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Address

• Vikram Nagar, Boudhi Chouk, Latur.
• Tq. Latur, Dis. Latur 413512 (MS.)
• (+91) 9922455749, (+91) 9158387437

Email

• aiirjpramod@gmail.com
• aayushijournal@gmail.com

Website

• www.aiirjournal.com

CHIEF EDITOR – PRAMOD PRAKASHRAO TANDALE

Concept of Yoga: Origin and History

Satyanarayan Mishra,

Research Scholar, Yoga,
Utkal University, Vani Vihar,
Bhubaneswar, Odisha

Abstract

The exact Origin and history of Yoga is somehow obscure and uncertain as it has been transmitted orally from Gurus and authors of sacred texts to the successors and the secretive nature of the valuable teachings. Early teachings on yoga were recorded on fragile palm leaves which got lost or damaged in course of time. Yoga practice is believed to have its origin with the very dawn of civilization. Long before the religions or beliefs were created the science of yoga has its origin as believed. Prevedic yoga, Vedic Yoga, Preclassical Yoga, Classical Yoga, Postclassical Yoga and Modern period. Attempt has been made to discuss the concept, origin and history of yoga in this article.

Keywords:- Shiva, pre-vedic yoga, vedic yoga, post vedic yoga, pre-classical yoga, classical yoga

Introduction

We can trace back the development of yoga to over 5,000 years ago, while according to some researchers origin of yoga may be up to 10,000 years old . We can categories the long history of yoga into six periods of innovation, practice and development such as Pre-Vedic, Vedic Yoga, Preclassical Yoga, Classical Yoga, Postclassical Yoga and Modern period.

Shiva as Adiyogi

Yoga practice is believed to have its origin with the very dawn of civilization. Long before the religions or beliefs were created the science of yoga has its origin as believed. In Hinduism and yogic lore Lord Shiva is perceived as the first yogi or Adiyogi and he is the first Guru or Adi Guru from which the teachings of yoga have been transmitted.

It is told that, several thousand years ago, on the banks of the lake Kantisarovar in the Himalayas, Adiyogi Lord Siva delivered his profound knowledge to the legendary Saptarishis or "seven sages". The seven sages spreader this powerful yogic science to different parts of the world, including Asia, the Middle East, Northern Africa and South America. Modern scholars have observed, close parallels between ancient cultures across the different parts of the globe. It was in India that the yogic system found its fullest expression. Sage Agastya, the Saptarishi who travelled across the Indian subcontinent, crafted this culture around a core yogic way of life.

Seals and fossils and symbols of Indus Saraswati valley civilization

There existed a civilization known as Indus Saraswati valley civilization in ancient Indian Subcontinent.

The Number of seals and fossil remains of Indus Saraswati valley civilization show the Yogic motives and figures engaged in Yoga Sadhana which suggest the presence of Yoga in ancient Indian Subcontinent. The phallic symbols and the seals of idols of mother Goddess suggest the existence of practice of Tantra Yoga.

Yoga in traditions:- Apart from Indus valley civilization remains presence of Yoga is also available in folk traditions, Vedic and Upanishadic heritage, Buddhist and Jain traditions, Mahabharat and Ramayana, theistic traditions of Shaivas, Vaishnavas, philosophies and Tantric traditions of India.

Pure yoga of South Asia:- In addition, there was a primordial or pure Yoga which is observed in mystical traditions of South Asia. In this time Yoga a practice was under the direct supervision of the Guru and its spiritual importance was very high.. Yoga sadhana was a inbuilt in their rituals and a part of Upasana in those traditions.

Sun God and pranayama:- Sun was being worshipped as a major God during the vedic period. The practice of 'Surya namaskara' may have been influenced later on. Pranayama was a part of daily hindu ritual and to offer the oblation.

Sources: Information about Yoga practices and the related literature during this period are gathered from the following sources like –Four Vedas , One hundred eight Upanishads), Smritis, Buddhism teachings , Jainism teachings, Panini's writings, Two Epics ,Eighteen Parana's etc. After Sage Patanjali, many Sages and Yoga Masters have contributed greatly for the preservation and development of the yogic science through their well documented practices and literature.

Let us classify the yogic era as described below.

We can divide the history of Yoga can conveniently into the following broad categories: Prevedic yoga, Vedic Yoga, Preclassical Yoga, Classical Yoga, Postclassical Yoga and Modern period.

