



EXPLORING THE ROOTS OF YOGA POSTURES THROUGH THE VERSES OF YOGA UPANISHADS

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.250303041>

Abstract

Yoga is an ancient method of physical, mental, and spiritual exercises that have been passed down through the ages from teacher to student. Postures, breathing techniques, relaxation, chanting, and other types of meditation are all part of yogic practices. One of the schools of Indian philosophy is yoga. The word yoga was first used in the Vedas, according to historical records. The Upanishads provide an explanation of yoga's many facets. Asana is just one facet of yoga. In contemporary yoga, the assessed form of asana is yogic postures. Nonetheless, a lot of individuals believe that the modern yoga poses and exercises are either culturally appropriated by Europeans or do not belong to the traditional Indian yoga tradition. Many academicians have attempted to deprive yoga of its origins in reaction, contending that European colonists are more responsible for modern yoga than Indian sages or Hindu rituals and beliefs. The ancient Indian yoga asanas were employed primarily for spiritual practices, even if they were more than just postures or physical exercises. While asana did exist in ancient India, it was not the same as the asana of modern yoga, which mostly focused on sitting poses for meditation. Some individuals believe that modern yoga poses and exercises are not known in India or are not a part of the traditional Indian yoga tradition. Although asanas have been rated over time, they are a component of the ancient Indian Yoga Asanas. This paper discusses and interprets a number of Yoga Upanishad lines that specifically address yoga asanas. There have been attempts to refute the European claim to be the originator of yoga poses and to demonstrate that a portion of the modern poses are derived from the poses of ancient India.

Keywords: Yoga, Asanas, Upanishads, Posture

Introduction

One of the most significant spiritual legacies that the ancient Indian sages left for humanity is yoga. Yoga has a long history that dates back more than 5000 years. The word "Yoga" first appears in the Rig Veda. The concept of yoga was later broadened and reinterpreted by sages, and their teachings and practices were documented in the Upanishads. 'Yuj', which means 'to join' or 'to unite' in Sanskrit, is the root of the word yoga. It literally implies uniting the mind and body or the individual consciousness with the global consciousness. The Upanishads include the fundamental teachings of yoga. With the help of his Yoga Sutras, Patanjali organized and defined the yoga practices that were already in use, taking inspiration from the Upanishads. Yoga was widely practiced in the past for self-realization and spiritual advancement. The goal of these component practices was to assist the contemplative state of consciousness by creating the perfect conditions for psychophysiological health and optimal body and mind functioning. Yoga was formerly considered a spiritual practice aimed at fostering spiritual development. Nonetheless, in contemporary life, these yoga techniques are frequently applied sparingly to preserve mental and physical health. Currently, yoga is traditionally approached as a form of physical training. A key component of yoga was exercise. In ancient India, this branch of yoga was known as asanas. However, compared to modern fitness regimens, the yoga asanas of ancient India were intense and had different purposes. Yoga poses were more than just a kind of physical activity or fitness. Here, slokas from the yoga Upanishads will be explained along with the origins of yoga asanas, their purpose, and a variety of asanas.

Interpretations of Asanas

The Upanishads represent the pinnacle of Indian philosophy, of which yoga is an essential element. An excellent explanation of yoga theory and practice can be found in the Upanishads. The Upanishad states that the goal of yoga is to become knowledgeable about Brahman. There are essentially 108 Upanishads in all, 20 of which are devoted to yoga. The Upanishads of Yoga elaborate on several aspects of Yoga practice that lead to the realization of Brahman Knowledge and the attainment of samadhi. The Yoga Upanishads mention various yogas, including Astanga, Sadanga, and Panchasadanga. Furthermore, when discussing yoga, words like "Yama," "Niyama," "Asana," Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi are commonly used. Yoga aims to

achieve Samadhi. Asana is essential to reaching Samadhi. We have attempted to explain the numerous verses from the yoga Upanishads below, along with their interpretations and relevant sources. Asana in modern yoga refers to exercise or fitness program. Asana was not just an exercise in ancient India; meditation was at the center of asana practice. At that time Yoga asanas was a part of yoga practice called Sadhana, a spiritual discipline resting upon the ability to sit or be still for long periods of time to support the practice of meditation. 'Asanas' refers to the many bodily positions that are described in Patanjali's yoga sutra. The word asanas, which translates to "chair" or "seat" in Sanskrit, refers to both a seated position and, more broadly, any pose that is performed or maintained for a prolonged amount of time. "The proper postures where one can carry his mind to the Supreme Atman and can abide for a long time without discomfort" is what the Mandala Brahmana Upanishad defines as Asana.

