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## Historical and Current Perspective of Yoga: An Overview.

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### ABSTRACT:

Traditional Yoga practices have been mentioned since the era of Indus Valley Civilization, Vedic & Upanishad heritage, Buddhist and Jain traditions. Shiva is regarded as the first yogi in ancient Yoga tradition. The science of Yoga has been traced since long before the first religions or belief systems were born. At that time Yoga was practiced under the influence of nature under the guidance of the Gurus and its spiritual value was given special importance. In ancient times Yoga was known only for its spirituality to achieve highest level of consciousness. Today Yoga is not meant for spirituality only but it acquires the wider dimension by inculcating physical, mental and social aspect of health of healthy person. Newer evidence shows that Yogic Practices are gaining momentum for its therapeutic application for the management of health related issues of body and mind. Now-a-days Yoga education and its practices are being impacted by many eminent Yoga clinics, Yoga therapy and Wellness centers that have been established, medical institutes and therapeutic setups. People take up Yoga practice to maintain their health and lifestyle.

**Keywords:** Health, Lifestyle, Modern Yoga, Spirituality, Vedic Yoga

### INTRODUCTION

Yoga is a science of healthy way of living. It works when integrated into our daily life. It also impacts on individual's physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. It is the science that affects not only the conscious self but also the subconscious self.<sup>1</sup> Yoga covers all aspects of holistic health and life that originated in India thousands of years ago. It is the oldest practice of personal development in the world, encompassing body, mind and spirit. Ancient Yoga had a profound understanding of man's essential nature and

of what he needs to live in harmony with himself and his environment.<sup>2</sup> The word Yoga means unity or oneness and is derived from the Sanskrit word "Yuj", which means to join or to unit. Despite more than a century of research we still don't know about the earliest beginnings of Yoga.<sup>3</sup> It is around five thousand years old. However, many western scholars thought that Yoga originated much later perhaps around 500 BC.<sup>4</sup> The story or journey of the origin of Yoga is very interesting and full of awe. Some experts have



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suggested that the origin of Yoga could be traced back to the Indus Valley of civilization because in the ruins of the big cities of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa excavators found depictions engraved on soapstone seals that strongly resemble Yoga.<sup>5</sup>

#### **History and Developments of Yoga:**

It is thought that Yoga was first practiced at the very beginning of civilization. Even before the first religions or belief systems were established, the science of Yoga was developed.<sup>6</sup> Adiyogi imparted this great knowledge to the fabled "Saptarishis" few thousand years ago, on the banks of Lake Kantosarovara of Himalayas. This divine knowledge developed in the different parts of world by the Sages. Yet the yogic system reached its pinnacle of development in India. Agastya, Saptarishi, traversed this society while adhering to a fundamentally yogic way of life.<sup>7</sup>

Many fossilized Indus Saraswati Valley civilization seals and artifacts with yogic themes and representations of people doing Yoga Sadhana point to the existence of Yoga in prehistoric India. The mother goddess idols' seals and phallic emblems are indicative of Tantra Yoga. Yoga is present in folk tradition, Darshana, the Mahabharata and Ramayana epics and Shaival's theistic traditions.<sup>8</sup>

Yoga was practiced historically as early as the pre-Vedic period (2700 B.C.) and continued up until Patanjali's time and during this time, the Vedas, Upanishads, Epics, Jainism, Panini and Smritis, among others are available.<sup>9</sup> The classical Yoga approach as outlined by Patanjali in the Yoga sutras uses Yoga as a method. Yama and Niyama, Asanas (Postures), Pranayama (Breathing exercises), Pratyahara (Controlling one's senses), Dharana (Concentration), Dhyana (Meditation) and Samadhi (Self-Realization) are the part of Patanjali's eightfold (Ashtanga) System of Yoga, which emphasizes a holistic approach to spiritual development.<sup>10</sup>

For our convenience, we may divide the history of Yoga into four broad categories:

