

# The Ways Understand Yoga: An Integrated Approach

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## Abstract

Yoga has been popular worldwide, yet several people have fuzzy idea about. The present article attempts to investigate and delineate real nature of Yoga based on holistic approach—etymological meanings, definition in Indian thoughts, meaning of Yoga as told by the Yoga scholars, etc. Initially it deals with etymological meaning of Yoga and related with several Yoga have been defined in three sources of Yoga, i.e. Samkhya-Yoga philosophy, Vedanta Philosophy and the Tantric Philosophy. Simultaneously, it also attempts to make understanding of Yoga simple and convenient by depicting Yoga as an End or Ultimate State or Mean or Tool, Process, subject of art and science etc.

**Keywords:** Yoga, Science, Consciousness, State, Mean, Art.

## INTRODUCTION

Currently the word Yoga and its practices are popular worldwide yet the most people have vague ideas about it. Gusain (2020)<sup>1</sup> asserts some, person think of it as a system of exercise (asanas), while other think of it either as system of breathing exercise (pranayama) or a mixture of chanting (japa) and right association (satsang) or relaxation technique or meditation or Hindu religion or a trick of magic or a creed or community or related with particular age and gender or withdrawal (sanyasa) from society or sensual enjoyment or philosophy,

etc. Even among the scholars and researchers of Yoga and Indian philosophy perceive Yoga. The understanding of Yoga needs deeper and wider perspectives. The author noticed first such an attempt by S-VYASA<sup>2</sup> in their books. The present article present the perspectives which makes the Yoga to be understood in corrects manners. Before going ahead with objectives, design and perspectives lets us understand etymology and sources of the Yoga knowledge as under:

- 1. Etymology:** The word 'Yoga' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'Yuj'; according to Panini Vyakaran (grammar) (QCI/YCB, 2017)<sup>3</sup>, it has three meanings i.e., 'Yujir Yoge, Yuj Samadhau and Yuj Samyamne.' While 'Yujir Yoge' means Yoga is union, 'Yuj Samadhau' means Yoga is total cessation of mental modifications and 'Yuj Samyamne' means Yoga is control or restraint or abstinence or moderation or being patient for the time being or austerity or discipline.
- 2. Sources of Yoga Knowledge and Meaning of Yoga:** There are three sources of Yoga knowledge (Jayanthi *et al.*, 2017)<sup>4</sup>, namely

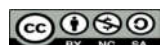
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*Vedanta*, Patanjali Yoga Sutra (*Yog Darshan*) and *Tantra*. While *Vedanta* is the source of four types of Yoga, i.e., *Jnana* Yoga, *Bhakti* Yoga, *Karma* Yoga and *Dhyana* Yoga, Patanjali Yoga Sutra is the source of *Raja* Yoga and *Tantra* is the source of *Hatha* Yoga, *Mantra* Yoga, *Yantra* Yoga, *Tantra* Yoga, *Japa* Yoga, *Laya* Yoga, *Kundalini* Yoga, *Swara* Yoga, etc.

## OBJECTIVES

The several Indian philosophical treatise and the experts present interpretations of Yoga in their own ways and unique sense. Therefore present article is written with following objectives while keeping the interpretations of Yoga acceptable to the experts from Indian philosophy as well as Yoga with a background in modern science.

1. To make the Yoga simple and convenient to comprehend.
2. To make Yoga understand in terms of either as an end state or just a state, mean/tool (mean to end), process, deliberate practice with patience, power, subject, etc.
3. To Encourage the Yoga practitioners to comprehend the Yoga in variety of perspectives without being defensive or offensive of their own perceptions of Yoga.
4. To disseminate the understanding of Yoga an appropriate manner.

### *Explanatory Design*

In accordance with objectives of present article, an explanatory method is adopted. In order to meet the objectives of article, author decided to review the understanding of Yoga in the light of either as end state or state or mean (set of Yoga methods to meet particular purpose), practice or discipline or process or power or subject, etc. Therefore each interpretation of Yoga in aforesaid light is followed by popular meaning of Yoga which has been supported by etymology, argument, logical explanation and relevant quotation of Yoga pioneers.