Sloka 1- तत्र दश यमाः। तथा नियमाः। आसनान्यष्टौ। त्रयः प्राणायामाः। (Sandilyopnisad- 1/1/3)

According to this passage, there are 10 yamas and niyamas. There are eight distinct asanas. The number of asanas mentioned varies throughout yoga Upanishads. Certain asanas are unique, while others are frequently practiced. Sandilyopnisad, for instance, explains eight asanas. Only four asanas were mentioned by Yogatattvopnisad. While the Darsana Upanishads include nine asanas, the Trisikhibrahmanopnisad describes seventeen, and the Tejobindupnisad describes Siddhasana alone. Eleven asanas are described in the varaha Upanishads. Sukhasana is one of the nine asanas that are mentioned in the Darsana Upanishads, along with the other eight. Again, the Upanishads show the distinctions between the various Yogangas (aspects of Yoga). For example, the Yoga Upanishads describe Astanga, Sadanga, and Panchasadanga among other Yogangas. The positions of asanas also change based on variations in yogangas. Asana, according to the Mandala Brahmana Upanishad, is the third of the Astangas. The first anga of the Sadanga is Asana, as described in the Ksurikopnisad and DhyanaBindu Upanishads. Tejobindupnisad claims that Asana is the eighth anga of the Panchasadanga. Asana is mentioned as the third anga of Astanga in the Trisikhibrahmanopnisad, Sandilyopnisad, Varaha Upanishad, and Darsana Upanishad.

Different kinds of yoga asanas are mentioned in various verses of the Yoga Upanishad. Trisikhibrahmanopnisad has taught us around seventeen asanas. For example –

Sloka 2- पद्मासनं सुसंस्थाप्य जानूर्वोरन्तरे करौ।

निवेश्य भूमावतिष्ठेद्योमस्थः कुक्कुटासनः। (Trisikhibrahmanopnisad-1/1/41)

These two lines discuss the postures of Padmasana (lotus-posture) and Kukkutasana (cock- posture). The Yoga Upanishad lists numerous such asanas. Approximately eight asanas are described in the Sandilyopnisad: Svastika, Gomukha, Padma, Vira, Simha, Bhadra, Mukuta, and Mayura. The Trisikhibrahmanopnisad, Varaha Upanishad, and Darsana Upanishad all share these eight asanas. The only four significant asanas that Yogatattvopnisad discussed were Siddha, Bhadra, Simha, and Padmasana. Approximately eight Trisikhibrahmanopnisad Asanas, including yoga, baddhapadmasana, Uttanakurmaka, Dhanurasana, Matsyapithaka, and Pascimatana Asana, were described. Yoga Upanishad also describes the guidelines for performing yoga poses. All of these topics are covered in the Yoga Upanishad, including body posture and how to sit in each asana, hand and foot placement, and head alignment. According to these two verses, when sitting in the pose known as "Padmasana," one should place their hands between their knees and thighs. Once he has mastered the Padmasana, he adopts the kukkutasana (cock-posture), where he is suspended in midair with his body firmly grounded on the earth and his two hands placed in the area between his knees and the objects.

It is crucial to perform yoga poses in the appropriate location. Yoga asana demands a quiet, serene space to be practiced, where there won't be any outside noise to distract from the sound or anything to go in the way of mental concentration. The Yoga Upanishad mentions this from a very long time ago.

Sloka 3- वेदतत्त्वार्थविहितं यथोक्तं हि स्वयम्भुवा।

निःशब्दं देशमास्थाय तत्रासनमवस्थितः॥ (Ksurikopnisad-1/2)

According to the Vedic teachings, as stated in these two passages, one should sit quietly and without making any disturbance.

Astanga Yoga includes asana as one of its components. Every Yogangas complements every other one. Without a Yoganga, it is impossible to achieve Samadhi or awareness of Brahman. Each Yogangas has to be performed in the correct sequence and consecutively in order to achieve Samadhi or Brahman Knowledge. Asana is among such. The next level cannot be attained if the asanas are not performed in the way prescribed by the Yoga Upanishad. Such as,

Sloka 4- यमनियमासनाभ्यासयुक्तः पुरुषः प्राणायाम चरेत्।

तेन नाड्यः शुद्धा भवन्ति॥ (Sandilyopnisad- 1/3/15)

It is stated here that one should fulfill Yama, Niyama, and Asana before engaging in Pranayama. That is, in order for pranayama to be effective, the mind must first adhere to a set of yamas and guidelines, and then the body must be positioned in a specific way. By stating, "By whom posture has been successfully attained, by him are all three worlds subjugated," Sandilyopnisad indicates the significance of Asana. Pranayama should be practiced by the practitioner of Asana, Niyama, and Yama. The Nadis are thus cleansed. The significance of Asana is also discussed in the Darsana Upanishad. According to this Upanishad, a person who performs the proper asana can vanquish Triloka.

Conclusion

At present, people understand yogaasanas as yoga exercise. In ancient times, yoga meant more than just exercise. Yoga of ancient times was spiritual. But today's yoga is generally focused on physical fitness. Many believe that these physical exercise or yoga

asanas originated outside India and were later adopted by India. But in this article we have mentioned and explained various verses of Upanishads where yoga asana is mentioned and we understand that the origin of yoga asana was not outside India but on the soil of India. India is the birthplace of yoga, but that was a long time ago. There are many differences between the era of the present and the era of ancient India. As time has passed, the concept of yoga has changed. Yoga asanas is no exception to this; there have been many changes in yoga asana as well. So maybe we can see some discrepancies between the yogasanas of ancient India and the current yogasanas. But that does not mean that yoga was imported from western countries to India.

Acknowledgment: No

Author's Contribution: *Trishna Karati*: Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing

Funding: No

Declaration: Not Applicable

Competing Interest: No

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