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## Critical Analysis on *Ashtanga Yoga*

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### ABSTRACT

*Yoga* is knowledge of life accepted by worldwide originated in India having a history of long back. It is one of the most important practices used extensively to keep body and the mind in balanced condition and make a person physically, mentally and socially healthy. *Yoga* is derived from the Sanskrit root *YUJA* also *YUJIR* meaning to unite or to integrate, union refers to *jeevatma* with *Paramatma* i.e union of individual consciousness with cosmic or divine consciousness. Integration refers to physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual aspects of human personality. Integration also refers to adjustment of an individual with his environment or the society. *Yoga* is getting recognition among world because of its therapeutic value and also one of the non pharmacological method to treat the diseases. In this review article attempt as been made to collect and compel available references on *Ashtanga Yoga* and analyze importance of *Ashtanga Yoga* for present day.

### KEYWORDS

*Ashtanga Yoga*, Health, *Hatha Yoga*, *Dharana*, *Dhyana*, *Samadhi*, *Moksha*



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## INTRODUCTION

*Yoga* is philosophy originated in *India* which is having long back history; dated 5000 years back science which taught right living. *Yoga* bestow effect when it is integrated in our daily life, it works on all aspects of human personality like physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional. The word *yoga* is derived from *Sanskrit* root *Yuj* or *Yujir* which denotes union; the union refers to union of *Jeevatma* with *Paramatma*, which is union of individual consciousness with divine consciousness.

युजिर्योगे ॥

युज्यते अनेन इति योगः ॥

The process one which unites, combines, integrates is called as *Yoga*, combination refers to body and the mind. That which unites soul with the god is refers to *Yoga*<sup>1</sup>.

मनःप्रशमनोपायः योग इत्याभिधीयते।<sup>2</sup>

Acharya *Yogavasishta* clears *Yoga* is a technique which pacifies thoughts of the mind. When mind is detached from worldly objects could maintain desire free state. With desire free mind person will not be influenced with gain or loss, succeed or defeat and pleasure or misery in life.

योगः चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥<sup>3</sup>

Acharya *Patanjali* defines *Yoga* as Stoppage of functions of *chitta* or *manah* or dividing of *chitta* from its functions or

cessation of mental functions or *Chittavrittis* due to mind, intellect and ego.

प्रमाणविपर्ययविकल्पनिद्रास्मृतयः ॥<sup>4</sup>

*Pramana*, *Viparyaya*, *Vikalpa*, *Nidra* and *Smrithi* are the *Chittavrittis* mentioned by *Patanjali* in *Yoga sutras* of *Patanjali*. *Pramana* is a source of knowledge, again three types are there, *prathyaksha pramana* one which is having direct evidence. *Anumana pramana* is one which is understood by Inference. *Aagama pramana* is gained by reading Holy texts or *vedas*. *Viparyaya* is wrong interpretation or wrong diagnosis, *Vikalpa* is imagination or fantasy, *Nidra* denotes Sleep, *Smrithi* is memory or remembering experience of past.

योगः कर्मसुकौशलम् ॥<sup>5</sup>

In *Bhagavadgeetha* it has explained *Yoga* is skilled performance, person who performs action with balanced mental status will able to diffuse the effect of *Sanchitakarma* and *Prarabdakarma*. Such state of mind will make the way to achieve state of super consciousness; in concise *yoga* is procedure to perform action devoid of the attachments.

समत्वं योगमुच्यते ॥<sup>6</sup>

Acharyas mentions state of balance between failure and win or body and mind is *Yoga*; person should engage oneself in action with mind persistent in *Yoga*.



Individual should dispose of attachments and be tranquil in success and failure this state of circumstance is called as *Yoga*.

तंविद्यात्दुःखसंयोगवियोगंयोगसंज्ञितं ॥<sup>7</sup>

Individual should remain unrestrained with contentment and miseries of world is considered as *Yoga*, separation of association with pain is designated as *Yoga*. It has to be practiced diligently with determination.

### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim of this study is to collect all available references from classical texts of *Yoga* and other ancient texts regarding *Ashtanga Yoga* to make easy understanding of topic. Analyze the importance of *Ashtanga Yoga* in classical text of *Yoga*, and also discuss the significant role of *Ashtanga yoga* in promotion and maintenance of health and also achieve super consciousness state.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This article is conceptual, all the available references from Ancient literature have been searched, collected and compiled also available current literature for *Ashtanga Yoga* have been searched for this article and analyzed for better understanding of topic.

To conclude the study, all available *Yogic* literature referred, and a humble effort has been made to draw conclusion.

### CONCEPT OF ASHTANGA YOGA

*Ashtanga Yoga* is one of the ancient systems of *yoga*; literal meaning of this is eight limb of *yoga* as explained by sage *Patanjali* in *yoga sutras* of *Patanjali*. *Ashtanga Yoga* is internal purification and integration of body and mind for revealing universal self consists of eight spiritual practices those are

यमनियमासनप्राणायामप्रत्याहारधारणाध्यानसम  
ाधयोष्टावाङ्गानि ॥<sup>8</sup>

1. *YAMA* – Ethical practice or moral codes
2. *NIYAMA* – Ethical practice and self-purification
3. *ASANA* – Physical practice or postures
4. *PRANAYAMA* – Vital practice or breath control
5. *PRATYAHARA* – Sensorial practice
6. *DHARANA* – Mental & spiritual practice (concentration)
7. *DHYANA* - Mental & spiritual practice (Meditation)
8. *SAMADHI* - Mental & spiritual practice (Integration)

#### **YAMA (Ethical practice):**

*Yama* is one which induces *Vairagya* on *Deha* and *Indriya*, first and foremost step in *Patanjalis Ashtanga Yoga* is *Yama*, the literal meaning of *Yama* is abstinence or self-discipline or self-control, in *Patanjali yoga darshana* five types of *Yama* has been



explained which beginners should follow without deviating are mentioned beneath.

अहिंसासत्यास्तेयब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रहायमाः।<sup>9</sup>

*Yama* is ethical discipline to regulate positive personality, hence practice of right conduct or ethical discipline are necessary to achieve success in *yoga*. There is a purposeful arrangement in five *Yamas* those are *Ahimsa*, *Sathya*, *Astheya*, *Brahmacharya* and *Aparigraha*.

*Ahimsa* otherwise non violence is first and foremost step in *Yama*, one must remove brutal nature and individual must become non violent and extend enormous love towards every living beings. Individual should avoid injuring any living creature; this is the first step in spiritual path to eliminate appalling nature only then person will become able to practice *Yoga* hence one should practice *Ahimsa* in its purest form.

*Sathya* is second step in order of *Yama* which denotes truthfulness, thought should agree with word and word with action is called as pure form of truthfulness, otherwise doing opposite is called as crookedness. Through speaking lies one will pollute there subconscious mind, in other words self is truth it is realized only by speaking, observing truth in thought, speech and action.

Third and important step of *Ashtanga yoga* is *Astheya* denotation of this is non-stealing, this is a form of self restraint or self control. While individual needs to full fill his requirements and he will not get it by rightful way then only he will indulges in stealing further desire will cause for stealing. Without the knowledge of possessor captivating his petite belongings and wants others not to recognize this act is called as stealing. The *yogic* scholar should away from these types of acts to achieve *siddhi* in *yoga*.

The fourth *Yama* is put into practice of continence that is *Brahmacharya*; most of the great spiritual aspirants will follow celibacy hence they are able to stimulate whole world by command of their knowledge. Sexual continence or celibacy is not only by means of physical contact in other words it includes all types of sex and thinking about sex, watching sex and talking about sex should also be avoided by *yogic* practitioner.

The final and extremely important step in *Yama* is *Aparigraha*; *Parigraha* is having greediness, and immediately opposite to this word is *Aparigraha* means not having any type of greediness. *Aparigraha* is a mental condition in which the sensual desire is absolutely dead. *Aparigraha* puts to end to all activities of brain like nervousness, fear, hatred, annoyance, and



stealing and dishonesty extras, enhances peace and contentment.

