

Yog: Culture, Practice and Spread in Assam in Ancient Era

Abstract

Assam, situated in the foothills of Himalayan range, was known as *Padadeshum*, *DanavaRajya*, *Kamrup Rajyain* pre and post vedic era. *Pragjyotishpurwas* the capital of *KamrupRajya*. Archeological sites, museum, ancient texts indicate that at that age this place was a sacred place of learning, practicing, culture and spreading of Yog, also known as Jog in Sanskrit and Assamese language. The NathJogis of this place provide information that their tribe was a cult which was formed for practice and culture of Jog or Yog. This ancient form of Yog was not documented properly or if documented might have merged with other texts. The information if collected with proper research will provide a new path way to find out many ancient Yogasanas and other yogic ways.

Keywords: Yog, Yam, Niyam, Asana, Pranayam, Dhyan, Dharana, Pratyahar.

Introduction

Yog or more commonly known as Yoga is a science that systematically enhances positivity in life in a more scientific way, an addition to life. Yog means Addition, plus, '+' or positive. Addition in good health of mind, body and soul by Yam, Niyam, Asana, Pranayam, Dhyan, Dharana, Pratyahar is Yoga. Yoga is not exercise, it's a scientific medicine in holistic way. Now a days, Yog has taken the front seat in rejuvenation, Beauty, Spa, Health Resorts, Management Classes etc. It is practiced in the highest Offices like President's House of United States, Buckingham Palace in UK and Rastrapati Bhawan of India. People often ponder on the question of its origin. Evolvement of such a science, its culture and practice is a matter to think on. Every expert would in unison point out Bharat Varsh as the place of its origin. When we speak of electricity, modern medicine, atomic energy we know the inventor or inventors. Atleast (we) can call a definite person as the father of that science. However, we seldom try to find out exactly which part of Ancient India or Bharat, yoga was born, is a crucial question. We have absolutely no clue of who first discovered or invented this science of Yog. Maybe we have doubt or we assume certain ancestors to have formed and practiced this science but definite strength in such statements are lacking. In this paper the researcher will try to find out answer to such questions often enquired.

Objectives

1. To find out the ancient of Yog Science
2. To find out how it was cultured and spread
3. To find out how its was communicated to other places.

Research Questions

1. Was Yog in ancient form practiced in Assam?
2. Who and how was it cultured?
3. How was it communicated between other parts of the country?

Hurdles

1. Lack of documents or text books to indicate the ancient practice and culture of yog in Assam
2. Documents written in that age might have been damaged due to earth quack, flood, termite attack as this place is prone to all these natural calamities.
3. Archeological spots have some stone curvings but it is sometimes confusing as they were Asanas or some special art form
4. People who have inherited the Yoga art generation after generation do not wish to part with the knowledge as they consider it as secret.
5. Majority from the NathJogi tribe have adopted other professions and stopped practicing Yog.
6. Yogasanas, mudras, pranayama, kriyas have blended with religious customs, making it difficult to separate from one another.



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Area

1. Guwahati,
2. Gorakhpur and
3. Mayong
4. Basisthapur

Population

1. People practicing or have practiced Yog. People connected to NathJogi Autonomous Council officials and members.
2. Practitioners and students of Vivekananda Kendra Guwahati,
3. Doctors, Gurus, Students of Green Ayur Hospitals
4. Yoga researchers of Banaras Hindu University Yoga Unit.
5. People of Mayong and Basisthapur

Data collection**Primary**

1. Interview
2. Observation
3. Conferences, seminars
4. Visits to ancient temples, Archeological survey of India

Secondary

1. Books
2. Newspaper
3. Talks in electronic media
4. Social Media.
5. Internet

Review of related literature**Yoga**

Origin and Philosophy' by Devi, Gitanjali, Gauhati University :The special feature of this system is the comprehensive treatment of the art of Yoga. Yoga is defined as the cessation of the modifications of *citta*- As defined in the thesis. 'Yoga was born, practiced and cultured in India since Ages. Its mention is found in Vedas. First mention can be as back as to date to pre historic pre Vedic traditions; it is mentioned in the Rigveda but most likely developed around the sixth and fifth centuries BC, in ancient India's Ascetic and Sramana movements. The chronology of earliest texts describing yoga-practices is unclear, varyingly to Upanishads. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali date from the first half of the 1st millennium BC but only gained prominence in the West in the 20th century. *Hatha yoga* texts emerged around the 11th century with origins in Tantra.

