

# Philosophy of Yoga: Its origin and basis of today's Yoga practices and varying goals of practitioners!

(Renunciation, Bodily Transformation, Relaxation or Therapeutic Benefits)

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## Introduction

This article aims to establish the basis of the Yoga that is practised today by exploring the earlier practices, philosophical thinking, and goal to achieve from the Yoga during the Vedic period of Hinduism History. The article further explores how the original methods and philosophy evolved during the medieval period with the influence of Tantra, tantric practices and philosophy. A comparative analysis of processes and philosophical thinking is then examined by exploring the seminal Yoga text and the modern tantric texts on Yoga to reach an informed understanding of Yoga practices, its evolution in the last few centuries and benefits anticipated by the practitioners.

## The Yoga Practices during the Vedic Period (1500 BC to 500 BC)

The Yoga practices reference can be found in several Vedic texts such as The Katha Upanishad, The Shvetashvatara Upanishad, The Mahabharata, The Bhagavad-Gita, and the Patanjali's Yoga Sutra. Kath Upanishad displays a clear awareness of Yoga techniques through which higher realisation is attained. The emphasis here is on bringing the mind and senses under control (v.8.9), and then the realised knowledge of *Atman* is sought as the goal of Yoga (vv.14-15). The Shvetashvatara Upanishad, in its first two chapters, address the subject of Yoga. It states that our soul is in a state of *bondage* (1.2), but there is a Deity who is beyond all bondage, and the one who practices the *Dhyana yoga* can perceive him (*te dhyana-yoganugata apasyan devatma-shakti* 1.3) along with *Atman* and the *Shakti*, i.e. energy referred to as matter (George, 2001; Feuerstein, (2001).

The reference to Yoga and instructions are also found in Mahabharata book 12 in the Shanti Parvan chapter. There are several chapters where Bhishma to Arjun, Japaka & King Ikshvaku, Rishi Vyasa to Suka and Bhishma to Yudhishtira; are either giving discourse or explaining about Yoga. These chapters provide significant insight into the main form of Yoga practices and define the goal of Yoga that is Brahman. There is precisely 884 times reference to Yoga in these chapters (Edgerton, 1924). During this Vedic period, the Yoga advocated a means of gaining empowerment that allows the soul to break free of its connection with matter (Body & Mind).

Bhagavad Gita introduces different Yoga forms such as *Karma Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, *Raja Yoga*, *Jñana*, and *Dhyana Yoga*. A brief reference to Pranayama is found in chapter 4 (v 41 & 42) where Krishna explains practices that can be regarded as forms of *Jñana-Yajñā*, two verse at the end of chapter 5 that provides an introduction to the more extended exposition that runs throughout chapter 6, and a relatively brief discussion in the middle of chapter 8 where

Yoga and *Bhakti* are drawn together into a single system. The Yoga practices outline in the Gita is similar to those in the Upanishad's and Mahabharata.

Patanjali Yoga Sutra (PYS) is referred to as the principal work on Yoga with authoritative status. It is considered a seminal work that defines the system (Iyengar, 2002). The four-section of the texts include *the Samadhi-pada, the Sadhana-pada, the Vibhuti-pada, and the Kaivalya-pada*. Chapter 2 (v 28 & 29) that is the central notion of Yoga practice explains the *Asthanga Yoga (Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi)*. The Yoga Sutras describe the philosophy of Yoga and explains why it is necessary, what it can achieve, how it can be efficacious, and the type of that is to be followed. Our every action and thought leaves a latent impression on our consciousness, which comes to fruition at some point as our material existence is carried forward. These action and thoughts determine our next birth, and Yoga philosophy teaches us to perpetuate our rebirth (Satchidananda, 2012).

It is the Yoga derived from these above sources is referred to as Classical Yoga. The objective here is to unite the *Jeevaatma*, the individual soul, which dwells in the human body, with the *Paramatma*, the universal soul, spread all over the Universe. In other words detaching the human being from the worldly affairs and uniting them with God (Iyengar, 2002). The practice emphasis is finding ways to control the mind's fluctuation and external focus by practising a type of meditation that allows direct perception of the true self within one's being. In other words, Yoga in the early period was a technique through which the adept can attain the level of realisation required for the soul to break free of its bondage in the matter (Feuerstein, 1998; 2001).

### **Vedic Rituals to Tantric Practices**

In between AD 300 to 600, a shift in the religious practices took place, and during this period, the origins of the temple and the worship of sacred images started which were different to Vedic rituals and are known as Tantra or Tantric practices (Kalamakar, 2011). This change is unknown, but Vedic priests seem to have accepted the change and started practising the worship of sacred images. The word Tantra is derived from the Sanskrit word, Tan - meaning "expansion," and tra, meaning "instrument". Tantra involves the right and left-hand path. The left-hand path is more straightforward and involves various rituals. The right-hand path is internal and deals with body and energy within the body.

