

Yoga: India's Gift to the World

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Abstract—Yoga and India are synonymous. Yoga is a five thousand year old harmonizing process of body, mind and soul which is originated in India. Though it is unique to India, our great Rishis like Patanjali made it universal by compiling Yoga- sutras and declared that it can be practiced by anybody at any time.

Though it is introduced in the west in mid 19 th century by Indian monks like Vivekananda and Yogananda, It gained popularity in 1960 s. It reached far off nations after being recognized, June 21st of every year as “The International Day of Yoga” by the United Nation of Organization on December 11, 2014. It has been adapted by so many countries of the world and is being practiced by millions around the world.

My paper will provide a general information about the origin, sources, limbs of yoga, its benefits and ongoing research on yoga. It is India's responsibility to teach the real meaning of yoga which is the union of Jivatma with Paramatma and not as the foreigners think that the yoga is about asanas only. “complete personality” can be achieved by doing yoga properly.

Keywords: yoga, the International Day of Yoga, Vivekananda, personality, Patanjali.

1. INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization defines “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. Man is able to control his outside material world with his ever updated technology and able to manage the whole planet with his scientific ideas but unable to understand his limits and control his mind's unbearable pressure. He is able to chase away so many dangerous infectious diseases from the Earth, but at the same getting burdened with non communicable or lifestyle diseases associated with development and technology.

At this juncture, Indian Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi proposed the adoption of 21 June as International Day of Yoga, during his address to UN General Assembly on 27 September 2014. On 11 December 2014, United Nations General Assembly approved 21 June as 'International Day of Yoga'. In suggesting 21 June, which is one of the two solstices, as the International Day of Yoga, he said that the date is the longest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere and has special significance in many parts of the world.

The first International Day of Yoga was observed world over on 21 June 2015. About 35000 people, including Indian Prime Minister Sri Narendra Modi and a large number of dignitaries, performed 21 Yoga asanas (yoga postures) for 35 minutes at Rajpath in New Delhi. The day devoted to Yoga was observed by millions across the world.

2. MEANING AND ORIGIN OF YOGA

Yoga is a group of physical, mental, and spiritual practice which originated in ancient India. The word Yoga is derived from Sanskrit root word *yuj* means “to join” or “to unite”. In western context, though Yoga is associated more with physical exercises and a little bit mental concentration. In Indian way it is purely to unite the Jivatma (individual soul) with Paramatma (universal soul). Someone who practices yoga is called yogi (may be applied to a man or a woman) or yogini (traditionally denoting a woman).^[1]

The origins of yoga found in Rigveda, it reached its zenith in the upanishadic time. Bhagvadgita synthesizes many different yogas. Many schools and forms of yoga are there within Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. “Yoga philosophy is reckoned to be part of the non-Vedic system, which also includes the Samkhya school of Hindu philosophy, Jainism and Buddhism:”[Jainism] does not derive from Brahman-Aryan sources, but reflects the cosmology and anthropology of a much older pre-Aryan upper class of North –Eastern India being rooted in the same subsoil of archaic metaphysical speculation as Yoga, Samkhya, and Buddhism, the other non-Vedic Indian systems.”^[2]

3. THE PIONEER OF CLASSICAL YOGA: PATANJALI

Before coming to Patanjali, we have to take a look at Samkhya Philosophy of Kapila Muni, in which he propounded two basic eternal elements, Prakriti and Purusha. Samkhya says that the Knowledge of Purusha makes the individual to be free from bondage caused by the identification of self with the unintelligent Prakriti, but we can't find the way how to attain that knowledge in his teachings. Based on this theory, Patanjali Yogi, with his unparalleled intellect and practice, compiled Yoga Sutras.

Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

Pada (chapter)	English meaning	Sutras
Samadhi Pada	On being absorbed in spirit	51
Sadhana Pada	On being immersed in spirit	55
Vibhuti Pada	On supernatural abilities and gifts	56
Kaivalya Pada	On absolute freedom	34

Astanga Yoga (Eight Limbed Yoga).

In sutra (aphorism) 2 of book 1 Patanjali defines Yoga as

योगः चित्त-वृत्ति निरोधः

yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhah

“Yoga is restraining the mind-stuff (Chitta) from taking various forms (Vrttis)”^[3]

Patanjali mentioned eight steps of yoga in his 29th sutra of book 2. One has to follow them carefully under the guidance of a trained teacher to attain Moksha (Liberation).