Nath Yogi Autonomous Council Publications

'Nath Yogi' and 'AdiNath' published by Nath Yogi Autonomous council has detailed life history of AdiNath. According to this book AdiNath was one of the names of Shiva Lord. He Was a Yogi till his marriage with Sati. He was the one who systematized *Asanas, Dhyana, Pranayama, Kriya, Mudra, Chakra kundaliniYog*. He travelled from place to place and taught the general population about Yogdhyandharana. He introduced Yogdhyana to the non aryan people. He was a yogi and did not accept *grahaysthaasram*. He believed in natural way of life. His decedent was Aditya Nath who further started the schools of Yogi and Yogini, who practices celibacy. They cultured and practiced yogsadhana.

Yogvasistha

This book found in Manuscript format in Banaras Hindu University, is considered as a book that was written prior to *Yogasutra* of Patanjali. This shastra includes yog in its origin form and probably have been written by VasisthaMaha Moni of Pragjyotishpur. It includes all the Yog forms including *AstangaYog, KriyaYog, Mudra Yog*. The seven stages of Yog -*Yam, Niyam, Asana, Pranayam, Dhyana, Dharana, Pratyahar* has been categorized. This Shastra has tried to bring discipline to the already prevalent form of Yog that was being cultured and practiced in that age.

Yogasutra of Patanjali

Patanjali has very well defined Yog. He has propagated the *AstangaYog*. He clearly indicates that he was not the one to introduce discipline in Yog, it was already disciplined before he started. In his Philosophy of *YogSadhana*, the name of one of the six orthodox schools which is closely related with is the

Sāmkhya School

Amongst this six schools the most important contribution provided to Yog philosophy is

Yogasūtra of Patañjali

It is known as *Pātañjalayoga* or *Pātañjaladarśana* after the name of its founder. The Yog system primarily pay importance on the epistemology and the metaphysics of the *Sāmkhya*. Its this physics and science which makes Yog a science for human wellness. The medicine that can prevent and cure various problems, diseases and defects without surgery or oral medicines or therapies. However, the system admit that some super natural power formulated the Art & Science of Yog. The existence of God as *HiranyaGarva* is emphasised. *HiranyaGarva* means embryo or womb or *Brahma* or creation centre. This may indicate a certain point where all were created is place where Yog was created too. It may indicate that *Brahma* Created with the creation of all living beings.

Therefore, Yog is termed as the theistic *Sāmkhya* or *SeśvaraSāmkhya*. Patanjali has defined *AstangaYog* as his area of practice. He mentioned in definite words that Yog was being practiced by Rishis long before since eternity. He has mentioned there cannot be a discipline without being disciplined. He vowed to all those Maha Rishis who have contributed and disciplined the science of Yoga.

Vedic Literature

The followers became Yogi and Yogini. They were known in Sanskrit and Assamese language as Jog Jogini. They formed a tribe which still exists in India, Known as Nath Yogis or Jogis. We find their mention in *Shiva puran, KalikaPuran, Mahabharata, Vishnu Puran, Brahmaboirbbata Purana*. They attained royal patronage during *DanavaRule* in *Kamrup* and *DanavaRajya*. During King Narakasura rule there were over sixteen hundred *Yoginis* or *Juginins* in *Kamruprajya* under royal patronage. On behest of Indra Dev and other Gods *Sri Krishna* conquered *KamrupDanava King Narakasura*. He defeated

Narakasura and performed symbolic marriage with all the *Yoginis*. These yoginis later spent their life in *Vrindavanas Gopinis of Sri Krishna*. Practicing and teaching *Yogasana* to the people of Yamuna and Ganges valleys.

