

## Yoga a science, an art or a philosophy: A critical analysis

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### Abstract

The debate whether yoga is a science, an art or a philosophy has gone on for years. Many scholars about their opinions, that it is both an art and science. With very perfection analysis with solid reasons it comes to conclusion that Yoga is a wonderful combination of both science and art and also one of the six orthodox schools of Indian Philosophy. The term "yoga" comes from a Sanskrit word "Yuj" meaning "union." This is the union of individual soul with the super natural being or the universal soul. Yoga has been practiced for thousands of years as an Indian philosophy to join the individual self with divine, universal soul or cosmic consciousness. Yoga is discussed in the ancient foundational Sutra of Hindu philosophy and is perhaps most elaborately mentioned in Patanjali Yoga sutra. Patanjali is considered as the father of Yoga and his Yoga Sutra are completely dedicated to the knowledge of Yoga. Patanjali defines yoga in his second sutra as:

"*Yogah citta-vrtti-nirodhah*" means 'yoga is the cessation of all the modifications of mind'. The Sanskrit term '*vritti*' here means all painful or non-painful elements of the mind which keep on suffering in the form of thoughts, feelings and emotions. The Astanga yoga (eight fold path) of Patanjali narrate deeply the importance each steps to attain liberation. These eight fold path are Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dhyana, Dharana, and Samadhi. The first five limbs or steps leads to bodily perfections such as beauty, loveliness, strength and toughness; while the last three limbs through *sanyama* leads to mind and psychological perfections of perceptiveness. However, in recent times yoga has been extremely popular in the context of fighting stress, anxiety, depression and achieves health related fitness. In the present days, the people are more inclination towards regular practice of yoga to make their body fit and active lifestyle habits. Yoga is not just a set of asans that one performs on the mat, but rather a way of life. The person with a healthy body and calm mind is bound to live a happier and stress-free life. Yoga is an art and is a science that deals with body, breath, mind, soul, and ultimately, the universe itself.

**Keywords:** astanga yoga, philosophy, art, science, asana, *samadhi*, *kaivalya* and emancipation

### 1. Introduction

The word 'Yoga' comes from the Sanskrit term '*Yuj*' which means 'Union', 'to join' or to 'unite', the union of individual soul with that of universal soul. As per yogic scriptures the practice of yoga leads to the union of individual soul with that of universal soul. In India, the practice of Yoga is believed to have started with every dawn civilization. In the yogic context, Lord Shiva is seen as the first Yogi or Adiyogi. Yoga has also been practiced in Pre-Vedic period by different Seers.<sup>[1]</sup> In the sixth chapter of Bhagavad Gita, which is most important authority on yoga philosophy, Sri Krishna explains to Arjuna the meaning of Yoga as a deliverance from contact with pain and sorrow<sup>[2]</sup>. The Bhagavad Gita also gives other explanations of the term yoga and lays stress upon Karma Yoga (yoga by action). It is said: 'work alone is your privilege, never the fruits thereof. Never the fruits of action be your motives; and never cease to work. Work in the name of Lord, abandoning selfish desires. Be not affected by success or failure. This equipoise is called Yoga<sup>[3]</sup>. The *Kathopanishad* describe Yoga thus: when the sense are stilled,

when the mind is at rest, when intellect wavers not- then say the wise, is reached the highest stage. This steady control of the senses and mind has been defined as Yoga. He who attains it is free from delusion'.

Yoga is one of the six orthodox schools of Indian Philosophy which has its own epistemology and metaphysic. The great Sage Mahashi Patanjali systematized it and classified it into Astanga Yoga or eight fold path of Yoga. This eight fold path consists of Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. The first two steps are Yama and Niyama which controls a person's passions and emotions. He maintained a well disciplined and balanced life with his fellow man. The third step asana is totally related to physical body that is physical fitness. Regular practicing asana keeps the body fit. The next two steps, Pranayama and Pratyahara, teach us how to regulate the breathing, and through that the person can control the mind. This two stages of yoga helps to free the senses from the bondage of the objects of desire. The last three stages are difficulty to practice where a person keeps him harmony with himself and supreme soul. Here only the

<sup>1</sup> BKS Iyengar, Light on Yoga, Harper Collins Publishers, New Delhi, 2003, P.19.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, P.20

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.20

person realizes himself and reach the super consciousness stage. The person is fully conscious and alert in the Samadhi stage. So yoga is not confined to asana and pranayama only. This is a vast philosophy. Yoga may be considered as an art. As music, craft work, dance, paintings are practiced by human being science inception, yoga as an art, also pursued by human beings throughout our history, so it can be called as an art. Yoga is a branch of knowledge or study dealing with a body of facts truths systematically arranged and showing the operation of general laws. So, Yoga is considered as pure science. Yoga is very systematic, very scientific. The art of yoga inspires, whereas the science of yoga illuminates us.

