

Understanding of Yoga in a Different Perspective

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Abstract

Yoga is known to be one of the 'Darśanaśātra' or 'School of Indian philosophy' having known for its several benefits. It is also considered to be an 'Ancient Indian Psychology'. Everyone knows that Yoga has come from root 'Yuj' means to join. But in this paper author has discussed about three different perspectives about etymological meaning of 'Yuj' and 'Yoga'. It will be necessary for a student of yoga, to understand about various definition of Yoga in its different perspectives. Author gives different definitions of yoga and has mentioned about various types and forms of yoga those are present till date. It explains about the understanding of yoga, not only restricted to 'Sāmkhya Yoga' – 'Pātañjala – Astānga Yoga' or 'Hathayoga' but also about Yoga traditions in Buddhism and Jainism as well. Author emphasizes the importance of knowing about the authentic forms of yoga and caution about distorted forms of yoga prevalent in the global scenarios. There is a discussion about authentic training institution of yoga, one need to know in India.

Keywords: Yoga; Etymology; Types; Traditions, Authentic and inauthentic & distorted forms of Yoga; Yoga institutions in India

Key Messages: This paper gives a brief review on how Yoga can be understood in a different perspective. Author is trying to give views on etymology of Yoga, various definitions of yoga not only from Patanjali Yoga Sutra but also from the other scriptures, other religions. It also discusses about the authentic and inauthentic forms or distorted forms of yoga. Also gives a brief account on authentic schools/institutions of yoga in India.

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Introduction

Yoga is known to be one of the 'Darśanaśātra' or 'School of Indian philosophy' having known for its several benefits. It is also considered to be an 'Ancient Indian Psychology'. Everyone knows that Yoga has come from root 'Yuj' means to join. But in this paper author has discussed about three different perspectives about etymological meaning of 'Yuj' and 'Yoga'. It will be necessary for a student of yoga, to understand about various definition of Yoga in its different perspectives. In this paper we are intending to discuss different meaning of Yoga, not only from the Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga point

of view but also from the perspective of Hathayoga, Kashmiri Shaivism or yoga from other religion's perspective as well, such as Buddhist Yoga or Yoga in Jainism.

Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi mentions that 'Yoga' is an invaluable gift of ancient Indian tradition. It embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfillment; harmony between man and nature and a holistic approach to health and well-being. He further says that 'Yoga' is just not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with ourselves, the world and Nature. Thus he points out on a very specific aspect

or belief system of common masses about Yoga, that it is not just mere doing difficult Asana practices or doing 'Prānāyāma' (Breathing exercises) or directly jumping to do difficult practice of alone 'Dhyāna' (Meditation), but it is much more all-inclusive holistic discipline. Shri. Modi further says that by changing our lifestyle and creating consciousness, it can help us to deal with climate change. He defines yoga as a state of equilibrium or equinity. He emphasizes that a path of yoga is a path to wellness and getting free from illness. Yoga is the journey from 'me' to 'we'. After discussing on Communicable and Non Communicable Diseases he specifies about life style disorders and role of stress and anxiety in generating diseases. He terms them as a silent killer and categorically mentions that Yoga can offer a solution to tackle these problems.

Yoga as indicated by many texts and commentaries of 'Pātañjal Yoga Sūtra's can be mainly understood in three ways. The most common understanding of yoga as mentioned in the government site is to join -that which joins body, mind and soul. As can be seen in the publication (Common Yoga protocol) the explanation about the term 'Yoga' as given in the Ministry of AYUSH and Moraraji Desai National Institute of Yoga, New Delhi. It reads, the word "Yoga" is derived from the Sanskrit root 'yuj' meaning "to join", "to yoke" or "to unite". According to Yogic scriptures, the practice of Yoga leads to the union of an individual consciousness with the universal consciousness. According to modern scientists, everything in the universe is just a manifestation of the same quantum firmament. One who experiences this oneness of existence is said to be "in Yoga" and is termed as a yogi who has attained a state of freedom, referred to as 'Mukti', 'Nirvāna', 'Kaivalya' or 'Moka'. "Yoga" also refers to an inner science comprising of a variety of methods through which human beings can achieve union between the body and mind to attain self-realisation. The aim of Yoga practice (Sādhana) is to overcome all kinds of sufferings that lead to a sense of freedom in every walk of life with holistic health, happiness and harmony.²