1. Vedic Yoga
2. Pre-Classical Yoga
3. Post Classical Yoga
4. Modern Yoga

#### **Vedic Yoga:**

The root of the phrase 'Dhyana' or Meditations is the word dhi, which denotes Buddhi or intellect. In general words, the continuous flow of thoughts (*Ekatadata*) over the focused point (focused part of Dharana) is called as

Dhyana. Vedic Yoga which could also be called archaic Yoga was closely connected with the ritual life of the ancient Indians. It revolved around the idea of sacrifice as a means of joining the material world with the invisible world of the spirit.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Pre-Classical Yoga:**

The Vedas are the earliest religious scripts in existence. Veda is a Sanskrit word for "knowledge". A collection of hymns honoring a higher power can be found in the Rigveda. The other three Vedas include the worldly knowledge that the *Atharva* and Yajur Veda were taught by sages. Throughout the Vedic era, it was believed that the key to higher achievement was the knowledge; the universe revealed to a sage through meditation. It consists of three different types of Yoga, including Mantra Yoga (which transforms the mental power by mantra), Prana Yoga, (which energizes the life) and Dhyana Yoga (which energizes the life force while focusing the entire mind on one thing or thought).

This Yoga covers an extensive period of approximately 2000 years until the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. The Bhagavad-Gita is among the greatest and most famous texts on Yoga, was written in approximately 5000 B.C. ago. Moreover, the Upanishads were written at this time. The Bhagavad Gita states that there are three routes (such as Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga) can be followed to develop a relationship with the Supreme Being.<sup>12</sup>

Maharshi Patanjali composed the Yoga-Sutra, a collection of 195 illuminating aphorisms, in the classical era. The eight steps (Ashtanga Yoga) to achieve emancipation from the suffering from birth to death are the ultimate aim of human life. This description refers to Patanjali's Yoga Sutra's Ashtanga Yoga (eightfold Yoga), also referred to as "Raja-Yoga".<sup>13</sup> There are four routes to achieve spirituality are mentioned below:

1. **Karma Yoga:** This is a route of self-less service carried out without consideration for the results of the service. This causes a person to let go his strong attachments, which in turn helps him to achieve mental stability. It serves as a tool for clear understanding and behavior. Since he has demonstrated to the world that one might discover the truth by consistently performing one's duty. Mahatma Gandhi is known as the "Karma Yogi".
2. **Bhakti Yoga:** The path of worship facilitates emotional restraint. The current era is referred by psychologists as the age of emotion and worry. They attempt to approach their gods through devotion. Such emotional insight only comes from unwavering dedication. The Bhakti route is a blessing

for overcoming emotional instability issues. The Bhakti Yoga practitioner is the true devotee.<sup>14</sup>

3. **Jnana Yoga:** It is the route to self-realization through Gnostic understanding and practice. More specifically, it is the ability to distinguish between the real and the unreal. All people need information, understanding, and wisdom to live successful lives and knowledge can help people realize God or the absolute truth.
4. **Raja Yoga:** Raja Yoga is mentioned in the sutras and has been cited by Patanjali as a succinct and appropriate style of Yoga. There are eight steps or stages in Raja Yoga. In essence, it is a comprehensive method of Yoga that combines Ashtanga Yoga practice with personality and behavior enhancement for people.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Post-Classical Yoga:**

Buddha made meditation popular over the entire subcontinent sometime in the sixth century B.C. There was some debate, though, over the idea that meditation cannot be the first step in spiritual practice. Buddhism has deteriorated throughout this time. The system was intended to be cleansed by great Yogis like Matsyendra Natha and Gorakhanatha. The primary works produced during this time are Sri Nivasa Yogi's Hatha Ratnavali and Svatomarama's Hatha Yoga Pradipika, both of which are conversational treatises. It also covers Yoga, the Shiva Samhita, Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati by Nitya Natha and Ayurveda.<sup>16</sup> Yoga was the one that first made Samadhi known to people. Goraksha Samhita, Gitta and Yoga Chintamani are among the books attributed to Guru Goraksha Natha. This is a highly thorough category that covers all the significant varieties and schools of Yoga that developed in the years following Patanjali's Yoga Sutra.