Pre-Vedic Yoga:- find historical evidences of the existence of Yoga seen in the pre-Vedic period (2700 B.C.), and thereafter till Patanjali's period. Though Yoga was being practised in the pre-Vedic period, the great Sage Maharshi Patanjali made it systematic,, codified the prevalent practices of Yoga, formulated its meaning related knowledge through his Yoga Sutras.

Vedic-Yoga:- The teachings of yoga found in Rig-Veda and other three ancient hymnodies (Rig, Yajur and Sama) are called as Vedic Yoga. Veda is a sanskrit word which means "knowledge," while the Sanskrit word rig (from ric) means "praise." So we can infer that the sacred Rig-Veda is the collection of hymns that are in praise of a higher power or Absolute and this collection of hymns is in fact the fountainhead of Hinduism.

The three other Vedic hymnodies constitute the Yajur-Veda which is the Knowledge of Sacrifice, Sama-Veda -Knowledge of Chants and Atharva-Veda -knowledge of Atharvan. The sacrificial formulas used by the Vedic priests are mentioned in the first collection of hymns.. The chants accompanying the sacrifices are mentioned in the second Vedic text. The third hymnody contains the magical incantations for all occasions including a number of very powerful philosophical hymns. It is linked with Atharvan, a famous fire priest who was also master of magical rituals. The Vedic Yoga—which could also be called Archaic Yoga—was closely associated with the ritual life of the ancient Indians. The core idea of sacrifice was a means of joining the material world with the invisible spirit world .For success in rituals, the sacrifices had to focus and concentrate their mind for a long period of time. Such prolonged inner focusing for the purpose of transcending the ordinary mental limitations is the root or basis of Yoga.

The Vedic yogi, when successful was graced with a "vision" or experience of the transcendental reality. He was known as a "seer "or a great master of Vedic Yoga or in Sanskrit "Rishi". The Vedic seers were capable of viewing the very fabric of existence, and their hymns speak of their inspiring marvelous intuitions.

Pre-Classical Yoga:- Pre-Classical category of yoga covers an extensive period of approximately 2,000 years until the second century A.D. This category of Yoga appears in various forms and guises. The earliest manifestations of such yoga were still closely linked with the Vedic sacrificial culture, as developed and described in the Brâhmanas and Âranyakas. The Brâhmanas are Sanskrit texts explaining the Vedic hymns and the rituals at their back drop. The Âranyakas are also ritual texts specific to those who preferred to live in seclusion in a wild-natural environment or forest hermitage.

One of the most important Yoga scriptures in course of time is the Bhagavad-Gîtâ ("Lord's Song"), of which Mahatma Gandhi commented as follows:

When disappointment stares me in the face and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the Bhagavad-Gita. I find a verse here and a verse there and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming tragedies—and my life has been full of external tragedies—and if they have left no visible, no indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teachings of the Bhagavad-Gita.

(Young India, 1925, pp. 1078-79)

In its present form, the Bhagavad Gita, often referred to as simply the Gita was composed around 500 B.C..It is a 700 verse Hindu scripture which forms a part of epic Mahabharata(chapter 23-40 of the 6 th book of Mahabharata).The Bhagavad Gita calls for selfless action which inspired many leaders of Indian independence movement including Bal Gangadhar Tilak And Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji referred Gita as "spiritual dictionary". Gita is a daily inspiration to millions of Hindus and its central teaching are: (a) If we want to be alive we have to be active (b)if we want to avoid difficulties for ourselves and others, our actions must be benign and also go beyond the grip of the ego. (c)We should believe in action not expecting the results.(d)Surrender to God is the key to get peace.

In Bhagawadgita elaborate description of the concept of Gyan yoga, Bhakti yoga and Karma Yoga are found. These three types of yoga i.e Gyan yoga, Bhakti yoga and Karma Yoga. Represent the highest example of wisdom and followers find peace by adopting the methods as advised in Gita.

Pre-classical Yoga also comprises the many schools whose teachings can be Ramayana and the Mahabharata (in which the Bhagavad-Gita). These different pre-classical schools developed all kinds of methods for attaining deep meditation through which yogis and yoginis could transcend the body and mind and could be able to discover their true nature.

Classical Yoga:- The period between 500 BC - 800 A.D. is tentatively considered as the Classical period. This period is also considered as the most fertile and prominent period in the history and development of Yoga.

In the pre-classical stage, yoga was a mixture of various ideas, beliefs, theories and techniques which are found often conflicting and contradicting with each other. The Classical period of Yoga is characterized by Patanjali's Yoga-Sûtras, which was the first systematic presentation of yoga in form of sutras. This classic text which is supposed to be written some time in second century, describes the path of Raja Yoga in form of thread or sutras, often called "classical yoga". The word sutra (Latin suture) means "thread." Which represents a thread of memory, which is an aid to memorization for aspirants curious to retain Patanjali's concept, knowledge and wisdom?