### Yoga is an art

First of all, let us discuss the meaning and definition of art. There is no universally accepted definition of art. Although commonly used to describe something of beauty, or a skill which produces an aesthetic result. The original classical definition - derived from the Latin word "ars" (meaning "skill" or "craft") - is a useful starting point. This broad approach leads to art being defined as: "the product of a body of knowledge, most often using a set of skills." The Merriam Webster dictionary defines art as "skill acquired by experience, study or observation". The Cambridge dictionary defines art as "the making of objects, images, music, etc, that are beautiful or that express feeling".

Considering the entire thing, Yoga can be termed as an art. The following reasons are narrated.

- While performing *asana* (yoga postures), there is an artistic element and that maintain balance and increase consciousness as the body changes into various beautiful postures. Here the performer involved with balance, poise, grace and precision. This is an art.
- The *pranayama* (breathing practices) is also an art, because the practitioner spends long time, calming his senses and progressing from short breaths to long smooth ones, which calm his mind. While practicing *kapalvati* (jerky breaths) is also an artistic form.
- When our conscious mind becomes quiet and calm after practicing *pranayama*, the person doing meditation. Through meditation the consciousness develops. He becomes aware of his deeper and inner being and begins an exploration of his emotions and thoughts. This journey is an art.
- The fifth stage *pratyahara* (withdrawal of senses) involves control of senses, or the ability to withdraw the attention of the senses from outward objects. This withdrawal process of senses definitely brings it into the category of art.
- Yoga as one of the many arts, skills and creative activities pursued by human beings throughout our history, such as music, dance, painting and craft-work. Yoga is also a part of the cultural heritage of humanity. It is a creative act and Yoga is an art that we can engage with, take part in, transform ourselves with.

### Yoga is a science

Yoga is a science because each of its poses (asana) have been specifically designed and tested for perfect result by the ancient sages over the period of thousands years. Each asana (physical postures), mudras (hand gesture) Pranayama (breathing practices) activates a special part of the body or organ in order to get exact result out of it or a specific effect after practice. Thus it is scientific journey to our inner consciousness which enhance our senses of being. The science of yoga consists of acquiring knowledge through observation and experiment. It is a science, which deals with the body and mind controlling the body through the practice of yoga to achieve the rhythm of the mind. The health and the strength of the body and the mind are acquired, only when a state of equilibrium is attained where by the body and the mind are balanced. The dictionary definition of the word science is

- A branch of knowledge or study dealing with a body of facts or truths systematically arranged and showing the operation of general laws <sup>[4]</sup>.
- The intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment <sup>[5]</sup>.
- Knowledge about or study of the natural world based on facts learned through experiments and observation <sup>[6]</sup>.
- The observation, identification, description, experimental investigation, and theoretical explanation of phenomena: new advances in **science** and technology <sup>[7]</sup>.
- The systematic study of the nature and behavior of the material and physical universe, based on observation, experiment, and measurement, and the formulation of laws to describe these facts in general terms <sup>[8]</sup>.
- The careful study of the structure and behavior of the physical world, especially by watching measuring and doing experiments, and the development of theories to describe the result of these activities <sup>[9]</sup>.  
<http://dictionary.cambridge.org>

So considering these above mentioned definitions of science, yoga is definitely a "systematic knowledge of the physical or material world gained through observation and experimentation." Yoga is also a branch of knowledge or study dealing with a body of facts truths systematically arranged and showing the operation of general laws. They gained all this knowledge not through belief and superstition but through systematic observation of their physical bodies and the environment. All our ancient yogis were definitely scientists. They rightly observe the nature, physical bodies, and health and after carefully experimental investigation identify various postures, pranayama, mudras, and various kriyas then describe it in the text. They nicely elaborate astanga yoga which is Yama (moral code), Niyama (personal discipline), Asana (Yogic Postures), Pranayama (Breathing), Pratyahara (Withdrawal of senses), Dharana (Concentration on object) Dhyana (Meditation) and Samadhi (Salvation).

<sup>4</sup> WWW.Dictionary.com

<sup>5</sup> <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com>

<sup>6</sup> [www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)

<sup>7</sup> [www.freedictionary.com](http://www.freedictionary.com)

<sup>8</sup> Co build advanced English dictionary, Copyright HarperCollins Publishers.