#### **Modern Yoga:**

Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga, also known as Purna Yoga, places a strong emphasis on opening to the divine and surrendering to it, allowing the divine energy to transform one's nature. The path of Bhakti Yoga and deep love is documented by Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa. His message of religious unity is one of Sri Ramakrishna's greatest contributions to modern society.<sup>17</sup>

Swami Vivekananda summarized the Vedanta's teachings as follows:

1. Each soul is potentially divine.
2. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, both external and internal.
3. Do this either by action (Karma Yoga) or worship (Bhakti Yoga), or Psychic control (Raja Yoga) or Philosophy (Jnana Yoga) by one, or all these and be free.

4. In 1893, the Parliament of Religions was organized in Chicago which began the history of modern perspective of Yoga. It is the same religious congress where Swami Vivekananda made a lasting impression on the minds of Americans. In present scenario, everyone believes Yoga practices are for the preservation, maintenance and promotion of health. Yoga has spread all over the world through the teaching of great personalities like Swami Rama, Sri Aurobindo, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and B.K.S Iyengar.<sup>18</sup> Following are the great examples of Yogis as-

1. **Swami Vivekananda:** Swami Vivekananda is an important personality in the field of Yoga, who gave a new dimension to Indian philosophy, also known as Neovedanta was Vivekananda the first Hindu swami to travel to the West and introduce Eastern ideas at the World Assembly of Religions in Chicago in 1893. He introduced the Vedanta philosophy and the spiritual culture of India to the United States. His concluding observations on Raja Yoga, Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga are the perennial springs that feed the spiritual minds of people.<sup>19</sup>
2. **Shri Aurobindo:** Indian patriot Shri Aurobindo was also a poet, evolutionary philosopher, guru and renounced scholar. Integral Yoga, also referred to as Purna Yoga, is a new technique created by Sri Aurobindo. Purna in this context denotes totality and integral denotes a special approach that incorporates all facets of Yoga. The ultimate objective of Purna Yoga is to achieve “divine life”. His liberty is a concrete experience. Consequently, according to him, “Yoga means not only the realization of God but also a complete focus on and transformation of our inner and outer lives until it is suitable to manifest a divine consciousness and become a part of a divine task”.<sup>20</sup>
3. **Maharishi Mahesh Yogi:** He founded, developed, and popularized the Transcendental Meditation technique in India. He stayed at Uttara Kashi in the Himalayas from 1953 to 1955 and he started to teach meditation techniques, naming them Transcendental Meditation. His first world tour began in 1958. He popularized transcendental meditation in various parts of the world. He has written 16 books, some of which are important: The Art of Living, – Transcendental Meditation, Ideal India and Maharshi Mahesh Yogi on Bhagavad-Gita. Maharishi spent two years traveling and teaching throughout India, and in 1958 he founded the Spiritual Regeneration Movement in Madras. Then, traveling east, he taught in Singapore and Hawaii where he came to California in 1959. California is a place now where spiritual movements flourished.<sup>21</sup>
4. **Swami Ramdev:** Swami Ramdev, often known as Baba Ramdev, is credited with popularizing and spreading Yoga

throughout the world. He had been paralyzed since he was a toddler. After engaging in Yoga practice, he regained his power. He attended Shahjadpur through the eighth grade before transferring to the Gurukul in Khanpur to study Sanskrit and Yoga. He eventually decided to become a saint and rose to fame as Baba Ramdev. In India, set up numerous free Yoga training camps. Along with Acharya Karamveer and Acharya Balakrishna, he founded the Divya Yoga Mandir Trust. He has set up many Yoga campuses outside of India. The TV shows are shown in many countries, including Australia, America and Africa. On August 6, 2006, the Patanjali Yoga Trust was established to create the largest Ayurvedic center. He received many awards important among them are Honorary doctorate from KIIT university in 2007.<sup>22</sup>