**Yoga as End State - Yoga is Union:** The most popular interpretation of the word **Yoga as the union** is related to the first interpretation of the Sanskrit word 'Yuj' i.e. *Yujir Yoge*. The interpretation of Yoga as the union is evident in *Vedanta* and *Tantra*. In the *Vedanta* the yoga is interpreted as the union of individual consciousness (*jivatma* or soul) with supreme consciousness (*paramatma* or Brahma or *Hiranyagarbha* or God). *Vedanta* is the source of

four types of Yoga. Hence, there are four paths (i.e., *Jnana* Yoga, *Bhakti* Yoga, *Karma* Yoga, and *Dhyana* Yoga) to attain the ultimate purpose of Yoga, which is the union of individual consciousness with supreme consciousness. Each step and stage of training and transformation varies. In *Jnana* Yoga, the seven steps (four external and three internal) of training transform intelligence into intellect and intellect into wisdom and intuition. In *Bhakti* Yoga, nine staged training transforms our 'sense of being connected' with one another, along with faith and devotion, into 'love with the Devine, hence ultimately union with the divine. In *Karma* Yoga, the training of inculcating its principles and developing them within leads attached actions to detached actions, which results in freedom of the soul from the samskaras (impressions that cause the soul to be bound and entangled into a vicious cycle of birth and death. In *Dhyana* Yoga, training and consistent practice concentration leads to transforming personal consciousness into supreme consciousness (union).

In the *Tantra*, the Yoga is interpreted as **union of Shiva** (at Sahasrara Chakra) and **Shakti** (as Kundalini Shakti that dwells at Muladhara Chakra in form of unconscious and sleep state). Hath Yoga Pradeepika<sup>5</sup> asserts the purpose of Hatha Yoga is Raja Yoga where Raja Yoga means Samadhi. It is the same Samadhi which is attained through process of awakening of Kundalini Shakti<sup>6</sup> at the Muladhara Chakra and then gradually deliberately making the same rise upwards piercing through each of Chakras - Muladhara, Swadhishtana, Manipur, Anahata, Vishuddhi, Ajna, and finally Sahasrara by using various means of contemplation on mantras, Yantras, deities of the Chakras along with blessing of gurus.

**Yoga as State - Yoga is Union of Body, Mind and Spirit:** Yoga as the harmony of the body, mind and spirit is come to light last hundred years. The interpretation is influenced by the theory of bodily composition (anatomy and physiology) found in *Vedanta*, *Samkhya Darshan* (which is considered a theoretical aspect of Yoga Darshan (Patanjali Yog Sutra) and *Yog Darshan* and *Tantra*. According to the theory, our entire being comprises of three bodies, i.e., *sthool sharir* (gross body), *sukshma sharir* (subtle body), and *karak sharir* (causal body). The gross body is composed of five elements, namely space or ether, air, fire, water and earth; the subtle body is comprised of the mind, ego, intellect, five cognitive organs and five conative or motor organs) and, the causal body is comprised of samskaras (impressions or inherited genetic material as a blueprint of typology of the subtle body and gross body), due to

which the soul gets bounded and entangled into a vicious cycle of birth and death. Yoga, as the union of body, mind, and spirit, has also been influenced by the emergence of the understanding of the mind and scientific studies over the past two centuries. Hence, Yoga as the union of the body, mind and soul is advocated by experts of Indian philosophy, Yoga and also the common Yoga practitioners and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)<sup>6</sup> after United Nation's (UN) general assembly decision of celebrating International Yoga Day on 21<sup>st</sup> June from 2015, under its wing of education, science and culture.

**Yoga as Mean - Yoga is a Means to Attain Moksha (salvation) or Kaivalya (solitude):** The word *Moksha* means ultimate freedom or liberation from the cycle of birth and death. It also means *Kaivalya* (solitude), salvation, or emancipation. In terms of Yoga Darshan (Patanjali Yoga Sutra), Yoga means *Samadhi* (ultimate freedom or emancipation). In this philosophy, individual consciousness (which is called *jivatma* in *Vedanta*) is called *Prakriti* (nature) and supreme consciousness (which is called *paramatma* in *Vedanta*) is called *Purusha* (God). Though both words (*Moksha* or *Kaivalya*) are synonyms, they differ in contextual use. While the word *Moksha* or ultimate freedom is used as liberation not only from three types of sorrows but also from effects of *mahat* (*Chitta*), *ahamkara*, *manas*, five senses, five conative senses, five gross elements, five subtle elements (*tanmatras*) and qualities (three *gunas* of nature) in context of *Prakriti*, the word *Kaivalya* or emancipation (re-establishing in one's true self) is used in the context of *Purusha*.

