or connection and the like. With the growth of religion and philosophical ideas in the Rigveda, we find that the religious austerities were generally very much valued. The force of flying passions was felt to be uncontrollable as that of the spirited steed, and this word Yoga, which was originally applied to the control of the steeds, began to be applied to the control of the senses. The word yoking is used in later Vedic works such as Shatapatha Brahmana⁵.

Three passages in Shatapatha Brahmana where the word Yoga occurs are just reproductions from Rigveda (19-2-7 ; 20-27-1; 20-69-1). At one

place the words used 'Astanga' and 'Sadanga' suggest the Yoga of eight and six accessories ⁶.

The word Yoga occurs in two places in the "Vajasaneyi Samhita" of Yajurveda. Of these, one passage has been borrowed from Rigveda. Thus the origin of several Yogic concepts, certainly goes back to the age of Rigveda ⁷.

That certain practices, known as Yoga, were generally prevalent amongst the wise, seems very probable, for these are alluded to not only in some of the Upanishads, but also accepted by the two *Nastika* schools of Buddhism and Jainism ⁸.

That person who is experienced in *Pranayama*, exhales in a steady, slow and rhythmic manner. *Sruthi* also mentions the same. "*Bhutva Tatrayatah pranah sanai reva samuchrujeth*", meaning that during *pranayama*, the *prana vayu* should be exhaled slowly and steadily. By the practice of *pranayama*, breath is retained resulting in concentration ⁹.

It is also mentioned meaning that by Yoga *jnana* is awakened, and such *jnana* further enhances Yoga power ¹⁰.

Brahmanas: Importance of yoking the mind has also been greatly stressed in the Taittiriya Brahmana. The Shatapatha Brahmana also states that nothing can be done properly without yoking the mind, and that *prana* is said to be the body of the self ¹¹.

Upanishads: The word Yoga is used in *sloka* 11 of Kathopanishad (Chapter II/Section 6) :

"*Tam Yogamithi manyanthe. sthiram indriya dharanam*". - Firm control of senses is regarded as Yoga. When the five senses and mind become controlled and the intellect also becomes steady, then that stage is the highest, and that is called Yoga ¹².

Yajnavalkya: Vedic sage, Yajnavalkya, says that just as evening Sun cools his radiance so also the person who practises *asana* (3rd *anga* of Patanjali Yoga) will be free from mental distortions and becomes stable-minded. Yajnavalkya also says that having *Atma darsan* (realisation of soul) through Yoga is better than trying to achieve the same through *achara, yoga, dama, ahimsa, dhyana, svadhyaya* etc ¹³.

"After practising *asanas*, then Oh Gargi, the man who has conquered the postures will practise *pranayama*..... *Pranayama* is composed of *rechaka, puraka, and kumbhaka* and joining the *prana* with *apana*.....

by *pranayama* the impurities of the body are thrown out, and by *samadhi* is taken off everything that hides the lordship of the soul ¹⁴.

Samhitas : In chapter V *sloka* 9 of Siva Samhita, it is said that Yoga is of four kinds—*mantrayoga*, *hathayoga*, *layayoga* and *Rajayoga*. In chapter-III *sloka* 84, it is said that there are 284 *asanas* (postures), and out of them the following four are recommended to be practised—Siddha, Padma, Ugra and Swastika. Here also importance is given for meditative postures meant for effective practice of *pranayama* ¹⁵.

In the ancient work of Saivagama, Adinatha (Lord Siva) urges upon the most perfect Yogin also not to give up the practice of *asana-pranayama* (with *Kumbhaka* etc), for the purpose of keeping the body in perfect good health, as all human beings are required to keep their houses in perfect cleanliness ¹⁶.

In Jnanatantra, one *sloka* runs—“Iswara taught Parvati that even if one is a *jnani* (realised soul) or has renounced or is established in *dharma* or has all senses under his control or even if he is a God, one, cannot achieve *moksha* without Yoga Sadhana”¹⁷

Manu in Yatidharma Prakarana says that by Cosmic oneness, achieved through practice of Yoga, one is endowed with the faculty of vision, which penetrates into the past and the future ¹⁸.

In Panini's time, the word Yoga attained its technical meaning and Panini distinguished this root “Yuj Samadhau” (“Yuj” in the sense of concentration) from “Yujir Yoge” (root “Yujir” in the sense of connecting).

Kautilya in his Artha Sastra, while enumerating the philosophical sciences of study, names Samkhya, Yoga and Lokayata.

In Yoga Vasistha, Vasistha told Rama as follows: Oh Rama! the terrible disease of this fast changing *samsara* can be eradicated by the pure *mantra* of Yoga ¹⁹.

It is further said in Yoga Vasistha as follows: For one Yoga is possible and for another Jnana is possible. Hence, God has shown both these paths in the beginning itself ²⁰.

Bhagwad Gita : 4th chapter *sloka* 1 runs as follows: The Lord (Srikrishna) said I taught this imperishable Yoga to Vivaswan; Vivaswan taught it to Manu; Manu taught it to Ikshvaku. At the very beginning of creation, knowledge of Vedas was imparted by the Lord to the Sun-God, who in turn conveyed it to his son, Manu, the ancient law-giver of India.

Manu, in his turn, expounded it to Ikshvaku, the ancestor of the solar dynasty, that ruled over Ayodhya for a long period ²¹.