5. **Shree Shree Ravishankar:** Shree Shree Ravishankar is a great spiritual and humanitarian leader. He supported a society free of stress and violence by promoting the development of human values. He was born to Venkata Ratnam and Vishalakshi on 13 May 1956 in Tamil Nadu. The Art of Living, a nongovernmental organization with operations in 140 nations, was founded by Shree Shree Ravishankar in 1981. After observing 10 days of solitude on the banks of the Bhadra River, he received the idea for Sudarshana Kriya Yoga, a rhythmic breathing technique in 1982. He views breathing as the connection between the body and the mind. Following the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, the Art of Living Foundation provided free stress-reduction classes to New Yorkers.<sup>23</sup>

## **MATERIALS & METHODS:**

This review paper aims to review the history of evaluation in Yoga, highlights its contribution to modern lifestyles and also explaining the history of progressive development of Yoga with explanation of modern points. The literature searched by the electronic databases Pro-Quest, Google Scholar and Pub-Med. Literature is reviewed from Vedic Yoga, classical Yoga and modern Yoga. This search was not limited to certain years, since the purpose of the article is to present a thorough historical review of development in Yoga.

## **RESULTS**

This study suggests that at present time, Yoga not limited to spirituality alone but that people are using Yoga in other life aspects like health, research, disease, education and the employment sector. Many studies show that Ashtanga Yoga is based on Yoga scriptures that explain both physical

and mental health, such as the Yoga Sutra. The eight steps or Ashtanga Yoga (Yama & Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi) are elaborately explained in Patanjali Yoga sutra.<sup>24</sup> We achieve physical health through Asana and mental health by practicing Niyama & Pramayama, social health by practicing Yama and spiritual health by practicing Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. Most of the Yoga practices are confined to Hatha Yogic text. However, in Yoga sutra, just three sutras are dedicated to Asanas. Fundamentally Hatha Yoga is a preparatory process, so that the body can sustain higher levels of energy.<sup>25</sup> By studying many books and research articles related to Yoga, we find that both spirituality and health are well explained such as in Veda and Bhagwat-Gitta.<sup>26</sup> Yoga could be described as a panacea for all ailments. Though Yoga includes thousands of postures and breathing techniques but it is not just only about postures and mantras. It is an old age practice which is related to achieve wholesome health including spirituality.

## **DISCUSSION**

After analyzing many texts and research publications, we find that Yoga imbibes a long historical story. Yoga is playing an important role to maintain every dimension of health. All the Yogic practices and belief systems develop act of Yoga as a central source. That's why the Yoga tradition is very deep and scientific. In the modern world, Yoga is playing a vital role in other areas like education, disease, and healthy way of living. The practices of Yoga are blossoming and growing more vibrant every day, are becoming increasingly popular in the United States and around the world. The popularity of Yoga could be fathomed by the fact that the 21st of June is celebrated as World Yoga Day every year all over the world. The UN general assembly on December 11, 2014, declared June 21 as International Yoga Day, which was first celebrated in 2015 by 192 countries, the largest-ever event. At present, Yoga is being practiced for its benefits not only in India but also in other countries as well. In UN general assembly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed that Yoga is more than just physical fitness and body exercise.

## **CONCLUSION**

We finally conclude that Yoga system was developed under the leadership of ancient Seers since antiquity for the achievement of true knowledge of life. The same approach and process was adopted by many successes and later on it is turned for benefit of mankind. It is about changing one's lifestyle and emphasized plugging into an ancient practice

that was introduced to the West by Swami Vivekananda. Now a day’s, Yoga education is being impacted by many eminent Yoga institutions, including Yoga University, Naturopathy colleges, Yoga & Ayurveda Hospitals and private societies. Today, millions of people across the globe have benefitted from the Yoga practice which has been promoted by the eminent Yoga Gurus from ancient times. Yoga gurus like Swami Vivekananda, Swami Ramdev, Shri Aurobindo and Shree Shree Ravishankar were especially crucial in popularizing the practice of Yoga around the world. The Indian philosophy was given a new perspective by Swami Vivekananda and in 1910 Sri Aurobindo founded a center of Yoga for meditation in Pondicherry.

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**Fig 1-Four routes to achieve spirituality**