#### **NIYAMA:**

शौचसन्तोषतपःस्वाध्यायेश्वरप्रणिधानानिनियमाः।

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Second step in the path of *Ashtanga Yoga* is *Niyama* also consists of five limbs, specifically *Shoucha*, *Santosha*, *Tapa*, *Swadhyaya* and *Eswara pranidana*. *Niyama* is also code of conduct and ethical practice for internal and external purification of body.

The foremost and primary limb in *Niyama* is *Shoucha* which is purity together internally and externally. External purification will produce purity in internally as well and through practice of *Shoucha* individual gradually gives up attachment and affection to the body and it is easy to attain higher qualities in the path of *Yoga*. Internal purity is more significant than external one, internal purity contains taking away of annoyance, lust, greediness and jealousy. Hence developing of internal purity is extremely difficult but can be achieved by vigilant attempt.

The second step in *Niyama* of *Ashtanga Yoga* is *Santosha* which means contentment; *Santosha* does not mean satisfaction, it is a keenness to acknowledge things as they are and make the best of them. A contented person is feels happy in

all circumstances he is satisfied through what he is having never craved for things he does not have. Contentment is powerful antidote or solution for poisonous covetousness, by adopting *Santosha* individual can achieve Moksha in the path of *Yoga*.

In path of *Ashtanga yoga* third step in *Niyama* is *Tapas* means austerity or practice of penance. *Tapa* also means self-control of the senses and meditation, which leads to control of the mind. *Tapa* also means *Swadarma* or profession; individual has to strictly follow their profession without deviating from path of *Yoga* or achieving of *Samadhi*. Psychological *Tapas* is more powerful than physical one to make mind stable as it is unbalanced in nature.

*Swadhyaya* is subsequent step in *Niyama* which is also called as self study, *Swadhyaya* is not only studying of books or scriptures it is also knowing one self and asking question to self is also considered as *Swadhyaya*. *Aptopadesha* is in addition can be considered under *Swadhyaya* as listening to *Aptha* is another approach of receiving knowledge. *Swadhyaya* can also be achieved by *Satsanga*, while individual cannot obtain essential companionship of realization, *Swadhyaya* helps in strengthening flickering mind.

Surrendering to the god is *Iswara pranidana* which is last step in *Niyama*; this



is the put into practice where individual will consecrate the whole thing to superior force. Self surrendering of each and every work as supreme god and results are fruits given by the same is called as *Iswara Pranidhana*. This surrendering to the supreme lord make individual to achieve self realization and reach *Moksha* which highest level of *yoga* in *Patanjalis Ashtanga Yoga*.

#### **ASANA:**

*Asana* is a third and important step in *Ashtanga Yoga*, *Asana* is a physical posture word meaning is sitting position. *Asana* is a *Sanskrit* word materialize in many contexts signifies a static physical position, in *Patanjali yoga* sutras *Asana* is defined as a firm and comfortable posture for prolonged period. In same context *Patanjali* explains *Asana* as third step in eight limbs of *Ashtanga Yoga*, but in *Hatha Yoga Pradeepika* *Asana* is mentioned in first step further *Acharya* explains *Asana* will provide steadiness to body, enhances health and lightness in body.

स्थिरं सुखं आसनं ॥<sup>11</sup>

हठस्य प्रथमाङ्गत्वादासनं पूर्वमुच्यते ।

कुर्यात्तदासनं स्थैर्यमारोग्यं चाङ्गलाघवं ॥<sup>12</sup>

*Patanjali Yoga sutra* simply classifies characteristics of excellent *Asana* however not single *Asana* in a name mentioned. Later on *Yoga* texts however mentioned 84

classical *Asanas* and associated them with lord *Shiva*. Different classical texts mentions number of *Asanas* dissimilar in *Hatha yoga Pradeepika* 84 numbers of *Asanas* are mentioned in that four are extremely important for *Yogi*, few classical texts opines that *Asanas* are infinite. It is also mentioned in *Gheranda Samhitha* that asserts of *Shiva* taught 8,400,000 *Asanas*, out of which 84 are most excellent and 34 are useful for *yogis* to attain *Moksha*. *Asana* is well known for western people, few regard as it is entirety of *Yoga*. However *Asana* is simple postures which are firm and comfortable for *Yogi* to prepare the body for meditation for longer period. Hence individual who wants to control the mind proficiently they have to get control over physical body primarily, this can be achieved by regular practice of *Asana*. These physical postures will develop mental equilibrium, endurance and immense vitality. Thus *Asanas* helps in controlling the mind to attain *Moksha* spiritually, protect the health and alleviate an assortment of diseases.

