

Indian Yoga Association (IYA)

Concept Note¹ on Yoga

I. Prelude

The popularity of Yoga has exploded exponentially all over the world and, today, it spans across the race, region, religion and nationality of its adherents. Yoga has now become a multi-billion dollar industry on the economic side, a therapy on the health and well-being front, a career option on the academic side, a symbol of sophistication on the social front, an anti-dote to stress in the Corporate Sector and a tool of excellence in general life. Hardly is there a walk of life in which Yoga has not made inroads. In this scenario, there is a natural tendency for the essence of Yoga to get diluted and its practices to get distorted. Variations, modifications and refinements in Yoga and its practices, complying with changes in modern life and its outlook, are definitely necessary. However, with the progress of time and accompanying inevitability of changes, 'Yoga' must necessarily retain its original spirit and essence.

The world today is torn apart on the basis of factors such as money and materialism, military power, caste and color, racism and religious fanaticism, unbridled greed for geographical dominance, etc. It is urgently necessary to realize the potential and promise of Yoga as a cohesive force for harmoniously binding together the whole world and bringing about universal peace and happiness.

The vision is to have IYA as the single most important hub for spreading of authentic Yoga, so that Yogic practices and Yogic lifestyle are adopted by all in our country and abroad. The attempt is to unite all Yoga paramparas (traditions) and encourage "Unity in Diversity".

¹ The purpose of this Concept Note is to have a framework for the understanding of 'Yoga' and its scope in the right perspective. This framework may ideally represent IYA guidelines for all Yoga activities in our country and abroad. The framework is envisaged to be as inclusive as possible and adequately flexible for accommodating growth and development based on growth of human knowledge and understanding in times to come.

II. Yoga

i. Yoga is an Aastika Darshana

Yoga is basically a darshana, a philosophy, and in that, one of the six aastika or orthodox Indian philosophies (Shad Darshana)², accepting the authority of the Vedas. Among philosophies, Yoga is unique in that it is not only a view of life but also a way of life.

As a philosophy, it is a spiritual³ (adhyatmic) philosophy. Therefore, shabda or agama (testimony of scriptures) is a source of valid knowledge (pramana) in Yoga philosophy. For the same reason, practices of Yoga begin with shraddha or faith⁴ towards the Guru and the Scriptures.

Yoga ideally flourishes in the Guru-shishya⁵ parampara⁶ wherein the subtleties of Yoga are imparted by the Guru to the shishya on a one-to-one basis in an ashrama environment.

ii. Spiritual Philosophy

Being a spiritual philosophy, Yoga is considered as a Moksha Shastra (a science of liberation). The ultimate goal of Yoga is Self-realization (Kaivalya). Physical and Mental Health are inevitable by-products on the path of progress in Yoga and not the ultimate goal of Yoga. Yoga is a preventive discipline preserving and promoting health.

The 'spirit' in the term 'spirituality' refers to 'Consciousness' per se. This represents the essence or real 'Self' of human being. The physical Body (Sthula sharira) and Mind (Sukshma sharira) are instruments for realizing this Self and hence they are subservient to the Self or Consciousness.

iii. Samkhya - Yoga

² The other five darshanas are Mimamsa, Vedanta, Nyaya, Vaisheshika and Samkhya.

³ It is essential note to that it is a spiritual philosophy and not a religious philosophy. Hence, we can emphasize upon the secular nature of Yoga and its practices.

⁴ It is essential to distinguish between faith and belief. Faith transcends knowledge and waits for reason to catch up with experiences had on the foundation of faith!

⁵ Guru-shishya = Spiritual Teacher – Disciple.

⁶ Parampara = unbroken series of succession or lineage

Maharshi Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga is based upon the philosophical / metaphysical foundations provided by sage Kapila's Samkhya darshana. Yoga can therefore be called as practical Samkhya and Samkhya can be called as theoretical Yoga. Samkhya and Yoga are Knowledge and Action respectively complementing each other.

They together form a complete system. Among the Shad Darshanas, Samkhya – Yoga represent Indian Psychology. In the order of subtlety, Mind is located between the Body and Consciousness. Yoga aims at keeping the Body healthy (so that it does not disturb⁷ the mind), controlling the Mind and then transcending the mind in order to realize the Spirit or Consciousness.