1. **Yama** (The five "abstentions"): Ahimsa (Nonviolence), Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (celibacy) and Aparigraha (non-avarice, non-possessiveness).
2. **Niyama** (The five "observances"): Śauca (purity of mind, speech and body), Santosha (contentment, acceptance of others and of one's circumstances), Tapas (persistent meditation, perseverance, austerity), Svādhyāya (study of self, self-reflection) and Ishvara-Pranidhana (contemplation of God/Supreme Being/True Self).
3. **Asana**: Literally means "seat", and in Patanjali's Sutras refers to the seated position used for meditation.
4. **Pranayama** ("Controlling Breath"): *Prāna*, breath, "āyāma", to restrain or stop. Also interpreted as control of the life force.
5. **Pratyahara** ("Abstraction"): Withdrawal of the sense organs from external objects.
6. **Dharana** ("Concentration"): Fixing the attention on a single object.
7. **Dhyana** ("Meditation"): Intense contemplation of the nature of the object of meditation.

8. **Samadhi** ("Liberation"): merging consciousness with the object of meditation.^[4]

One has to practice them regularly and slowly under the guidance of a teacher, for fast and accurate results. Though there are so many Yogas like Karma (Action) yoga, Bhakti (Devotion) yoga and Jnana (knowledge) yoga, the Patanjali yoga remains the “King of Yogas” in Indian Philosophy. The other forms of yogas in the world are based on Yoga of Patanjali in one way or the other.

4. ELIGIBILITY TO PRACTICE YOGA

The first and foremost eligibility to practice yoga is to be a human, so we all have this. Patanjali mentioned that it can be practiced at any time (with empty stomach and it is better to do at the time of dawn and dusk), at any place and anybody (who are above 5 years).^[5] The Yoga can be practiced either to maintain good health or to attain Moksha (Liberation).

5. JOURNEY OF YOGA TO THE WEST

The first Hindu teacher to actively advocate and disseminate aspects of yoga to a western audience, Swami Vivekananda, toured Europe and the United States in the 1890s. his teachings influenced eminent scholars and intellectuals like William James during 1920s in USA, yoga suffered a period of bad publicity ,but 1950s yoga began to gain popularity by india yoga teachers like Swamy Shivananda, T. Krishnamacharya, B.K.S. Iyengar, Swamy Satchidanada.

6. WORLDWIDE RESEARCH ON YOGA

- 95-97 percent muscle movements are possible through Surya Namaskar (12 poses).
- The cells and DNA are activated by doing Pranayama and meditation.^[6]
- In a research by Benarus Hindu University, it is proved that practicing yoga reduces heart diseases by increasing blood supply to heart as it increases the width of blood vessels by minimizing the fat content.
- Yoga is also an anti-aging technique and one can increase one's longevity.^[7]

7. PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL BENEFITS OF YOGA

- One can get physical health by Yogasanas (postures) and mental health by Pranayama (breath control)
- Yoga decreases pressures and tensions
- It is very useful in chasing away inferiority complex and boosting self confidence,

- Controls Blood Pressure and balances sugar levels.
- By doing Pranayama regularly we can also get some relief from asthma.
- Some postures are very useful for some ailments. For example,
 - Vajrasan (diamond posture) reduces acidity.
 - Shashankasan (rabbit posture) improves liver's health
 - Tadasan (rope posture) is useful in reducing backbone pain
- Recently a survey reveals that 75 percent of human diseases are born out of mind, and so by controlling our mind we can cure one third of problems.

8. THE ROLE OF INDIA AS A TEACHER

India can now establish a separate university for carrying research on Yoga. It also can be introduced in schools and colleges of India. Yoga instructors from India must go around the world to teach yoga. The Government of India and state governments can initiate Surya Namaskar at school level which improves health of students who are getting obese with their food habits and life style.

The government in general, the NGO's and Vedic- Yoga institutions in India must realize that it is the best opportunity for India to cast its Yogic wisdom throughout the world to prove itself and to establish harmony and peace on the mother Earth.

Endnotes:

[1] American Heritage Dictionary: "Yogi, One who practices yoga." Websters: "Yogi, A follower of the yoga philosophy; an ascetic."

[2] Zimmer, Heinrich (1951), *Philosophies of India*, New York, New York: Princeton University Press, ISBN 0-691-01758-1 Bollingen Series XXVI; Edited by Joseph Cambell.

[3] <http://www.yogaincentro.it/uploads/file/PatanjaliYogaSutraSwamiVivekanandaSanEng.pdf> page 9.

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoga#cite_note-30

[5] *Patanjali yoga sutras 2.31*

[6] <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/changing-our-dna-through-mind-control/>

[7] http://www.healthandyoga.com/html/news/motivational/metabolic_factors.aspx