

Importance of Yoga in the Indian Culture (A Study of the Yoga Camp Organized at Raman Reti, Vrindavan during Summer of 2012)



Gauri Dixit

Research Scholar,
Dept. of Sanskrit,
Institute of Oriental Philosophy,
Vrindavan (U.P.) India



Sarla Sharma

Research Guide,
Dept. of Sanskrit,
Institute of Oriental Philosophy,
Vrindavan (U.P.) India

Abstract

Of the various characteristics of the Indian culture, yoga is the one which is considered to be a way to link one with spirituality and God. All the Hindu scriptures including the Vedas provide several glimpses that confirm that in the past, yoga was an integral part of life of man, and with the exception of very few, all the people falling in different age-groups were inclined to physical exercise and yoga. The last phase of the twentieth century seemed to have forgotten yoga for certain materialistic reasons. However, now in the twenty-first century there is seen revival of yoga. Several dharm-gurus, television, internet etc. are playing a great role in spreading yoga and taking it door-to-door for the sake of the physical fitness of the people. It is believed that yoga is the panacea to all the major diseases known to the modern people. Yoga is exercised not only in India, but even in the European countries it is very popular.

Indeed, yoga is the need of the day as it cures man of the diseases, keeps him fit, keeps his mind strong, provides him mental peace, links him with meditation and spirituality and finally, links him with the ancient Indian culture. The scenario is that in all the major cities of India, yoga camps are organized throughout the year. Even the popular companies make yoga compulsory for their employees in order to keep them away from stress and to enable them to give their best through the work assigned to them.

Conducted on 100 male and female participant units of a Yoga camp in Vrindavan (U.P.), the study is empirical wherein both the primary and the secondary data have been used, and which explores the roots of the yoga in the Indian culture. The findings reveal that yoga is now a way of life that is helpful in transferring the cultural values to the members of the next generations to come.

Keywords: Indian culture, Yoga, Physical Exercise, Health, Sound mind, Sound body, Postures, Spirituality, Peace of mind, Activeness, Positive approach, Meditation, Oneness with God.

Introduction

Sri Patanjali, considered the "father of yoga," is credited with compiling the Yoga Sutras which date anywhere from 5,000 B.C. to 300 A.D. Since people experience relaxation and ease with the practice of yoga, yoga is considered a mind-body exercise. The underlying premise of mind-body exercises is that the physiological state of the body may shape emotions, thoughts and attitudes.

Yoga's history has many places of obscurity and uncertainty due to its oral transmission of sacred texts and the secretive nature of its teachings. The early writings on yoga were transcribed on fragile palm leaves that were easily damaged, destroyed or lost. The development of yoga can be traced back to over 5,000 years ago, but some researchers think that yoga may be up to 10,000 years old. Yoga's long rich history can be divided into four main periods of innovation, practice and development, that is, the pre-classical period, classical period, post classical period and modern period.

The beginnings of Yoga were developed by the Indus-Sarasvati civilization in Northern India over 5,000 years ago. The word yoga was first mentioned in the oldest sacred texts, the Rig Veda. Yoga was slowly refined and developed by the Brahmans and Rishis (mystic seers) who documented their practices and beliefs in the Upanishads, a huge work containing over 200 scriptures. The most renowned of the Yogic scriptures

is the Bhagavad-Gītā, composed around 500 B.C.E. In the pre-classical stage, yoga was a mishmash of various ideas, beliefs and techniques that often conflicted and contradicted each other.

The Classical period is defined by Patanjali's Yoga-Sūtras, the first systematic presentation of yoga. Patanjali is often considered the father of yoga and his Yoga-Sūtras still strongly influence most styles of modern yoga. Patanjali organized the practice of yoga into an "eight limbed path" containing the steps and stages towards obtaining Samadhi or enlightenment.

A few centuries after Patanjali, yoga masters created a system of practices designed to rejuvenate the body and prolong life. They rejected the teachings of the ancient Vedas and embraced the physical body as the means to achieve enlightenment. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, yoga masters began to travel to the West, attracting attention and followers. This began at the 1893 Parliament of Religions in Chicago, when Swami Vivekananda wowed the attendees with his lectures on yoga and the universality of the world's religions.

In the 1920s and 30s, Hatha Yoga was strongly promoted in India with the work of T. Krishnamacharya, Swami Sivananda and other yogis practicing Hatha Yoga. Krishnamacharya opened the first Hatha Yoga school in Mysore in 1924 and in 1936 Sivananda founded the Divine Life Society on the banks of the holy Ganges River. Krishnamacharya produced three students that would continue his legacy and increase the popularity of Hatha Yoga: B.K.S. Iyengar, T.K.V. Desikachar and Pattabhi Jois. Sivananda was a prolific author, writing over 200 books on yoga, and established nine ashrams and numerous yoga centers located around the world.