**Yoga as Process - Yoga is Involution Process (pratiprasav-prakriya):** Involution is the reverse evolution process. Evolution is defined as the process of growth and development from micro to macro. Hence, the involution is the process of development from macro to micro. Yoga as an involution process, as propounded by Patanjali (P.Y.S.: 2/25,3/50, 55, 4/26 & 2/10, 34)<sup>3,4</sup>, in the sutra as Involution as the transformation of Vrittis (PYS:1/5-11)<sup>3,4</sup>, as *Dukkha* (sorrows, PYS:2/15)<sup>3,4</sup>, as *Prakriti* (nature, PYS:3/9-12)<sup>3,4</sup> and Chetana (consciousness, PYS:3/13).<sup>3,4</sup>

**Yoga as Practice (Yoga is Discipline):** Discipline means the application of a certain degree of laws, rules, or patience. The first sutra of Patanjali Yoga Sutra (P.Y.S.: 1/1)<sup>3,4</sup> is evidence of Yoga as a discipline in which Patanjali begins with "*Atha Yoganushasanam*", which means now I begin the discipline of Yoga. *Shiv Khara* (2011)<sup>9</sup>, in order to make common populace understand what discipline

is, compares it with a kite and adds that "discipline is like a kite," which if even if dropped from 100th floor of the building can be carried away by wind either to down at earth or even carried to a mile or two, yet it is sure that it will not fly instead fall on the earth at some point of time. However, the kite held by a thread (disciple) and flown by an experienced person will indeed fly. So, the discipline leads to an individual to attain heights of development. Covey (1992)<sup>10</sup> asserted that successful people follow some discipline to maintain momentum in life to achieve heights or unachieved.

In the various types of Yoga derived from the Tantra, such as Hatha Yoga, Yoga is interpreted more as a discipline. Hence, Yoga is discipline.

**Yoga as Mean - Yoga is Mean to Manifest the un-manifest:** According to *Sayana*, one of the commentators on Patanjali Yoga Sutra (P.Y.S.), yoga is mean to achieve the achieved and Yoga is mean to achieve the unachieved (Singh, 1997).<sup>11</sup> The definition of yoga based on P.Y.S. by *Sayana* carries the same meaning: 'Yoga as a mean to manifest the un-manifest.' Methods of attaining dozens of siddhis (supernatural powers) have already been mentioned in the third chapter of the Patanjali Yoga Sutra. Modern Psychology and Parapsychology also recognize the existence of supernatural powers such as clairvoyance, clairaudience, and precognition as extrasensory perceptions (E.S.P.) among the Yogis and other spiritual practitioners.

In order to explain, 'to manifest the un-manifest,' in the context of the common person (not yogis and spiritual practitioners), several people often say, "We do not have confidence." Confidence, determination, etc., are not something outside the person. They are within the person, yet the person does not realize them as they are not manifested to them. Yoga emphasizes 99% of practice and 1% of theory through its key emphasized principles, *Abhyasa* (practice) and *Vairagya* (detachments). Increased levels of confidence, determination, etc., among the students of various *Gurukuls* systems (*Arya Samaj*, etc.) where the students start the day with Yoga asanas, pranayamas, meditation, prayers, etc. for years along with a healthy vegetarian diet and practice of values throughout the day are evidence of manifesting the un-manifest.

**Yoga is a Means to Obtain Holistic Health:** Yoga was considered earlier as a means for spiritual attainment only. However, people, physicians, and scientists have given much more importance to health and well-being in past centuries. It led me to consider Yoga as a means to attain the same. *B.K.S. Iyengar* is a perfect example of Yoga as a

means to attain health and wellness. He started his yoga practice journey under his guru and brother-in-law, *T. Krishnamacharya*, to treat tuberculosis and attain health. He was so fascinated by the influence of Yoga that he took up Yoga as a carrier and a means to develop his holistic health and that of the common populace. There are several other examples of people who started yoga out of fear motivation or because they were suffering from disease (s) and attained health. It led to a belief that became popular among the common person as Yoga is a means to health.

Yoga is also considered a means to attain holistic health because it has all the necessary means to attain all the aspects of holistic health.

Holistic Health means managing, treating and preventing disease and attaining physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual well-being. Thousands of testimonies and scientific evidence suggest that (Iyengar, 2001)<sup>12</sup> Yoga is meant to attain holistic health (physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual well-being).

**Yoga is a Means to Develop Integrated Personality:** The word personality is derived from the Latin term "persona", which means "mask." In the parts, theatre artists used to wear "masks" to represent a character in a drama. Hence, the earliest meaning of personality is character. However, these days, personality is considered the total of physical and mental characteristics. Moreover, various theoreticians of personality, such as behaviourism, psycho-dynamism, etc., defined personality in their terms.