Kalika Puran, Markandya Puran and Jogini Tantra mentions that *Kamrup Rajya* was the centre of learning of *Yog, Tantra, Mantra, Veda Vedanga*. The Brahmaputra Valley flourished with *Gurukuls*,

Asrams and learning centres with disciples coming from *Dakshinatyā, Kalinga, Bongo, Ganga uptyaka, Himalayas, Narmada and Yamuna Valleys*. According to these literary evidences, the *Nilachal Parvat*, was the place of *Dasomahavidyas*. These Ten *Mahavidyas* had gurukuls where till date *Yog, TantraMantra and Adhyatmik* culture is practiced in a crude form of Worship. This place is none other than the famous *Kamakhya Temple- the Jagarat Pith of Tantra*. It is considered as active sanctum sanctorum of Tantra. Tantra is the geometrical formulations which is followed for *YogSadhana* by the *Yogi and Yogini*.

Findings

In Vedic era, Post Vedic Era till Mediaval Age in India Yoga was practiced by the sages, Royals, Scholars and learned ones. It was a *GuptVidya* or secret knowledge, to be learned and practiced only by the royals, rishis, monis, gurus and disciples. Common people had no access to it. Swami Vidyasagar Saraswati, *Swami Dayananda, Ramkrishna Param Hansa* tried to preach among the

common people of India. During this time *Parmahansa Yogananda* travelled to America where he introduced Kriya Yoga to the western world. In his book 'The autobiography of *Parmahansa*' Swami *Yogananda Parmahansa* mentioned the presence of *Avtari Baba*, the *Yog Guru*. *Paramahansa Yogananda* made small movies showing the *kriyayoga* to communicate the great philosophy of Yog. The pace was slow and acceptance level was still the upper class. Yoga was taken as a serious subject and Universities included courses on Yoga and its philosophy. Research work began on yoga and its vast work. Degree level, post degree level, Doctorate and PhD level were introduced in Many Universities like Banaras Hindu University, Annamalai University, Karnataka University, University of Kannur.

Different reference was found on origin of Yoga. 5000 years ago, its reference was found in *Patanjali's*

Astanga Yoga. Yog as a part of *Dhyan* and a process towards *Yog-nidra* was practiced in *Ashrams and Gurukuls*

The process was demonstrated and theoretical knowledge was passed as *ShrutiiinPragjyotishpur*, the present-day Guwahati, Assam. *Adi Nath* was founder or original *Guru* who is also known as *Shiva*. The Vedic and Puranic literature indicate that *Shiva Lord* systematized different postures performed by human and animals, insects and reptiles into scientific *Yogic Asanas*, *Mudras*, *Kriya*, *Dhyan*, *Pranayama*. They were taught to his disciples and followers known as *Mlecha*, *Kirats*, *Naths*, *JogiJoginis* and *Danavas*. These tribes *Mach(Mlecha)* *Kachari(Kirat)* *Nath*, *Jogis* and *Non-Aryans* are a major population in Assam. Even today the *Nath Yogis* of Assam consider their *Gotra* to be *Shaiva Gotra*. At *Mayong*, in a cave *Shiva – Parbati* idols were discovered by Archeological Survey of India, as *Yogi/Jogi* and *Yogini/Jogini*.