### **Modern Yoga Texts (Tantric Texts)**

The three primary modern Yoga texts available are Hatha Yoga Pradipika (HYP), The Shiva Samhita (TSS), and The Gheranda Samhita (TGS), all of which were probably composed within the last six hundred years, except Gherandha Samhita that is perhaps within last three hundred years. All three texts make frequent reference to the Adinath, Gorakshanath, and Matsyendranath, who were the teachers of Tantra. Hence, it would probably be accurate to refer to it as a tantric text (Mallinson, 2004). The word Hatha is derived from the Sanskrit verb meaning, "to apply force". In another context, the word Hatha means "force" or even "oppression" and the indication is therefore that HYP is a form of practice that allows one to gain mastery over the physical body, subtle body, and mind.

The Shiva Samhita (TSS) include brief exposition of Vedanta and Samkhya philosophy, tantric insight into the subtle body, yoga practices that lead to the liberated state as taught by Samkhya and Vedanta, and the awakening of dormant energies that is the central theme of tantric revelation (Mallinson, 2007). It can thus be regarded as a work that draws on a range of different sources and ideas which then seeks to combine in a single exposition, and in this sense, it can be regarded as typical of the modern form of yoga teaching. The Shiva Samhita is in many ways, a similar text to the HYP.

The Gherandha Samhita refer its practices to as *Ghata*, meaning endeavour or striving. Most of which is also found within the HYP and TSS. The main methods in all these three Tantric texts are the performance of asanas, meditation, Pranayama, mantras, mudras, physical and ritual cleaning, visualisation of deities and yantras (Mallison, 2004).

Tantra advocates that the human body can be transformed and can be given a divine identity in a complex set of teachings. The human body has gross and subtle form, and subtle form has energy centres known as Chakras and Nadis, an essential element in the tantric techniques of bodily transformation (White, 2000; Mallinson, 2004 & 2007). Tantric practices transform the *Kundalini-Shakti* into creative energy. It focuses on the *Kundalini*, a three and a half-coiled 'snake' of spiritual energy at the base of the spine that rises through the *Chakra* until union between *Shiva and Shakti* (also known as Samadhi) is achieved (Feuerstein, 1998; Geoffrey, 2008).

### **A Comparative Analysis: Classical and Modern Teachings**

Several passages in HYP show similarity and its understanding of PYS. The opening chapter of HYP mentions "Hatha Vidha is Kevalam Raja Yogaya" – knowledge of Yoga is preliminary to Raja Yoga, which is similar to higher realisation or goal in PYS".

In chapter 2 (v.2) a direct reference is made to "*chitta-vritti-nirodha*" of PYS by using "*Chalam and nischalam chittam*". Also, the verse 55 & 57 of HYP quote a direct phrase from the B'Gita – *no kimchid api chinatayet* (Gita -6.25), "he should not think of any object at all.

A quick comparison (*please see appendix 1*) reveals that tantric practices not only fully integrated PYS practices but also included Mudras and provided detailed instructions on Pranayama lacking in the PYS. Mudras discuss the working on the subtle body and the Kundalini energy's arousing (Kalamakar, 2011). Although Patanjali refers to a Sukshma Sharira (subtle body) when he discusses the soul's transmiration, Chakras and Nadis' systems are not mentioned in PYS.

The common themes that are central to both teaching are concentration (*dharana*) and meditation (*dhyana*) although the focus of meditation differs, for example, Krishna in B' Gita, Atman or Brahman in Pattanjali's Yoga Sutra, different *Chakras* in tantric teachings and finally stilling the mind (*Samadhi*). Also, the first five limbs of PYS are preparation of the final three *Dharana*, *Dhyana* and *Samadhi*; likewise, HYP illustrates the initial practices explained in the first three chapters are designed to prepare the adept of *Raja-yoga*, the highest goal as described in PYS (Kalamakar, 2011).

In Classical Yoga, through practising the deep meditation, the practitioner aims to control and still the mind and focused upon the Purusha/Atman or soul to gain the liberation from the rebirth. However, in tantric meditation, the practitioner focuses on *Nada* or subtle sound, the *Chakras*, the *Nadis*, the *Kundalini* and finally on the *Sahasrara*, the highest *Chakra* that is the gateway to Brahman (Satchidananda, 2012; Iyengar, 2002). Tantric teachings are entirely congruent with the principal idea presented in Classical teaching, both aim to achieve the state of *Samadhi*, and both are revealing ways by which the adept may reach a state of transcendence, being liberated from the constraints and miseries of worldly existence. Hence, despite the very distinction between Tantric and Classical teaching both seem to be part of the same process despite their different techniques and goals, for in the end they are all aimed at *Samadhi* and at solving the problem of existence in this world (Feuerstein, 1998).