Sloka 46 of Chapter VI (on meditation) runs as follows :

“The Yogi is thought to be superior to the ascetics, and even superior to men of knowledge (mere scholars) ; he is also superior to men-of-action ; therefore (you strive to) be a Yogi, O Arjuna,’ (Yoga is also mentioned in Sloka 33 of chapter 18) ²²

Yoga is mentioned in Mahabharata in Bhishma Parvan. In Shanti Parvan, Yoga is referred to as a system of philosophy. In Mokshadharma Parvan, Yoga has been described as a source of great psychic power, according to Kenghe ²³.

Buddhist Period : A study of Jain and Buddhist Yoga can certainly help in understanding better the growth of Yoga, as also the terminology used by Patanjali.

The oldest Buddhist Sutras (e. g. Satipathana Satta) are fully familiar with the stage of Yoga concentration. We may thus infer that self-concentration and Yoga had developed as a technical method of mystic absorption, sometime before the Buddha²⁴.

In Buddhism, the influence of Yoga can be seen more glaringly and in its own turn, Buddha has also contributed a good deal to the development of Yoga. Buddha himself was a great Yogi ²⁵.

Patanjali's Yoga : (Otherwise known as Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali or Raja Yoga) : “The science of Raja Yoga proposes to put before humanity a practical and scientifically worked out method to reach this truth. The science of Raja Yoga proposes to give us the means of observing the internal states; the instrument is the mind itself. A part of the practice of Raja Yoga is physical, but in the main it is mental”, says Swami Vivekananda ²⁶.

A verse regarding Patanjali runs as follows : My obeisance to Patanjali Maharshi, who wrote *vaidya sastra* for the removal of bodily ailments ; who wrote *mahabhashya* for grammar to make the words perfect ; and who wrote the Yoga Sastra to eradicate modifications of the “Chitta”. Patanjali wrote the three *sastras* for the purification of the “*sthula, sukshma* and *karana sariras*” ²⁷.

“Patanjali's Yoga is absolute extremism”, says Dasgupta. “The Yoga of Patanjali is an ethical system. While it takes note of all short-comings and weaknesses, it does not give licence to the norms of life. The system evolved by Patanjali is purely a Vedic system, based on the Vedas and Upanishads” says Swamy Satya Prakash (in Patanjali Raja Yoga).

According to Patanjali. Yoga is the cessation of the thought-flow of the mind, i. e. *chitta vritti nirodha*. In his book on "Raja Yoga", Swami Vivekananda says that Chitta, mind stuff, is in every animal but it is only in the human being that we find it as intellect, in which form only the soul can be liberated. It is man's intelligence that is percolating through the mind, and man becomes intelligent only when he stands behind the mind. Chitta is compared to the lake and the *vrittis* to the waves. The bottom of lake is one's own true self. The bottom of lake cannot be seen because of the ripples on the surface. Activity is strength, but the greatest manifestation of power is to be calm, i. e. *chitta vritti nirodha*.

Patanjali not only collected different forms of Yoga practices and gleaned the diverse ideas which were or could be associated with Yoga, but also grafted them all on the Sankhya metaphysics, and gave them a form in which they have been handed down to us. The systematic manner in which the first three chapters are written, by way of definition and classification, shows that the Yoga materials were already in existence and that Patanjali only systematised them. Some maintain that the 4th chapter is a subsequent addition.

By the word "Yoga", the popular conception today, throughout the world including India, is *asanas* and *pranayama*. For our purposes here, we shall deal with the subject of "Yoga" as consisting of *asanas* and *pranayama*.

Post-Patanjali Period :

Kalidasa in his book "Raghuvamsa" says: One gets educated in boyhood, indulges in sensual pleasures in youth, leads the life of an ascetic in old age, and in the end renounces his body through Yogic practices. He is certainly a person who has practised Yoga throughout his life and mastered its techniques.

In Canto-III (stanzas 45 and 59) in Kumarasambhava of Kalidasa, *asana* (posture) is suggested. In stanza 58 of Canto III of the same book mention is made about Yoga.

Sankara in his "Aparoksha Anubhuthi" (slokas 102-103) has advocated for attaining Samadhi, the following 15 steps, calling it Raja Yoga: *yama*, *niyama*, *thyaga*, *mauna*, *desa*, *kala*, *asana*, *moolabandha* (control of root cause) *deha samya* (equipoise of body) *drishthi* (clear vision), *prana samya-mana* (control of vital airs), *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana* & *samadhi*. Sankara has mentioned about *asana-pranayama*, though the order is different.

Sankara also says that the practice of Hatha Yoga is intended for those, whose nature required to be purged of all impurities. Since the majority of men are not free from the infirmities of their lower nature, it

follows that the majority of students are in need of a training, which would fit them for the pursuit of the higher system of Raja Yoga, a training which no system is so well adapted to secure as the Hatha Yoga (says Brahmananda)²⁸.

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सारांश

योग के इतिहास की रूपरेखा

ले० सीतारामय्या

यह लेख 'योग' की परिभाषा देता है तथा अति प्राचीन काल से विद्यमान योग के संदर्भों को ढूँढ निकालता है। योग से संबंधित संदर्भ प्रत्यक्ष या परोक्ष रूप में इंदूस वैली सभ्यता, वेदों, ब्राह्मणों, उपनिषदों, पुराणों तथा कालिदास और शंकराचार्य से भी उद्धृत किये गये हैं।