The *Nath Yogis* Autonomous Council Chairperson *Dhiren Nath* (*Nath* 23rd February 2019), said in an interview - The *yogis* were primarily associated with the *Yogic-traditions* promoted by the great *Nath* saints, e.g. *MatsyendraNath*, *GorakshaNath*, *Chauranginath* etc. *Hatha Yoga* is considered as the prominent part of those traditions promoted by these great *Nath* masters. The *Nath Sampradaya* (a cult or tribe), is considered to have developed the *hath Yoga*, which was earlier known as *Siddha* or *AvadhutaSampradaya*, by an ancient lineage of spiritual masters. The *Nath yogis* are classical followers of *Shaivism*. The *Jogis of Mayang* Consider that *Shiva Parbati* as *Jogi Adi Nath* (*Yogi foremost Master*) and *Jugini Aai* (*Yogini Mother*) preached *Jog* or *Yoga* in ancient *Kamrup's* capital-*Pragjyotishpur*. It was practiced and taught as one to one basis to the weak and ailing people of *Pragjyotishpur*. With regular practice they become so strong that their bones become *Bajra/Vajra* or thunder strong, which cannot be burnt nor broken. On attaining this stage the person is awarded prestigious '*Nath*' Title after their Name and would be included in *NathJogiSampradaya*. Male and female were given equal status. After proper training all were upgraded to *Nath Sampradaya* and the female are upgraded to *Devi* (Goddess). It was considered prestigious to get this '*Upadhi*' (Title).

Jogi and *Joginis* are taught breathing exercises, *Asanas*, *Dhyan*, *Chakra*, *Kundalini* and *TantraDhyan*. They were also given important lessons on herbs and their use, to prepare decoctions, to heal ailments, to revive people from snake bites, *Mantra* and its use, *Astrology* in numerology form, *Mind reading* and cosmic energy healing. *Tolerance*, *patience* and *endurance* to take maximum pain, *fear* and *destroy* negative energy through *Yoga* and *dhyan* was focal goal of the *Jogi* and *Joginis*. Later years the basic aim got forked into many channels.

One of the *Illuminated* disciple of *Adi Nath* was *Gorakh Nath*. He Travelled from *Pragjyotishpur* towards

North Western Himalaya into *Ganga Yamuna Valley*. He reached a place where most of the population was weak, ailing and had early death. *GorakhNath* through *Yog*, started to make them strong, healthy and happy. *Jwala Devi* was very impressed enough to request *GorakhNath* to settle down there. Being a selflessness *yogi* with no wish for permanent settlement refused to do so. His aim was to roam around the World to make human being healthy and happy (*Nath*, 23rd February 2019). *Jwala Devi* ignited an underground blue flame by stamping her right foot on Earth. She started cooking *khichri* to serve the people. Suddenly she rose and requested *GorakhNath* to serve the *khichri* to the people, till she does not return. *GorakhNath* couldn't understand the trick played by *Jwala Devi*, and kept on following the instructions of *JwalaDevi*, by teaching *Yoga* and serving the people *khishri*. This place is known as *Gorokhpur* where the famous *GorakhDham* Temple is situated till date. Still the blue flame is burning in the temple and people are served with *khichri* as *Prasad*. *Lumbini* of *Nepal* is just on the other side of the *Border*. The *Buddhist Priest*, later, had interactions with these *Naths* and *Yogis* of *Gorakhpur* (*Chief Priest, Gorakhdham* 5th February 2016).

The *Nath Yogi* Autonomous Council have constructed a *Museum* In *Mayang, Morigaon*, where scriptures, utensils, statues, and many other objects of interest are kept. These objects on display establish the fact that *Yoga* was cultivated, cultured and spread from pre-vedic *Yog* (period of time as per *Vedic calendar*) to *Medieval* age. Many books were written, seminars and workshops were organized to establish the fact. The principles of *Yoga* philosophy of *Nath* tradition are stated in various books e.g. *Gorakshagita*, *Goraksha Paddhati*, *Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati*, *AmaraughaSasana*, *Amaraugha Prabodha*, *Mahartha Manjari*, *Gheranda Samhita*, etc., all written in *Sanskrit*. *Hatha yoga* is a holistic path of *yoga* which includes disciplines like *Asana* (Postures), *shatkriya* (*Purification Procedure*), *Mudra* (Gestures), *Pranayama* (Controlled breathing), *Dhyana* (Meditation), *samadhi* (To be one with the elements).