The Tantric teachings assert that the body is not to be transcended, as suggested in the Classical Yoga, but rather empowered and transformed into a different kind of matter – a divine body by awakening dormant energies of the body through a range of physical and mental practices. Gavin Flood (2002) refers to this as the idea of the "divinisation of the body", whereby matter is not discarded as one enters a form of existence that is entirely spiritual but instead is transformed from something mundane into something divine.

Tantra's philosophy is that nothing exists that is not divine in fact we are co-existent with Brahman. Whatever is it is fine, and it is a reflection of the Divine Consciousness – *Parama-Shiva*. It is evident that tantric tradition did absorb Patanjali's practices but rejected its philosophical dualism that separates the human body from *Brahman*. With its non-dual approach, Tantra also rejects the renouncing values of Classical Yoga (Kalamakar, 2011).

There are several studies {Chaline (2001); Horrigan, (2004); Ghoncheh & Smith, (2004); Mccoy, (2006); woodyard, (2011)} outlining the physical, mental, therapeutic and spiritual benefits of practising Yoga. It is evident the Classical Yoga was not meant for a fitness regime or stress relief practice but achieved the highest expression of personal spirituality. As such, it can only be adequately undertaken by a person who has mentally withdrawn from the world. However, Tantra provided a different notion in which one was not required to mentally remove from the world, rather be in the world, enjoy the world, or turn his body into a divine body. Hence, it is up to the individual to decide what benefit to seek when practising the Yoga.

## **Conclusion**

Most Vedic texts reference to Yoga and PYS is still considered a seminal text on the Yoga. Yoga philosophy during the Vedic period was aimed at detaching the human being from worldly affairs and uniting them with God. It is confirmed that the original practices and philosophical thinking did evolve under tantric teachings and philosophy. Tantric practices adopted the Patanjali's practices and advanced them by adding *Mudras* and provided more detailed information on *Pranayama*; however, it did not accept the PYS philosophical view of dualism.

It is confirmed that people today seek different benefits from the Yoga such as Classical renouncing style of Yoga by Sages or monks and fitness, relaxation and therapeutic benefits by others. Hence, it is fair to conclude that today's Yoga practices are based on the

combination of Classical and Tantric teachings, and it is up to practitioners what goal they wish to achieve from practising the Yoga.

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Appendix 1:

**A quick comparison between HYP and PYS practices.**

<b>Patanjali's Yoga Sutra</b>	<b>Tantric Yoga (Hatha Yoga Pradapika)</b>
1. <b>The five <i>yamas</i></b> of Patanjali (moral codes)	The ten <i>niyamas</i> of the <i>Hatha-Pradapika</i>
2. <b>The five <i>niyamas</i></b> of Patanjali (self-purification and study) <i>Tyaga</i> , renunciation (the non-attachment of mind and body to worldly things) <i>Muana</i> , silence (speaking only the truth if one has to speak at all)	<i>Desa</i> , the place for practice <i>Kala</i> , time (the auspicious astrological moments) <i>Mulabandha</i> , the root lock (energetic locks to seal in <i>prana</i> )
3. <b><i>Asana, posture</i></b>	<i>Deha-samyā</i> , equanimity of the body <i>Drk-sthiti</i> , fixed gaze Additional <i>angas</i> (optional)
4. <b><i>Pranayama, breath-control</i></b> (understood as purification of the <i>nadis</i> )	<i>Satkarma</i> , the six purifications <i>Asta-Kumbhaka</i> , eight subtypes of breath retention <i>Nadi-suddhi</i> , purification of bodily channels <i>Kundalini</i> <i>Khecari-mudra</i> , raising energy to the level of the <i>ajna chakra</i> and dissolving it in meditation.
5. <b><i>Pratyahara, sense withdrawal</i></b>	
6. <b><i>Dharana, fixation of attention</i></b>	Dissolving the mind in the <i>turya-pada</i> , state of the fourth
7. <b><i>Dhyana</i></b> , visualisation of self as <i>Parama-Siva</i>	
8. <b><i>Samadhi, absorption</i></b>	<i>Nada</i> , sonic experiences in <i>Samadi</i> <i>Unmani</i> , trans-mental liberation <i>Mukti</i> , liberation

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Placed in the tabular form by the author of the article.