#### **PRANAYAMA:**

*Pranayama* is made up of two words ‘*Prana*’ and ‘*Ayama*’ suffix *Prana* denotes breath, life, respiration, vitality extra, prefix *Ayama* denotes controlling, stretching, expanding by these words we can understand that controlling the breath will



controls our mind also, stretching and expanding breath will expands or enhances our lifespan.

तस्मिन्सतिश्वासप्रश्वासयोगीतिविच्छेदःप्राणायामः ॥

13

*Yogi* once reached mastery over *Asanas* he has to get control over breath; hence next step in *Ashtanga Yoga* is *Pranayama*. Here in this citation from *Patanjali Yoga Sutras* *Tasmin* stand for *Asana* as here in *Pranayama* any firm and comfortable posture is required, *Vyasa* defines *Shwasa* as ‘*BAHYASYAVAYORACHAMANAM*’ means sucking in the external air or inhalation and *Prashwasa* as ‘*KOSHTASYAVAYORNISARANAM PRASHWASA*’ Exhalation is the driving out of air from the chest. *Gativicheda* means Literary meaning is ‘a break down in the moment’, i.e. a simultaneous break in the acts of forced inhalation and forced exhalation. *Vyasa* puts it as *Ubhaya Bhava*, which means cessation of both inhalation and exhalation and not of one only. We find that *Vyasa* is very clear in defining *Pranayama*. The term *Pranayama* can be used only when the whole respiration is brought to a standstill, there being neither inhalation nor exhalation. In synonyms of *Pranayama* many terms are used by authors those are *Prana peedana*, *Prana Avarodha*, *Prana Samyam*, *Pranayama*, *Prana*

*nigraha*, *Prana nirodha*, *Mahanirodha* though all these terms mainly put forth the concept of total voluntary suspension of the respiratory reflex for a shorter or longer period a phenomenon called ‘*Kumbhaka*’.  
चलेवातेचलंचित्तंनिश्चलेनिश्चलंभवेत्।

योगीस्थाणुत्वमाप्नोतिततोवायुःनिरोधयेत्॥<sup>14</sup>

*Hatha Yoga Pradeepika* it is mentioned that mind is unstable when *Pranavayu* is moving; while it is accomplishing stability even mind becomes stable. Hence when *Pranavayu* and mind becomes stable then only *yogi* will attains steadiness therefore individual should control the *Vayu* through regular *Pranayama* practice.

#### **PRATHYAHARA:**

*Ashtanga Yoga* is divided in to two headings *Antaranga Yoga* and *Bahiranga Yoga*, initial four those are *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Asana* and *Pranayama* are incorporated under *Bahiranga Yoga*, last three those are *Dharana*, *Dhyana* and *Samadhi* are considered as *Antaranga Yoga*, *Prathyahara* acts as bridge between these two that is *Antaranga* and *Bahiranga Yoga*. *Prathyahara* is act of self control, it is one of the eight limbs of *Ashtanga Yoga* it enhances power of concentration, with draw the senses by giving up the individual objects and established in unique state of mind.





स्वविषयासम्प्रयोगेचित्तस्वरूपानुकारइवेन्द्रियाण  
ांप्रत्याहारः।<sup>15</sup>

*Prathyahara* is withdrawing of senses from all worldly objects and desires, observance of setting up in pure nature of *Chitta* or mind. Since sense organs are making contact with objects they imitate features of the mind, the sense organs become introvert.