Patanjali systemized and organized and presented textually the practice of yoga introducing an "eight limbed path" (astanga yoga)which contained the steps and stages towards attainment of

Samadhi or enlightenment. Patanjali, Yoga-Sûtras still strongly exert influence on most principles and practice styles of modern yoga system.

Patanjali believed that each individual is a composite of matter and spirit (purusha and prakriti). According to Patanjali the process of Yoga was to bring about the separation of purusha and prakriti thereby restoring the spirit in its absolute purity. Philosophical dualism is the characteristic of his formulations which is an important point; because most of India's philosophical systems are in support of one or the other kind of nondualism. The earliest available Sanskrit commentary on Yoga sutra is the Yoga-Bhasya ("Speech on Yoga") written by Vyasa. It was written in the fifth century A.D. which furnishes fundamental explanations of Patanjali's Yoga sutra. Except few legends nothing more is known available either regarding Patanjali or Vyasa. In this period also, India had two great religious teachers like Mahavir and Buddha.

Mahavir had introduced the concept of five great vows and Buddha had introduced the concept of eightfold path. The concept of Five great vows – Pancha mahavrata- by Mahavir and the concept of Ashta Magga or eightfold path by Buddha can be considered as preliminary nature of Yoga sadhana..

Post-Classical Yoga:- The period between 800 A.D. - 1700 A.D is recognized as the Post Classical period wherein the teachings of great Acharyatrayas-Adi Shankracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhavacharya-were prominent during this period. The teachings of Suradasa, Tulasidas, Purandardasa and Mirabai were the great contributions during this period. The Natha Yogis of Hathayoga Tradition like Matsyendaranatha, Gorkshanatha, Cauranginatha, Swatmaram Swami, Gheranda, Shrinivasa Bhatt are some of the great yogic personalities who popularized the Hatha Yoga practices during this period.

After Patanjali's period, yoga masters designed a system of practices to rejuvenate the body and increase the longevity. They assumed the body as a temple of the immortal spirit, not merely as a container to be discarded at the first opportunity. They started exploring through advanced yogic techniques the possibility of energizing the physical body to such a degree so that its biochemistry is changed and even its basic matter is reorganized to render it immortal. Help of alchemy was also taken.

The ancient Vedaic teachings were rejected and the physical body was considered as the tool to achieve enlightenment. Thus developed the system of Tantra Yoga, which proposed radical methods to purify the body and mind thereby breaking the knots which bind us to our physical existence. This idea, preoccupation and consequent exploration of the physical-spiritual link and body centered practices led to the creation of Hatha-Yoga, an amateur version of which is today widely practiced throughout the world. This developed the various branches and schools of Tantra-Yoga, of which Hatha-Yoga is just one approach.

Contrary to classical Yoga, post-classical Yoga affirms the ultimate unity of everything which is nothing but the core teaching of Vedanta., the philosophical system based on the Upanishadic teachings.

The dualism of classical Yoga can be understood as a brief but powerful interlude in a stream of non-dualist teachings going back to Vedic times. These teachings affirm the idea that everything else is an aspect or expression of one and the same reality. That singular reality is known as Brahman (meaning "that which has grown expansive") or atman (meaning the transcendental Self as opposed to the limited ego-self).

In post Patanjali's period, the evolution of Yoga took an interesting turn. Some great adepts started to probe the hidden potential of the body whereas the previous generations of yogis and yoginis were giving no particular attention to the body. They were more interested in contemplation to the point where they could exit the physical body consciously. Their goal was to leave the world behind and merge with the formless absolute, reality, the supreme spirit.

Modern Period Yoga:- We can say that the history of modern Yoga commenced with the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in year 1893. At that congress Swami Vivekananda made a big impression on the American public by his hear touching speech. As instructed by his teacher, Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda found his way to the States where everything was unknown to him.

Some well-wishers who recognized the inner greatness of this adept arranged to invite him to the Parliament, where he ended up being its most popular diplomat. Later he traveled widely attracting many students to Yoga and Vedanta who became his followers. He wrote various books on Yoga which are very useful today.

Before Swamiji few other Yoga masters also had visited Europe, but their influence was local and ephemeral. Vivekananda's achievement opened door for other yoga masters from India which still continues.