Integrated Personality Development refers to the overall development of personality, *i.e.*, physical, mental, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual self. In the education systems all over the world, it is observed that services of physical education teachers are limited to physical development as well as the development of social skills (teamwork) and services of subject education are limited to the development of intellectual aspects. Value education, which has been part of the education system in the past decade, only leads to some aspects of spirituality. Hence, mental, emotional, and spiritual development is given the most minor importance. Yes, yoga is a means which can lead to the overall development of personality. Yoga is also considered a means to attain holistic health because it has all the necessary means to attain all the aspects of holistic health.

**Yoga is the Art and Science of Living:** Art is the body of knowledge based on subjective thinking,

opinions, assumptions, beliefs, experiences, and intuition. The art is conceptual, which expresses knowledge through subjective representation. Based on intuition, it leads to innovation and creativity expressed through an artist's subjective interpretations. Yoga is an art for several reasons. Firstly, the knowledge of Yoga obtained originated and was developed by *Yogis* a thousand years before was based on *Prajna* (intuition) and what they heard in a state of deeply absorbed meditation. Secondly, the re-origination of Hatha Yoga through the artistic work of *Maharishi Matsendranath*, etc., to the current form is also evidence of innovation, creativity and subjective representation. To illustrate, it was innovative and creative ideas of *Swami Shivananda*, *B.K.S. Iyengar*, *Shri Shri Ravi Shankar*, etc. that their initiatives, subsequently, in form teaching Yoga asanas integrating the most asanas with twelve asanas of Sun Salute, using props, using combination of bellows breathing with *Ajapa-Japa* into a package of *Sudarshan Kriya* to make the common person taste the Yoga, and alleviate their health problems and enhance well-being.

Science is the body of knowledge obtained through systematic observation and experimentation. Science is theoretical, which lays a system (scientific method) for acquiring knowledge. At the same time, science is based on the logic involved in its systematic observation, experimentation and scientific methods. Yoga is science, too. Firstly, the practice of Yoga techniques such as asanas, pranayamas, mudras, etc., engages a systematic approach (steps and stages) of doing and developing practice and also involves logic whether which techniques should be practised why (logic), by whom and under what conditions practice of the techniques be change. Moreover, it respects subjective differences, as medical doctors do not practice the same medicine (*e.g.*, antibiotics) for every person suffering from fever, cold and cough.

**Yoga as the Science of Consciousness:** Science is known as the body of knowledge obtained from systematic observation and experimentation. It is the body of knowledge obtained and developed using scientific methods.

Consciousness (Bharadwaj, 2013)<sup>13</sup> can be understood in physics, physiology, psychology and metaphysics. In terms of physics (as well as Tantra), it means *Prana* (a subtle form of energy) or energy which flows through over 72,000 *Nadis* (energy channels) and is regulated and directed by *Chakras* (plexus) in connection with *sanskaryukt atma* {imprisoned soul or bounded soul or spirit entangled with (hereditary and genetic

information) or previous life actions). In terms of psychology, it means something which makes us aware of information and understanding of stimuli and events within and in the environment. In terms of physiology, it means those neuro-endocrine systems that help us know, make sense, understand, etc. In terms of the metaphysics of India, it means both a light of consciousness and energy, which manifest when spirit and matter are united and are subsequently sources of both cognition and activities. In metaphysical terms, this consciousness is considered an instrument of the soul.

Osho was among the foremost people in the 1970s to 1980s who considered Yoga as a science of consciousness. He even authored a book (Osho, 1990)<sup>14</sup> in Hindi titled “Chetana ka Vijnan”, which means the science of consciousness. Recognition of Yoga as a science of consciousness led to various Yoga departments in the Universities, Department Yoga and Science of Consciousness.

Swami Satyananda Saraswati (2000)<sup>15</sup> interpreted the definition of Yoga in his book “Shore to Shore”, which is mentioned in Patanjali Yoga Sutra, i.e., *Yogashchittvrittinirodhah* (PYS:1/2) as Yoga is complete control over various layers of consciousness.

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## CONCLUSION

The microscope is used to study the variety of germs, cells and its organelles, etc. The telescope is used to study the heavenly bodies. Similarly, perspectives of Yoga as mentioned above as an end state or state, mean/tool, process, etc. will help to the Yoga, Indian philosophy aspirants, scholars and researcher to understand and disseminate the knowledge of Yoga much more meaningful ways.

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