<sup>9</sup> <http://Dictionary.Cambridge.org>

They gave emphasis on first and second steps which is related to physical and moral code and highly essential to leave in the society. The third step asana describe regular practices of various posture and their health benefits. In today's world all the asana are correct so far as kinesiology and biomechanics is concerned. The practice of Asana integrates & harmonizes the body & mind. Asanas also release mental tensions. Regular practice of Asana maintains the physical body in an optimum condition & promotes health even an unhealthy body. The fourth step is pranayama and regular practice of different types of pranayama can improve total lungs capacity. The other lungs volume or capacities like tidal volume, inspiratory reserve volume, expiratory reserve volume, residual volume and vital capacity can improve. Modern research in the field of exercise physiology and physical education prove it. During those days they know the importance of oxygen for our body. The next four steps explain properly about our self-realization and how desire is the ultimate cause of our sorrow. Meditation is a precise technique for resting the mind and attaining a state of consciousness that is totally different from the normal waking state. Through meditation only the mind became under control. Modern stress management *Gurus* are also emphasizing regular practicing of meditation and through meditation only the body, mind and soul can be maintained in an equilibrium state. So, considering the above mentioned facts yoga is very systematic, very scientific.

### Yoga is a philosophy

Indian Philosophy or Hindu Philosophy is generally classified into 6 orthodox schools (*āstika*) and 3 heterodox (*nāstika*) schools. The basic difference between the two branches of Hindu Philosophy schools is said to be based on the recognition of Vedas. Orthodox schools recognize the authority of Vedas while heterodox schools don't believe in the authority of Vedas. The six classical schools (*shatdarshan*) are *Samkhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyaya*, *Vaisheshik*, *Purva Mimansa* and *Uttar Mimansa (Vedanta)*. Almost all Indian schools of thought accepted the theory of karma and rebirth, and the ideal of *moksha* is conceived as liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. *Moksha* or liberation is considered as the highest goal of human struggle. Yoga school of Hinduism holds that ignorance is the cause of suffering. Liberation, like other schools of Indian Philosophy, is removal of ignorance, which is achieved through the knowledge and self-awareness. In Yoga philosophy, Patanjali gave emphasis on liberation and that can be achieved with *astanga yoga* <sup>[10]</sup>. Patanjali systematized Yoga and wrote *Yoga Sutra*. The word Sutra means aphorism. It is a mnemonic (to aid memories) guide that was used by the ancients to remember a subject briefly. According to *Samkhya* Philosophy (on which the *Yoga Sutra* is grafted) the three constituents of matter, that is *Sattwa* (purity, harmony, lucidity, Rajas (energy, passion) and *Tamas* (inertia, darkness), form the mind. When *Tamas* predominates in the mind we have a dull, distracted and obsessive mind; when Rajas predominates we have a restless mind. Thus these types of mind have very limited concentration and are

incapable of knowing a subtle subject like Yoga. When *Sattwa* predominates we have a one pointed and concentrated mind. Beyond that is the purified mind which can reflect the Soul and Ultimate Reality <sup>[11]</sup>. There is no perfection in material life; it is difficult to find a balance in the material world. Similarly, mind is always disturbed by three *Gunas* and external objects. With constant practice of *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana* and *Pranayama* (the first four limbs) the mind can control and come to a stage called *Ekagra*. Then person proceeds to next step *Pratyahara* where mind finds it has no desire. This stage is called *Nirudha* where an individual is not prone to feelings of pain and misery, hatred, attachment and fear. According to Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, the ultimate aim of yoga is to reach *Kaivalya* (emancipation) or ultimate freedom. This is the last stage of Yoga called *Kavalya* or *Samadhi* and it can be achieved through practice of *Dharana* and *Dhyan* the sixth and seven stage of *Astanga Yoga*. In *Kaivalya*, one is said to exist in peace and tranquility, having attended absolute knowledge of the difference between the spiritual which is timeless, unchanging and free of sorrows and the material which is not. This is the stage of *Samadhi* where the person or Yogi in a state of full conscious and alert. In this stage there is only experience of consciousness, truth, joy and bliss. *Samadhi* is a state of super bliss, joy and merging individual consciousness in to universal consciousness.

### Conclusion

Modern research has established the scientific basis of yogic techniques and yoga has now gained international acceptance. Yoga is based on philosophy that is practical and for our day-to-day living. Today people are unable to do any work even with little concentration. A fully fledged or whole hearted performance, in every action of human activity involving lot of concentration and the practice of the same is well supported by yoga. The science of yoga teaches one to attain self-realization in skilful and systematic way. Yoga does not perceive man as having only a physical body. On the contrary, it lays greater emphasis on the value of mind and soul. Therefore, it must be remembered that whenever Yoga refers to good health it also includes mental and moral soundness apart from physical fitness. Yoga has consistently regarded man as a whole being with body, mind and soul. So, Yoga is indeed all the above an art, a science, a fitness routine or rehabilitation form of exercises.

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<sup>10</sup> Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, the Yoga Institute, Pravat colony, Santacruz(east), Print arts, Mumbai, 1975. P.45

<sup>11</sup> Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, the Yoga Institute, Pravat colony, Santacruz(east), Print arts, Mumbai, 1975. P.47

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