It is pertinent to note that all the darshanas (astika and nastika) except probably the Charvaka darshana have Yogic principles and practices incorporated in their philosophy. The four noble truths of Buddhism have several similarities and parallels to Yogic aspects. Similarly, in Jainism too the Triratna⁸ (the three gems) and Meditation or Dhyana practices (for e.g. Preksha Dhyana), among other parts, speak volumes for Yogic aspects in Jainism. Study of the nastika darshanas of Buddhism and Jainism will definitely enrich one's involvement in and practice of Yoga.

iv. Maharshi Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (PYS)

PYS forms the basic systematized text for Yoga Philosophy. It may be considered to provide the fundamental philosophical guidelines / principles for Yoga practices.

The PYS propounds Ashtanga Yoga i.e. the Yoga with eight limbs. These limbs are as follows: Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahar, Dharana, Dhyana & Samadhi. These limbs represent the practices of Yoga. The first five limbs are together called as Bahiranga Yoga (External Yoga) and the last three limbs represent the Antaranga Yoga (Internal Yoga). Antaranga Yoga stands for Meditation in sage Patanjali's Yoga. Bahiranga Yoga practices are

⁷ The first antaraya or obstacle on the path of Yoga is Vyadhi or physical ailment according to sage Patanjali. (Ref PYS Ch I : S-30).

⁸ The three Gems of Jainism are samyagd arshana (right faith), samyag jnana (right knowledge) and samyag charitra (right conduct).

preparatory for Antaranga Yoga. In other words, the first five limbs represent practices which prepare the Yoga sadhaka for Antaranga Yoga or Meditation.

The preparatory practices of Bahiranga Yoga, in the jargon of Yoga, help in reducing the Rajas and Tamas Gunas in the sadhaka thereby increasing the Sattva Guna. Concentration on subtler principles is possible only when the mind is Sattvic. Finally, even the Sattva Guna is transcended when the Sadhaka reaches the no-mind state in Meditation. Meditation is the highest practice in Yoga.

A hierarchical nature can be seen in the eight limbs of Yoga – each one subtler and internal compared to the previous one. Yamas (ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya & aparigraha), governing our interpersonal (social) interactions, are the outermost and grossest. We move inwards in Niyamas (shaucha, santosha, tapas, swadhyaya & ishvara pranidhan) which are personal in nature. Asanas are mainly physical and Pranayama practices can be said to take care mainly of the physiological and mental aspects. In Pratyahar practices the senses are withdrawn inwards. Dharana, Dhayana and Samadhi or Meditation, in general, can be said to cater to our psychological, intuitive and spiritual aspects. Thus Yoga practices take us from the outermost (social dimension) to the innermost (spiritual dimension). Yoga is an inward journey. But in moving inwards to higher practices of Yoga, the practices of the first five limbs are never abandoned. They are transcended! Practices of Yamas and Niyamas, as also keeping the body and mind healthy, can never be neglected / ignored whatever be the level of spiritual maturity or progress in Yoga.

v. Etymological Meaning of 'Yoga'

The term 'Yoga' is derived from the root word 'yuj'. Accordingly, we have three main meanings of 'Yoga': 1. Yoga is a discipline based upon 'yuj-samyamne'; 2. Yoga is a union based upon 'yuj-yujyati' or 'yujir-yoge'; and 3. Yoga is Samadhi or Concentration based upon 'yuj-samadhou'.

Of the three meanings, the most popular meaning of Yoga is 'union', union between individual consciousness and universal consciousness. This meaning is not found in Samkhya

philosophy. But Yoga can also advantageously be considered as a union (integration) of the body, mind and soul thus realizing the holistic nature of the human being.

In Maharshi Patanjali's Yoga darshana, the meaning of 'Yoga' is Samadhi i.e. Concentration. Meditation in Maharshi Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga starts with concentration (dharana) and the peak of concentration is reached in the state of Sabija Samadhi. When meditation progresses further, the mind is transcended in the state of Nirbija Samadhi and, finally, the meditator is established in pure awareness in the state of Dharmamegha Samadhi.

vi. Some Definitions of Yoga

PYS Ch I: S – 2 “Yogaha cittavritti nirodhah” – “Yoga is restraint to the point of stoppage of mental modifications”.

BG⁹ Ch II: S – 48 “Samatvam Yoga Uchyate” – “Evenness (of mind) is Yoga”.

BG Ch II: S – 50 “Yogaha karmasu kaushalam” – “Yoga is skill or dexterity in action”.

BG Ch VI: S – 23 “Duhkha samyoga viyogam yoga” – “Severance from the union-with-pain is Yoga”.