After Swami Vivekananda, Paramahansa Yogananda was the most popular teacher in the early years of the Western Yoga movement was , who arrived in Boston in 1920. Five years later, he established the Self-Realization Fellowship, which headquarters are still in Los Angeles. In 1902 Swami Rama Tirtha, a former mathematics teacher who preferred spiritual life to academia came to the United States and founded a retreat center on Mount Shasta in California. There he stayed for two years and drowned in the Ganges (Ganga) river in 1906 when he was only thirty-three years old.

In 1919, Yogendra Mastamani arrived in Long Island and for nearly three years demonstrated to astound Americans the power and elegance of Hatha Yoga. Before returning to India, he founded the American branch of Kaivalyadhama, an Indian organization created by the late Swami Kavalayananda, which has contributed greatly to the scientific study of Yoga.

Several decades after the 1920s came another spiritual master Ramacharaka, whose books can still be found in used bookstores. What few readers know, however, is that this Ramacharaka was apparently not an actual person. The name was the pseudonym of two people—William Walker Atkinson, who had left his law practice in Chicago to practice Yoga, and his teacher Baba Bharata.

Paul Brunton, a former journalist and editor, burst on the scene of Yoga in 1934 with his book A Search in Secret India, which introduced the great sage Ramana Maharshi to Western seekers. Many more works flowed from his pen over the following eighteen years, until the publication of The Spiritual Crisis of Man. Then, in the 1980s, his notebooks were published posthumously in sixteen volumes—a treasure-trove for serious Yoga students.

Since the early 1930s until his death in 1986, Jiddu Krishnamurti delighted or perplexed thousands of philosophically minded Westerners with his eloquent talks. He had been groomed by the Theosophical Society as the coming world leader but had rejected this mission, which surely is too big and burdensome for any one person, however great. He demonstrated the wisdom of Jnana-Yoga (the Yoga of discernment), and drew large crowds of listeners and readers. Among his close

circle of friends were the likes of Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, Charles Chaplin, and Greta Garbo.

Yoga, in the form of Hatha-Yoga, entered mainstream America when the Russian-born yoginî Indra Devi, who has been called the “First Lady of Yoga,” opened her Yoga studio in Hollywood in 1947. She taught stars like Gloria Swanson, Jennifer Jones, and Robert Ryan, and trained hundreds of teachers. Now in her nineties and living in Buenos Aires, she is still an influential voice for Yoga.

In the 1950s, one of the most prominent Yoga teacher was Selvarajan Yesudian whose book *Sport and Yoga* has been translated into fourteen or so languages, with more than 500,000 copies sold. Today, as we mentioned before, many athletes have adopted yogic exercises into their training program. Shri Yogendra of the Yoga Institute of Santa Cruz in India, visited the United States in the early 1950s. He pioneered medical research on Yoga as early as 1918, and his son Jayadev Yogendra is continuing his valuable work, which demonstrates the efficacy of Yoga as a therapeutic tool.

In the year 1961, it was Richard Hittleman who brought Hatha-Yoga to American television, and his book *The Twenty-Eight-Day Yoga Plan* sold millions of copies. In the middle of 1960s, the Western Yoga movement got great boosting by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, largely because of his brief association with the Beatles. He popularized yogic contemplation in the form of Transcendental Meditation (TM), which still has tens of thousands of practitioners around the world. TM meditation was introduced and Yoga entered into the corporate world. It, moreover, stimulated medical research on Yoga at various American universities.

In 1965, the then sixty-nine-year-old Shri Prabhupada arrived in New York with a suitcase full of books and \$8.00 in his pockets. Six years later he founded the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), and by the time of his death in 1977, he had created a worldwide spiritual movement based on Bhakti Yoga (the Yoga of devotion).

Also in the 1960s and 1970s, many swamis trained by the Himalayan master Swami Sivananda, a former physician who became a doctor of the soul, opened their schools in Europe and the two Americas. Most of them are still active today, and among them are Swami Vishnudevananda (author of the widely read *Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga*), Swami Satchitananda (well-known to Woodstock participants), Swami Sivananda Radha (a woman-swami who pioneered the link between Yoga spirituality and psychology), Swami Satyananda (about whom we will say more shortly), and Swami Chidananda (a saintly figure who directed the Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh, India). The last-mentioned master’s best known American student is the gentle Lilia Folan, made famous by her PBS television series *Lilia, Yoga & You*, broadcast between 1970 and 1979.

In 1969, Yogi Bhañan caused an uproar among the traditional Sikh community (an offshoot of Hinduism) when he broke with tradition and began to teach Kundalini Yoga to his Western students. Today his Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization—better known as 3HO—has more than 200 centers around the world.