This view is strongly accepted by vedantins. According to them it is about 'Union', that which unites or joins. They proclaim the union of individual self with the cosmic self or universal self, union of Ātman with Paramātman. Commentary on Pātañjala Yoga Sūtra in Marathi language written by Krishnaji Keshava Kolhatkar emphasizes upon this vedantic interpretation on Yoga sūtra where he proposes that Yoga means 'to join', 'a union of Jeeva and Brahman'.³ The second view and

understanding of the term 'Yoga' as per famous commentator Pātañjala Yoga Sūtrain 'Vyāsa' in his 'Vyāsa-Bhāṣya' glosses Yoga as nothing but Samādhi.⁴ Kumathekar, Uday⁵ mentions in his Marathi commentary on Pātañjala Yoga Sūtra, namely 'Yoga Darśan' that Vācaspati Mīśra while mentioning in his work 'Tatvavaiśaradī' says that one need not consider 'Yuj' as 'to join' but to understand it as a 'Samādhi'. While discussing this, he states that Yoga can be equated with Samādhi, which is nothing but a Dharma of Sārvabhauma Ātma (nature of mind) and the third view from the Upanishadic texts especially Kathopaniśada says that Yoga means nothing but the controlling of the sense organs.⁶

These above explanation can be derived from the Vyutpatti (Etymological meaning) of the term yoga. In Sanskrit grammar especially 'Panini' -The term /root 'Yuj' is interpreted in three ways.

1. "Yuj Yoge", "Yujyate anen iti Yogah" or "Yujir yoge"
2. Yuj Samadhau Yogah I
3. Yuj Niyamane Yogah I

If we see as per definition of Yoga then we will be surprised to note that many definitions are quoted for the term 'Yoga'. Some of them are directly with reference to 'Yoga philosophy' where as others have been quoted from different disciplines like Astrology, Ayurveda etc.

The very famous & most accepted definition of Yoga as mentioned in the Pātañjala Yoga Sūtra is as follows -

"Yogah Chittavrittih Nirodhah I" (Pātañjala Yoga Sūtra 1/2)⁷

"Tadā drastu Swarupe Avasthānam I" (Pātañjala Yoga Sūtra 1/3)⁸

Which means Yoga is the state of refraining or restraining or stilling mental modifications there by then one can see the establishment of the unmodified state of Purusa or one's own pure nature.

Yoga Vāsistha explains Yoga in a much broader way of says that yoga is a 'Yukti' a trick to overcome various hurdles that may come across in living life & reaching to know about ultimate Reality.⁹

Samsārottarena Yuktih Yoga śabden Kathyate I' (Yoga Vāsista .Nirvān parva 13.3)

Śrīmad Bhagavadgīta explains Yoga still in different ways -At one place it says Yoga is nothing but to attain dexterity in whichever work we undertake. It mentions whatever work we do, it must be done with excellence.

“Yogah Karmasu Kaushalam I” - Skill in action is Yoga .

Śrīmad Bhagavadgīta says one must understand the term ‘Yoga’ as that principle which teach us to strike balance at all levels. Yoga implies to avoid extreme conditions. It can be considered in every walk of life, whether eating or exercising or doing anything ,one must do it in a ‘moderation ‘, with appropriate way. Thus Śrīmad Bhagavadgīta says.

“Yogah Samatvam Uttachyate I ”

The other definition of Yoga as specified is that one should be attuned to one self to do one’s action. “Yogasyah Kuru Karmāni I”

Yet another approach towards explaining what Yoga is Śrīmad Bhagavadgīta mentions that disconnection of connecting with pain or miseries is Yoga. Yoga is thus a tool which helps separation for pain on miseries “Duhkha Samyogah Viyogah Yogah I”

Vaiśeṣika Sūtra explains Yoga as “Duhkha Abhavaat Yogah I”

When there is absence of pain or misery then it can be understood as Yoga. This definition reminds us the definition proposed by Śrīmad Bhagavadgīta as “Duhkha Samyogah Viyogah Yogah I”

There are other meanings of the term ‘Yoga ‘ as mentioned earlier with special reference to other disciplines like in Kautiliya Arthaśāstra explains Yoga as - “Alabdhasya Lābhah Yogah I ” When someone gets something which is otherwise unavailable or inaccessible is termed as Yoga.

In Astrology -‘Jyotisa śāstra’ when two or more planets (Graha golaka) come together or remain in opposite places (sthāna) in natal chart (Kundali) then it is termed as Yoga. e.g. Nīca Rājabhanga Yoga, Sadāstaka Yoga etc.