Katha Upanishad 2.6.11 ‘Taam yogam iti manyante sthiraam indriya-dhaaranam I Apramattastadaa bhavati yogo hi prabhavaapyayau II’ “‘Yoga’ they say is the firm control of the senses. The ‘Yogin’ then becomes free from all the distractions of the mind; for verily yoga (yogaḥ hi) is the outward expansion (prabhava) and the drawing back within oneself (apyaya)”.

Yoga Vashishtha: ‘Manah Prashamanopayah Yogah’ “A skillful and subtle tool to calm down the mind”

Very interestingly, almost all the definitions of Yoga refer to control of mind¹⁰ in order to transcend it thereby eliminating sufferings of human life permanently.

vii. Other Texts of Yoga

Innumerable other texts of Yoga like the Upanishads (Yoga Upanishads in particular), the Hatha Yoga Texts¹¹, the Bhagvad Gita, Yoga Vashishta, Yoga Yagnavalkya, etc also make valuable contributions to Yoga.

⁹ BG = Bhagvad Gita

¹⁰ In simple terms, ‘Control of mind’ can be understood as ‘Concentration’

viii. Traditions (Paramparas) of Yoga

Some of the important Traditions of Yoga are as follows:

Classical Yoga or the Ashtanga Yoga of Maharshi Patanjali (sometimes considered synonymously with Raja Yoga¹²), Tantra Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Mantra Yoga, Nada Yoga, Laya Yoga, Swara Yoga, Kriya Yoga, Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, etc.

These traditions need to be resurrected, rejuvenated and popularized by making them available to all in the right perspective keeping their spirit and essence intact.

Modern Traditions of Yoga originated by Legendary Masters of Yoga like Shri T. Krishnamacharya, Shri B.K.S Iyengarji, Shri Pattabhi Jois, Shri T. K. V. Desikacharji, Swami Kuvalayanandaji, Shri Yogendraji, Swami Sivanandaji, Swami Satyananda Saraswatiji, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Sri Sri Ravi Shankarji, Sadguru Jaggi Vasudevji, Swami Ramdevji, Swami Paramahansa Yoganandaji and others¹³ should be made more prominent in the world scenario of Yoga.

ix. Therapy in Yoga

Though the ultimate goal of Yoga is Kaivalya or Self-realization¹⁴, the therapeutic benefits of Yoga practices cannot be ignored. In fact, the popularity of Yoga today can be, to a great extent, ascribed to the therapeutic value of its practices. Yoga is fast appropriating the status of an alternate therapy. As a therapy, it complements the mainstream therapy i.e. Allopathy.

In PYS, physical illness or vyadhi is referred to as an antaraya which is an obstacle on the path of Yoga, a citta vikshepa or distraction of the mind. Pranava japa is mentioned as a

¹¹ Some of the principal Hatha Yoga Texts are as follows: Siddhasiddhantapadati (Goraksha Samhita & Gorakshaka Shataka), Hatha Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita, Hatha Ratnavalli and Shiv Samhita,

¹² Antaranga Yoga comprising of Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi of the Ashtanga's of Maharshi Patanjali's Yoga may be actually considered as Raja Yoga, a term popularized by Swami Vivekananda.

¹³ This list may be made more exhaustive by adding to what is missed out, if any.

¹⁴ In ancient India, Ayurveda (an Upaveda) catered to health and longevity, while Yoga was the means of Self-realization.

practice to eliminate these distractions or obstacles. Also, the kleshas or ‘inborn mental tendencies’ can deteriorate to the level of illness if not attendd to.

Hatha Yoga texts explicitly mention the therapeutic benefits of all Yoga practices – Kriyas, Asanas, Pranayama, Mudras & Bandhas, etc.

Not only Hatha Yoga but almost all the traditions of Yoga lend themselves to reaping therapeutic and healing benefits as regards health and welfare.

The therapeutic benefits of Yoga can be viewed in four dimensions viz. as a preventive discipline, as a Therapy, as a Healing methodology and a Transformative (Spiritual) technology.

The Energy dimension of Yoga practices need to be recognized and tapped to reach further heights in the field of therapy.

It is however extremely important to recognize the fact, as mentioned in Hatha Pradipika, that the practices done wrongly can invite all illnesses. Therefore, the significance of proper training for teachers and therapists cannot be over-emphasized.

x. Yoga is Lifestyle and not a style of Life!