The *Yoga* Philosophy was given to the World by *AdiNath* or *Lord Shiva* as practical lessons, practice and *ShrutiVanis*. These were practiced by disciples from far and near of *Pragjyotishpur*. The area became a hub of learning *yoga*, cosmic philosophy, laws and science, herbalism or naturopathy leading the pathway to *Ayurveda*. '*Ayurveda* was a *vidya* (knowledge) learnt by *rishis* of *Kerala* from *Pragjyotishpur* between *Vedic* age to *Kabya* age. *King Banasura* was the *King* of *Danava Kingdom*, presently known as *Sonitpur*. He was the *Grandchild* of *King Baliraja*, the ruler of *Kerala*. During this age hermits, scholars, *rishis* interacted and travelled to exchange knowledge.' (*Asghar* 28th April 2019). At that time there were two clans prevalent 1. Those who practice *yoga* 2. Those who accept *grahasthyaasram* (family life) and cannot practice *yoga*. Hence a third clan was streamlined. It is known as *Tantra*. According to this process one can marry accepting *grahasthyaasram* yet practice *yoga*. Geometrical pattern are invented which are drawn on the floor and steps with *Yogasana*, *Pranayama*, *Mudra*, *Kriya* the practioners would move from one point to other point in the geometrical pattern in quest of attaining *Pratyahara* for eternal **Samadhi (Srimali, 2013:10)**

There were other *Thaan* (yoga practice centre) too where *Yogdhyana* practice persisted like the *KaishaikhatiGukhaniThaan* by the *River Brahmaputra* in *Sadiya*. The *Devi* practiced and cultured *Yog*, known as *Dhyan* by her disciples. She and her disciples practiced specially diet : eating uncooked and raw food. To avoid damage to the environment, as cooking needs fuel, the practioners took minimal amount of fresh fruits, herbs, edible vegetables and roots, even grass just enough to sustain a healthy strong life. She made people to practice *dhyana*,

pranayam and asanas. During Ahom era Her deity was made of copper and kept on the sanctum sanctorum, hence also known as Tamreswari. Archeological Survey of India is maintaining this spot.

Another Important School of Yoga practice was AaiThaan (Mother's Yoga practice centre) of Tezpur by the River Brahmaputra. Myth and *Mahabharata SkhandaAkhya*narrate that Wife of Shiva, *Aai Gukhani* established an Asram and gurukul, where Princess Usha and her friend Chitralkha practiced Yog and learned vedic education. Chitralkha was later taught by *Narada Rishion* special meditation ways.

Another Important Yog practicing Asram was VasithaAsaram and Ugra Tara Mandir in Pragjyotishpur, established by *VasisthaMahamoni*. He attributed many shlokas and mantras in *Rig Veda*. He lived in *BasisthaAsram* with his Wife *Arundhati*, an illuminated *rishin* herself. And their special cow *Kamdhenu* with her calf *Nandini*. *Rishini Arundhati* attributed many shlokas in *Rig Veda*. *Devi Tara*, also known as *Neelsaraswati*, on invitation of *VasisthaMahaMoni* learnt, practiced and cultured Yog in *Pragjyotishpur*, by the River *Brahmaputra*, in *Ugra Tara Thaan*. She was expert in *Chakra Kundalinijagaran* and had great expertise in music, nutrition and economic. She left her belly button behind for *VasithaMahamoni* when she left this place for Tibet. Tibetan scriptures, *Kalikapuran*. (Saikia, 12th May 2019) (Head priest UgrataraThaan, 20th January 2019)

A place of great Knowledge and practice in Yoga and Tantra, in pre vedic to vedic era, that still continues to thrive is *DirgheswariThaan*. *Markandaya Mahamoni*, had his asram in this hillock where he practiced tantra yoga. He wrote the Famous *KalikaPuranand MarkandyaPuran*. The *Sri DurgaSaptasatiPath* verses are a part of *KalikaPuran*. He has mentioned *Vishnu*, *Brahma* and *Shiva* as Rishis in his writings, while mentioning *Saraswati*, *Laxmi* and *Durga* as *Devta*. He had exchanged knowledge with scholars, rishis and Maharishis during his age, contemporary of *Maharishi Vedavyas*, *Naradarishi*, *Brahmarishi* (*Kalikapuran: preface*).