In Ayurveda when two or more medicines are put together with some specific ratio that combination for specific disease then is termed as Yoga. For example ‘Dhatri Nisha Yoga’ (Combination of two ingredients) ‘Triphala’(Combination of three ingredients) , ‘Dhanya chaturthak kwath’ (Combination of four ingredients), ‘Panchakola’ (Combination of five ingredients), ‘Shadangodaka’(Combination of six ingredients), Rasnasaptak Kwath’ (Combination of seven ingredients), ‘Hingvashtaka Choorna’ (Combination of eight ingredients), ‘Navak Guggul’ (Combination of nine ingredients) ‘Dashanga Lepa’ or ‘Dashamool Kwath’ (Combination of ten ingredients), to as

many as combination of thirty two ingredients formulation like ‘Dwatrīnshakadi kwath’ etc.

Amarkosa (Tritīya Kanda /2379) gives five meanings of yoga one of which is to meditate (Dhyāna)¹⁰ It will be interesting to note that Amarkosa has not given explanation as ‘Samādhi’ as explained by Vyāsabhāṣya (‘Yuj Samādhau’) but equated it with ‘Dhyāna’. Medinī Kosa gives eleven meanings of yoga.

Edwin F Bryant, very nicely explained about how to define yoga. He says that there are many definition of yoga as explained by different traditions or different school of thought. He mentions further that even though there are overlapping of the explanation of all these definitions, ultimately they reflect upon a fact that-“Yoga referred to a cluster of practices, featuring various forms of disciplines & mind control, practiced by many different ascetics & communication on the landscape of ancient India; with a view to liberation from the sufferings of embodied life, it was not associated as a distinct school until well into the common era.¹¹” Here it refers not only to Pātañjali’s Astānga Yoga / Rāja yoga but also to other forms such as Bhakti Yoga/ Karma Yoga/ Jñāna Yoga, also to other schools of yoga such as Mantra Yoga, Laya yoga, Nāda yoga, Hata Yoga etc. Also cover other forms such as yoga as found in Buddhism – such as Buddhist Yoga – Vipassana/ Jainism Yoga – Prekṣādhyāna etc.¹²

Thus when we want to study the discipline of Yoga, then we should not be only confined to only learning of Pātañjala Yoga Sūtra but we must also be open enough to see the all different possibilities to learn, to know about various traditions of yoga in a different perspective. There are multiple traditions of Yoga not only seen or observed in Hindu religious texts but also yoga can be traced in Buddhist tradition, Jain literature as well.

Usually many of us confined ourselves to study only Pātañjala Yoga or Astānga Yoga. But we do not pay attention of knowing more about other interesting forms of yoga like Śivadvaīta Yoga as seen in Kāśmīrī Śāivism tradition or Hatha Yoga or Svāra Yoga, Laya Yoga, Mantra Yoga, Nāda Yoga or yoga as seen from different traditions such as mentioned in the Śrīmad Bhagavadgīta a Jñāna-yoga, Bhakti-yoga and Karma-yoga or as seen in Buddhism as Vipassanā or in Jainism as seen as Prekṣādhyāna. It will be interesting to note the similarities in the basic principles of these different schools or traditions of yoga.

Globally there is a growing market of yoga.

Like Ayurveda, Yoga has become a word of importance. Anything with some relationship with yoga can be sold very easily in the market. There is a huge market of articles, apparels, properties used while performing Asana practices. There is a neck throat competition in different brands marketing their Yoga mats, Yoga tea shirts etc. In metro cities in India and abroad, people prefer to join Yoga Studios or Yoga Spa rather than joining authentic yoga schools or yoga institutes where one can learn authentic classical yoga in presence of a qualified yoga teacher / instructor. There is a trend of learning yoga by looking at TV programme or following pre-recorded video sessions. It will be better if someone prefer to go to yoga institutes or schools and learn it step by step in front of Yoga teacher / Instructor rather than doing it at home in front of TV or video session. In the Yoga institutes or Yoga schools when someone goes physically and learn, there is a scope to rectify one's error there and there itself by yoga teacher, which may not be possible to do it when done at home.

But in the present scenario of Covid 19 , now there is a new trend that can be observed in yoga , i.e. online training of Yoga. Here a qualified yoga teacher / instructor teach on online platform using internet and students / participants learn at their home. Here only advantage is that teacher can see whether student is following the instructions correctly or not, whether he / she is practicing yogic procedures in a right way or not. If found that they are committing some kind of mistakes, then teacher can instruct immediately on that online dynamic session (where there is a communication of teacher and student)

In contemporary era, there are many traditions and schools within India, those who are propagating authentic knowledge about Yoga .Some of them can be listed as follows.