विषयेभ्यःइन्द्रियार्थेभ्योमनोनिरोधःप्रत्याहारः।<sup>16</sup>

This is the preliminary phase where *Yogi* will think about self, by regular put into practice of *Prathyahara* the sense organs are absolute control under the mind. This is the stage where control over the mind achieved and *Yogi* will get self realization.

#### **DHARANA:**

Sixth and important phase in *Patanjali Ashtanga Yoga* is *Dharana*, once getting control over physical body by practicing of *Bahiranga Yoga* and crossing the bridge of *Prathyahara* the practitioner move in to *Dharana* first step in *Antaranga Yoga*.

देशबन्धचित्तस्यधारणा।<sup>17</sup>

*Dharana* is a procedure of withdrawal of mind from the senses and joining together with the soul. Here in this stage mind is in focused state, with concentration on selected object.

मनःसंकल्पकंध्यात्वासंक्षिप्यात्मनिबुद्धिमानधार  
यित्वातथात्मानंधारणम्परिकिर्तिता॥<sup>18</sup>

This stage is most essential to attain *Atma Gnana*, hence in this path mind will get focused and bring about the concentration on desired object. In this stage *Yogi* will bring his concentration different parts of the body are on specific region like umbilicus, heart, tip of the nose, centre of eye brows then combine his mind with particular aim this is known as *Dharana*.

#### **DHYANA:**

*Dhyana* is a stage of advancement over *Dharana* this is seventh step in *Patanjali's* eight limbs of *yoga*, after achieving stage of *Dharana* at the point of time mind will succeeded in holding concentration for a sufficient time on desired object.

तत्रप्रत्ययैकतानताध्यानं।<sup>19</sup>

*Dhyana* is continuous and constant thought regarding same object and there is no divergence even for a fraction in other words uninterrupted continuation of mental ability is termed as meditation.

Generally *Dhyana* is translated as meditation means imply a status of remaining calm by deep inward focus as practiced in many traditions. By regular practice of *Dhyana* *Yogi* will enjoys absolute blissfulness.

स्थूलंज्योतिस्तथासूक्ष्मंध्यानस्यत्रिविधविदुः।

स्थूलंमूर्तिमयंप्रोक्तंज्योतिस्तेजोमयंतथा॥

सूक्ष्मंबिदुमयंब्रह्मकुण्डलीपरदेवता।<sup>20</sup>



*Dhyana* is practiced to reach *Vairagya* or complete detachment, *Dhyana* is of three types *Sthuladhyana*, *Jyothi Dhyana* and *Sukshma Dhyana*. When *Dhyana* is of *sthula* that is particular object or picture such as ones *guru* is considered, *Dhyana* is on *Brahma* as contemplated as light is called *Jyothisa Dhyana* and when *Brahma* is considered as *bindu* or point and also *kundalini* force is called *Sukshma Dhyana*. All the types of *Dhyana* are having their own importance and benefits.

### **SAMADHI:**

Final and ultimate stage of *Patanjali Ashtanga Yoga* is *Samadhi*, every school of *Yoga* are considered *Samadhi* as last stage. *Samadhi* is super conscious state where in *Yogi* obtains superlative intuitional or wonderful sensual knowledge and super sensual happiness.

तदेवार्थमात्रनिर्भासंस्वरुपशून्यमिवसमाधिः।<sup>21</sup>

*Samadhi* is state in which union of *Jeevatma* and *Paramatma* will occurs which is also an aim of *Yoga*. Union refers to individual consciousness with super consciousness; no much difference will be there in both consciousnesses. In this state *Yogi* will become engrossed in *Parabrahman* and the whole thing that hides the soul is detached.