Analysis

The Nath Yogi and Yoginis were spread from Himalayan Hills Greater Kamrupa to *Narakasura* Dynasty Period. They accept the aesthetic life with pleasure, remaining bachelors and away from family. They practiced Yog in Dhyana form. The yogis of *Mayang*, *KuchBihar*, and other parts of Assam still practice.

Yogdhyana

The Shiva Parvati temple in *Mayang* is known as *AdiNath Deva* and *Devi Mandir*. It depicts Shiva Parvati wearing tortoise shells as garland and both in *Natarajan Asana* (Dancing posture). The people believe that people of *Mayong* can perform magical feats and known to cast black magic on enemies and outsiders. When this researcher visited and observed for many months saw no such feats.

There are some people who boost of such things but in reality nothing as such was seen possible. Probably they spread it to keep people away from them as they wanted peace and seclusion for practice of

Yog

However saw some aged persons performing postures of Yog which were not normally possible.

Unfortunately, they don't allow photography. Nath Yogi Autonomous Council has adopted some steps to preserve some old *Pandulipi* (Manuscripts). These are palmleaves and *Balkal* (tree bark) scriptures, hand written with ink prepared from tender mango leaves with pens made from *ikora* (Weed).

Kamakhyatemple is still considered as *JagratTantra pith* where still *dhyana*, *asana*, *pranayama* is practiced. Other such *Asrams* were *Markandaya Asram Dirgheswari Mandir*, where *Markandya Moni* wrote *Kalika Puran*, *Durgasaptasati Path*, *Chandi Path*.

The original form of Yoga was tough to practice but was ultimate achievement of Yoga Practice. It is practiced in the following form. The primary aims of this practice was to attain sixth sense sight, open the third eye by activating the pineal gland of our brain. That was with a motivation, to be established as *NathJogi* or *Devi Jogini*. *Siddha yogis* say that the ultimate aim of *Naths* is not to have merely sight of the Divine State, but is to become permanently established in it. At the advanced stages of *Saadhanaa*, *Yogireaches Sahaja* (uninterrupted state of spontaneous) experience of the union with Higher self through yoga, at all aspects of his life. He becomes established in this state so firmly that he goes beyond of the three normal states of consciousness: sleep, dreaming and awakened states, and even beyond of the fourth state of *Turya*.

GorakhNath preached that, the final emancipation is not merely ceasing of existence, in reality of transformation into purely new form of life. The acquiring of *Siddhis* or the magical powers is not the aim of the *Nath Yogis*, achieving the State of *Siddha* is their Main Aim. *Siddha* is a person who has attained through *Sadhanā*, permanent and spontaneous union with the Eternal Self. This form of *Yogsadhana* is still practiced in Assam. People may not wear fashionable yoga wears but they perform yog in simple **Langoti or Simple Clothing**

They don't practice in airconditioned auditoriums but in natural surroundings in open air. The International Day of Yog has recently given a major boost to the Yog Scenario.

Hopefully the crude form of Yog in Assam will get a new recognition.

Conclusion

The original form of Yoga and Tantra with Naturopath and Ayurveda is being researched and tried to revive in Assam by many new generation researchers, Yogis, Naths, Some scholars and pundits. People have earned this Yoga Knowledge generation after generation, from father to son, mother to daughter.

This knowledge was once a guarded secret, which is now slowly opening up. The *Baidyas*, *Yogis*, *Jogis*, *Joginis*, are opening up their secrets. Hopefully we will soon attain this secret knowledge, which will undoubtedly benefit Human being and society. Human, nature, animals will all benefit if the sacred knowledge can be used for better beauty & wellness benefits.

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