Kaivalyadhama Yoga Institute, Lonavala founded by Swami Kuvalayanand

The Yoga Institute- Santacruz , Mumbai founded by Shri Yogendraji

Shivanda Yoga Institute /Ashram, Rishikesh by Swami Shivanand

Bihar school of Yoga , Munger founded by Swami Satyanand, now guided by Swami Niranananda

Iyengar Yoga Institute , founded by Yogacharya B.K Iyengar -Pune in Maharashtra .

Yoga Vidya Niketan founded by Yogacharya Padmashree Sadashiv Nimbalkar, Mumbai and Navi Mumbai .

Ambika Yoga Kutir founded by Yogacharya Nikam Guruji ,Thane .

Ghantali Mitra Mandal - Yoga Vibhag founded by Yogacharya Anna Vyavahare ,Thane

Yoga Vidya Dham , Nashik founded by Yogacharya Vishwasrao Mandlik and many more .

There are national level institutes / University of Yoga.

Morarji Desai National Institute if Yoga & Naturopathy New Delhi ,

Swami Vivekanand Yoga Anusandhan Samasthana (S.VYASA) Yoga University - Bangalore

Various Universities have initiated their department of Yogic Sciences to teach program ranging from Certificate, Diploma, Advance Diploma, Post graduate Diploma, Bachelor and Master in Yoga, Doctoral and Post-Doctoral Fellowship programmes in Yogic Sciences. Whereas in some universities Yoga programme are taught under activities of philosophy department. Where one may learn yoga and acquire a formal qualification in yoga.

For last couple of years Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India , initiated programme in collaboration with Quality Council of India (QCI) now termed YCB (Yoga Certification Board), which conducts an examinations (both theory and practicals - viva) to give certification to yoga professionals.

There are certain specific styles which are developed by some researchers or institutions for practicing yoga nationally or globally. Integral yoga, Structural Yoga, Vinyasa Yoga, Ashtanga Yoga, Iyengar Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, Bikram Yoga, Power Yoga are some of the examples to name with. There are certain distortions of yoga which needs to be looked with caution, examples of these distorted yoga styles are Nude Yoga, Hot Yoga, Cat Yoga, Dog Yoga and many more.

There is yet another perspective of Yoga that need to take an account while discussing and that is Therapeutic Yoga or Yoga Therapy. There is a growing awareness about the usefulness of yoga as a supportive therapy. Ministry of AYUSH , thus gave a separate position to Yoga and Naturopathy along with Ayurveda, Unani , Siddha, Sowa Rigpa (Tibetan Medicine) and Homeopathy. Since 1923 onwards there is long way of investigation and documentation of usefulness of Yoga having a therapeutic value. Swami Kuvalayananda, Swami Rama, Dr. Datye, Dr,Vinekar, Dr. Gore, Dr.

Gharote and many more contributed to scientific revalidation of Therapeutic Yoga. The legacy is still continued with many contemporary researchers like Dr. H.Nagendra, Dr. Nagarathna, Dr. Shirley Telles, Dr. Satbir Khalsa, Dr. Bhavanani and many more. There are national and International Associations working on Yoga and Yoga Therapy. Associations like 'International Associations of Yoga Therapists' (I.A.Y.T.) from USA has worked very extensively in the field of research and practice of Yoga Therapy. In India association like 'Indian Yoga Association' (I.Y.A.) is also doing extensive work on the standardization of Yoga education syllabus on all India level. It is also working about the kind of standards or minimum requirement one need to possess to those who intend to practice as a Yoga Therapist.

Thus Yoga is a vast canvas with different types, varied styles, and diverse applications make it available to many for exploration. One must be inquisitive to know the numerous aspects of Yoga with different perspectives. Yoga thus needs to be understood in its holistic approach.

Conclusion

Thus we may conclude that it will be really difficult to define Yoga in a very typical way or focussed way. It can be understood on a canvas of different shades. May it be from the Samkhya - Yoga perspective (Yuj Samadhau - to meditate) or may it be from the Vedanta perspective (Yuj means to join). No doubt Patanjali Yoga Sutra gives apt and crisp yet crystal clear understanding about the path towards liberation. It's an experiential science. It can be understood on a larger platform of yoga from various sects like Hathayoga , Kashmiri Shaivism or Buddhist Yoga or Yoga in Jainism. Everywhere it is aimed at working on mind (Chitta) and leading towards liberation.

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