In 1970 and 1980s Bhagavan Rajneesh (now known as Osho) was most controversial but wildly popular guru, whose followers constantly made the headlines for their sexual orgies and other excesses. Rajneesh was a former philosophy professor. He drew his teachings from Yoga sources and mixed it with his own personal experiences. Rajneesh allowed his disciples to act out their repressed fantasies, notably of the sexual variety, hoping that this would free them up for the deeper processes of Yoga. His life illustrates that Yoga adepts may come in all shapes and sizes and that, to coin a phrase, one person’s guru is another person’s uru. (The Sanskrit word uru denotes “empty space.”) Another maxim that can be applied here is caveat emptor, “buyer beware.”

Other renowned modern Yoga adepts of Indian origin are Sri Aurobindo who was the father of Integral Yoga, Ramana Maharshi who was an unparalleled master of Jnana-Yoga, Papa Ramdas, who lived and breathed Mantra-Yoga, the Yoga of transformative sound, Swami Nityananda who was a miracle-working master of Siddha-Yoga, and his disciple Swami Muktananda, a powerful yogi who put Siddha-Yoga, which is a Tantric Yoga, on the map for Western seekers. All these yoga gurus or teachers are no longer among us.

The great yoga teacher in modern times of Hatha-Yoga was Sri Krishnamacharya, who died in 1989 at age of 101. He practiced, developed and taught the Viniyoga system of Hatha-Yoga until his last days. His son T. K. V. Desikachar continues his father's teachings and taught Yoga, among others, to the famous Jiddu Krishnamurti. Another well-known student of Sri Krishnamacharya and a master in his own right is Desikachar's uncle B. K. S. Iyengar, who has trained and many students, including the world-famous violinist Jehudi Menuhin.

We may mention the name of Pattabhi Jois and Indra Devi who studied with Krishnamacharya in their early years and have since then inspired thousands of Westerners.

Modern yogis like Sri Chinmoy and Swami Satyananda (a Tantra master who established the well-known Bihar School of Yoga, has authored numerous books, and has disciples around the world). There are other great Yoga adepts yet unknown and hidden representing Yoga in one form or another.

Until modern times majority of Yoga practitioners have been male yogis.. But there have also been great female adepts, yoginīs. In recent years, a few woman saints—representing Bhakti-Yoga (Yoga of devotion)—have come to the West to bring their gospel of love to open-hearted seekers. Yoga embraces so many diverse approaches that anyone irrespective caste, creed and gender can find a home in it.

An exceptional woman teacher from India is Meera Ma ("Mother Meera") who is out of stereo type teachings. Her teachings are not in words but communications in silence through her simple presence. She has made her home in the middle of a quaint German village in the Black Forest is attracting thousands of people from all over the world every year. Dalai Lama, champion of nonviolence and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize is unquestionably one of the truly great yogis of modern Tibet, who demonstrates that the principles of Yoga can fruitfully be brought not only into a busy daily life but also into the arena of politics. Today Tibetan Buddhism (which is a form of Tantra-Yoga) has gained extremely popularity among Westerners, and there are also many lamas (spiritual teacher) who are willing to share the secrets of their well-guarded tradition to true seekers.

If we want to know about Westerners who have made a name for themselves as teachers in the modern Yoga movement (understood in the broadest terms), we may consult the encyclopedic work "The Book of Enlightened Masters" by Andrew Rawlinson. The book includes both genuine masters (like the Bulgarian teacher Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov) and a galaxy of would-be masters.

For a comprehensive history of Yoga, the book The Yoga Tradition, published by Hohm Press can be referred.

Yoga began to achieve popularity in the West at the end of the 19th century. But it was a yoga which was deeply influenced by Western spiritual and religious ideas. It represented in many respects a radical break from the grass-roots yoga lineages of India.

The yoga system exported to western world by yogis headed by Swami Vivekananda, largely ignored asana and emphasized to focus instead on pranayama, meditation, and positive thinking. The English-educated Vivekananda arrived on American shores in 1893. He publicly rejected hatha yoga

in general and asana in particular. Those who came from India to the United States in his wake were inclined to echo Vivekananda's judgments on asana. Around 1920s a cleaned up version of asana began to gain prominence as a key feature of the modern English language-based yogas emerging from India.

Conclusion

India is the country which had originated the supreme science of yoga. Ancient seers and hatha yogis had great contribution in these regard. In modern times' also Indian yogis and teachers were active in spreading yoga in the west. Time will come everybody will realize the importance of yoga which is the only natural panacea for all physical and psychological disorders.

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