Objectives of the Study

1. To reflect the key features of the Indian culture
2. To associate yoga with the Indian culture
3. To discuss the history of yoga in India
4. To trace the roots of yoga in the scriptures
5. To interpret the need of yoga in the present times
6. To discuss the benefits of yoga to the people of the different age groups
7. To deal with the various aspects of yoga
8. To discuss the various postures adopted during the process of yoga
9. To associate yoga with spirituality
10. To reflect the effects of yoga on the mind and body of man
11. To enumerate the role of media in bringing people closer to yoga

Review of Literature

JP Sinha & Rajesh Kumar (2004) in their jointly written paper Methodology for Understanding Indian Culture discuss that methods of understanding cultures, including Indian culture, are embedded in a broad spectrum of socio-cultural approaches to human behavior in general. These approaches reflect evolving perspectives on Indian culture, ranging from the starkly ethnocentric to the largely eclectic and integrative. Most of these methods were developed in the West and were subsequently taken up with or without adaptations to fit the Indian context.

Richard M Eckersley (2007) in his research paper entitled Culture, spirituality, religion and health: looking at the big picture discusses that human health has multiple sources: material, social, cultural and spiritual. We are physical beings with material needs for nutritious food, clean air and water, and adequate shelter, as well as physical activity and sleep. We are also social beings who need families, friends and communities to flourish. We are cultural beings — of all species, we alone require cultures to make life worth living. And we are spiritual beings, psychically connected to our world.

S Chattopadhyay (2007) in his research paper Religion, spirituality, health and medicine: Why should Indian physicians care? discuss that religion, spirituality, health and medicine have common roots in the conceptual framework of relationship amongst human beings, nature and God. Religion and spirituality play important roles in the lives of millions of Indians and therefore, Indian physicians need to respectfully acknowledge religious issues and address the spiritual needs of their patients. Incorporating religion and spirituality into health and medicine may also go a long way in making the practice of medicine more holistic, ethical and compassionate.

Elizabeth Monk-Turner and Charlie Turner (2010) in the research paper entitled Does yoga shape body, mind and spiritual health and happiness: Differences between yoga practitioners and college students observe that in the Yoga Sutras, yoga is defined to mean, "the yogic experience." Yoga is often translated as "union" of mind, body and spirit. Classically, yoga is understood as the science of the mind. The yogic experience is that which is gained by controlling the modifications of the mind.

Padmini Tekur, Singphow Chametcha, Ramarao Nagendra Hongasandra, Nagarathna Raghuram (2010) in their study Effect of yoga on quality of life of CLBP patients: A randomized control study observe that in recent years, quality of life (QOL) has become a key concept in the medical community where health care places dual emphasis on treatment and quality of care. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines QOL as an 'individual's perception of his/her position in life in the context of culture and value system in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns'. It depends on a patient's physical, psychological and social responses to a disease and its treatment.

Arndt Bussing, Andreas Michalsen, Sat Bir S. Khalsa, Shirley Telles and Karen J. Sherman (2012) in their paper Effects of Yoga on Mental and Physical Health: A Short Summary of Reviews summarize the current evidence on the effects of yoga interventions on various components of mental and physical health, by focussing on the evidence described in review articles. Yoga may well be effective as a supportive adjunct to mitigate some medical conditions, but not yet a proven stand-alone, curative treatment. Yoga may have potential to be implemented as a beneficial supportive/adjunct treatment that is relatively cost-effective, may be

practiced at least in part as a self-care behavioral treatment, provides a life-long behavioural skill, enhances self-efficacy and self-confidence and is often associated with additional positive side effects.

Darpan Kaur, Mohinder Singh and Shaunak Ajinkya (2012) in their study Spirituality and Religion in Modern Medicine hold the idea that spirituality is related to physical and mental health. Enhanced and effective interpersonal communication between providers and patients, using a person-centered framework, is essential for optimal clinical care. As scientific research continues to explore this complex relationship between spirituality, religion, and medicine, approaches that incorporate faith, neurobiology, and psychology should be encouraged.

P A Balaji, Smitha R Varne, and Syed Sadat Ali (2012) in their research article entitled Physiological Effects of Yogic Practices and Transcendental Meditation in Health and Disease observe that yoga is an ancient Indian way of life, which includes changes in mental attitude, diet, and the practice of specific techniques such as yoga asanas (postures), breathing practices (pranayamas), and meditation to attain the highest level of consciousness. The various avenues of study of yoga practices reviewed in the present article indicated considerable health benefits, including improved cognition, respiration, reduced cardiovascular risk, BMI, blood pressure, and diabetes mellitus. It also influenced immunity and ameliorated joint disorders.