Individual who achieves highest level of bliss that is reaching of *Samadhi* he will be

free from all desires, disinterest from his own body, detachment from son, wife, kinsmen and being free from each and every one will obtain entirely *Samadhi*.<sup>22</sup>

### **RESULTS**

*Ashtanga yoga* explained in *Patanjali Yoga Sutra* is traditional and accurate path to accomplish *Samadhi* stage for each and every *Yogi*. *Ashtanga Yoga* which starts from Ethical practice or code of conducts in the name of *Yama* and *Niyama* are most excellent practices for purification of body by internally and externally. *Asana* which makes body and mind stable which is very essential for *Yogi*, *Pranayama* is vital practice and breath control also helps *yogi* to strengthen psychological health. *Prathyahara* is sensorial practice acts as bridge in between *Bahiranga* and *Antaranga Yoga*. Finally three *Dharana*, *Dhyana* and *Samadhi* are very essential for *yogi* to attain *Moksha*.

### **DISCUSSION**

Currently several schools refer to ancient text *Patanjali Yoga Sutra* as the philosophical resource and manuscript for describing *yoga* practice in comprehensible approach. According to *Patanjali Yoga Sutra* description of *yoga* is '*ChittaVritti*



*Nirodha*’ which means cessation of mind from its functions.

प्रमाणविपर्ययविकल्पनिद्रास्मृतयः॥<sup>23</sup>

In the same context *Acharya Patanjali* explains regarding *ChittaVrittis* which comprise *Pramana*, *Viparyaya*, *Vikalpa*, *Nidra* and *smrithi*, individual wants to achieve highest level in path of *Yoga* one has to put these *ChittaVrittis* in accurate path.

अत्याहारःप्रयासश्चप्रजल्पोनियमग्रहः।

जनसङ्गश्चषड्भिर्योगोविनश्यति॥<sup>24</sup>

In *Hatha Yoga Pradeepika Acharyas* explains obstacles in path of *yoga* which avoid individuals to achieve highest goal in *yoga*. Above mentioned citation elucidate person consuming more quantity of food and untimely food; carry out works which give physical exertion, individual more talkative regarding unnecessary, excessive or extreme adhering to rules, maintaining company of normal people and unsteadiness of mind and body these factors which leads to obstacles in *Yoga*, consequently individual wants to accomplish *Moksha* one has to stay away from these factors.

In *Patanjali Yoga Sutras* the eight fold path is termed as *Ashtanga*, the literal meaning of this is eight limbs of *Yoga*. These eight steps fundamentally acts as guiding principle on how to live determined and

significant life. This *Patanjalis Ashtanga Yoga* serves as an instruction to accomplish ethical and principled conduct for self discipline also these practices will direct responsiveness towards health and help individual to distinguish spiritual aspects of our personality.

*Patanjalis Ashtanga Yoga* provides comprehensible deeper knowledge to put in to practice and also well describes procedure of performing *Yoga*. The foremost two stages of *Ashtanga Yoga* are *Yama* and *Niyama* are fundamental rules and regulations which are related to ethical code of conduct or preconditions to reach higher stages in *Yogic* path, these are extremely essential for *Yogi* to achieve *Samadhi* stage in *Ashtanga Yoga*. *Asana* and *Pranayama* are fourth and fifth stages of *Ashtanga yoga* consecutively physical practice and vital practices which are essential stages for *Yogi* to improve stability of body and mind further obtain control over body and breath. Further the fifth step is *Prathyahara* work as bridge between external and internal *Yoga*. Last three are *Dharana*, *Dhyana* and *Samadhi* are considered as internal parts of *Yoga* which are also considered as mental and spiritual practices to achieve realization in *Yogic* path. The meaning of word *Yoga* is combining, integrating; joining hence each and every step in *Ashtanga Yoga* is



beneficial in combining body and mind, also integrating of *Atma* with *Paramatma* that is individual consciousness with divine consciousness.

## CONCLUSION

Subsequent to referring all accessible references on *Patanjalis Ashtanga Yoga* it can be concluded that stages described will increase the vital life force and channels them in accurate path, stimulates the *shatchakras*, exceptional to improve physical health, strength and endurance. There are various other benefits through *Ashtanga Yoga* those are increase mental clarity, flexibility and strength of body will improve, decrease stress furthermore balances body and mind.

Individual who want to achieve highest level in *Yoga* they should stay enthusiastic, always be enterprising, individual should be courageous, having discriminative knowledge, person should be pledged for achievement and ready to stay alone<sup>25</sup>.



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