Yoga is a holistic discipline. It not only encompasses the body, mind and spirit but also spreads itself to cover all the 24 hours¹⁵ of the day of a human being. It is a way of life. The values of Yoga need to be incorporated in day to day life. From “doing Yoga”, we should move to “being Yogic”.

Yoga ethics and etiquette need to be incorporated / complied with wherever an individual is and in whatever profession.

Yogic Lifestyle includes sadhana, diet, rest, relaxation and behavior considerations.

III. Some Important Tasks at hand

i. Practices of Yoga

1. To ensure that the essence of Yoga practices is neither diluted nor distorted but refined and strengthened.

¹⁵ In Sutra no. 14 of Ch. I of PYS, Patanjali says the abhyasa or practice of Yoga should be nairantarya or unbroken.

2. Maintaining the purity of the practices of Shat Kriyas.
3. Asanas not to be converted into mere physical exercises and Pranayama not to be treated as mere breathing practices.
4. Recognition and fortifying of the fact that Meditation is the highest practice of Yoga be it any tradition of Yoga.
5. Practices of Mudras, Bandhas, Mantras, Nada, Swara, etc to be encouraged, propounded and restored to light from the esoteric cellars of antiquity and negligence.
6. Documenting of experiences of sincere sadhakas with or without formal scientific backing. Scientific investigations in this respect can be done subsequently.
7. Undertaking the massive task of documenting, together with photographs, all the practices of Yoga along with all their variations and modifications of every Tradition, School, Institution and Ashrama. IYA should become the 'single window' of reference for any and every practice of Yoga.

ii. Yoga as an Academic Subject and Career Option

As already mentioned, with the popularity of and demand for Yoga increasing in geometric progression, it is inevitable that Yoga will be considered as a subject of Academic Course and a Career option. However, in this pursuit, it is necessary to ensure that the essence of Yoga should not be diluted. The experiential and ethical aspects of Yoga, the faculty of faith in the Guru and Scriptures, the higher dimensions of yoga (not amenable to intellectual scrutiny) and, in general, the essence of Yoga should not be sacrificed at the academic altar of competitions, examinations, marks and grades.

Ideally, even as an academic subject, Yoga may be, advantageously imparted in an ashrama atmosphere. This involves creation of more and more ashramas in future. Yoga is a product of Indian Culture and thrives in such a cultural milieu. Academic pursuit in Yoga should lead to reviving the rich heritage of Indian Culture, the sanatana dharma.

iii. Yoga in Schools

To become Yogic in life, to inculcate Yogic values and personality, the seed has to be sown early and young.

IYA needs to provide guidelines to the Education Ministry as regards

a. the standard / class grade in school wherein Yoga should be incorporated into the main curriculum,

b. syllabus and curriculum for various Yoga education, therapy and training courses and programmes and

c. the modus operandi for learning and practicing Yoga in Schools.

It is of utmost significance to separate Yoga from Physical Education.

iv. Commercial Aspects of Yoga

As already mentioned, Yoga has become a multi-billion dollar industry.

Learning and imparting of Yoga, of course, justifiably requires exchange of money. Care has to be taken to ensure that money does not become the sole dictator in the field of Yoga and Yoga does not get diluted for the sake of money and commercial interests.

v. Research and Publication

As regards Research, the two imminent tasks at hand are:

1. To encourage formal research (theoretical and practical) into Yoga and its practices.
2. To develop a storehouse for reference into all research done in Yoga anywhere and everywhere in the world – a sort of Research Library.

As regards Publication, the tasks at hand are:

1. To encourage publishing of Yoga articles / books by having a Publishing House of IYA.
2. To develop a comprehensive Library of Yoga where one can gain access to information as regards any and every publication in the field of Yoga.

vi. Forums for Communication / Exchange of Information as regards Development in Yoga

IYA may organize quarterly / Half-yearly / Annual Conferences / Seminars / Workshops / Camps / Award Ceremonies / etc. wherein progress in Yoga, new ideas, new ventures, unique experiences, research matter, etc. can be discussed for the benefit of all present and disseminated.

There has to be continuous and constant exchange and interaction amongst the stakeholders for Yoga to make progress.

IV. Onerous Responsibility

Member Institutions of IYA have the unenviable privilege of retrieving, rejuvenating, preserving, promoting and progressing the interests and essence of Yoga so that the whole world benefits from Yoga and becomes a better place to inhabit.