Pallav Sengupta (2012) in the paper Health Impacts of Yoga and Pranayama: A State-of-the-Art Review writes that thousands of years ago yoga originated in India, and in present day and age, an alarming awareness was observed in health and natural remedies among people by yoga and pranayama which has been proven an effective method for improving health in addition to prevention and management of diseases. With increasing scientific research in yoga, its therapeutic aspects are also being explored. Yoga is reported to reduce stress and anxiety, improves autonomic functions by triggering neurohormonal mechanisms by the suppression of sympathetic activity, and even, now-a-days, several reports suggested yoga is beneficial for physical health of cancer patients. Such global recognition of yoga also testifies to India's growing cultural influence.

Douglas A MacDonald (2013) in the research paper written on A Call for the Inclusion of Spirituality in Yoga Research holds the idea that with its origins tracing back more than two millennia to ancient India, yoga is a popular practice throughout the world in our time. Accompanying this rise in popularity in the past few decades has been a growing interest on the part of scientists and health professionals alike to empirically explore the salubrious effects of yoga on health and to apply it to the amelioration of physical and mental illness.

Hypothesis

1. The Indian culture associates man with spirituality
2. Yoga is the key feature of the Indian culture
3. The Hindu scriptures provide glimpses of yoga

4. The history of yoga begins with the Vedic age
5. In the present age yoga is becoming more and more popular with the people
6. The benefits of yoga are reserved to the people of all the age groups
7. Yoga keeps one physically fit and mentally strong providing an incredible mental and spiritual peace
8. Yoga allows the body to mould in any way acquiring different postures
9. Yoga associates man with spirituality and provides a path of oneness with God
10. Media makes a wonderful contribution in making yoga popular

Research Methodology

Based on personal observation of the male and female members of the Yoga camps, personal interest in yoga and yoga-related literature, the study is chiefly empirical conducted on 100 participant units of the Yoga Camp organized at Raman Reti Vrindavan during the summer of 2012. In the study, both the primary and the secondary data were used. The primary data were collected through the personal interview of the randomly selected participant units of the camp, while the secondary data were collected through the traditional sources, such as, books, magazines, research journals, theses, dissertations, TV shows on Yoga and internet sites. The researcher followed the following steps for making the study-

1. The selection of the problem
2. Setting of objectives
3. Review of the related literature
4. Content analysis
5. Formulation of hypothesis
6. Preparation of the research design
7. Determination of the study area
8. Determination of the number of the units of information
9. Determination of the type of sampling to be used for the selection of the units of information
10. Selection of the interview technique for the collection of data
11. Collection, classification and interpretation of data
12. Arriving at findings

Immediately after the selection of the title and theme for the study, a careful study of the related literature was made through the books, magazines, TV shows and research papers available on the various internet sites. Then the content analysis was made focusing on the titles of the studies, nationality of the authors, year of publication and name of publishers, objectives of the studies, hypothesis of the studies, tools and techniques adopted for the collection of the primary data, sample and sample size, and findings of the studies. For the sake of the scientific spirit of the work, all the steps of research prescribed by the eminent scientists, were rigidly followed, and much care was taken while making studies. The researcher's participant observation allowed her to make face-to-face interaction with the units and to be familiar with the various aspects of yoga from them.

Findings & Conclusion

1. The key features of the Indian culture include-spirituality, faith in karma, faith in rebirth, tolerance etc.
2. Yoga has its roots in the ancient Indian culture which made it binding for everyone to adopt meditation and yoga as an integral part of life
3. All the ancient Hindu scriptures and epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana provide sufficient evidence of prevalence of yoga
4. Beginning in the Vedic age, yoga has seen, more or less, all the periods of the Indian history
5. Except the last few decades of the twentieth century, yoga has been popular as a way of uniting man with God
6. The modern man is in the grip of hollow materialism, and is deviated from the cultural values
7. Every man is suffering from one or the diseases due to the modern life style
8. Only the change in the modern life style can bring man back to the lost cultural values
9. Yoga is essential for everyone of each and every age group, as it is only Yoga that can free man from diseases
10. Yoga is good for the people of different age groups
11. There are various types of yoga for the different types of people
12. Yoga provides sufficient physical exercise required for physical fitness through certain body-postures
13. Yoga provides man a platform to join spirituality and God
14. Yoga has positive effects on the body and mind of man
15. Yoga is becoming more and more popular with the people, and it is witnessed through the participation of the Indians and foreigners in the yoga camp organized in Raman Reti, Vrindavan
16. Yoga keeps one physically fit and mentally strong providing an incredible mental and spiritual peace
17. Yoga allows the body to mould in any way acquiring different postures, finally leading to physical and mental fitness
18. Yoga camps are attended mostly by those who are suffering from high blood pressure, diabetes, knee-problem, joints pain, body pain, obese etc.

19. Yoga camps are helpful in restoring the normal life of the people
20. Media through the Yoga shows on TV, interviews of the various dharm-gurus, advertisements is bringing a revolution in the field of yoga.

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