



Relevance of Yoga in 21st Century: A Path of Attaining Balance through the Character of Shiva from Indian Mythology

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Abstract

Balance becomes crucial in the restless 21st century, where human beings have become multitaskers. From the binaries of home and office in social life to mind and body in an individual self, balance is one of the critical factors for leading a healthy and peaceful life. It brings constancy, and a stable mind works effectively in gaining knowledge. Yoga not only increases the capacity to acquire knowledge more efficiently but is also beneficial in blurring the common binaries in contemporary times. It relieves stress which is a widespread disease among youth these days. Yoga originated from Shiva, an Indian mythological character, and a widely worshipped god in India. He is also known by the name Adiyogi which means 'the first yogi'. While Yoga is a trend around the globe, it resides in the core of ancient India. For a better understanding of Indian culture, it becomes essential to imbibe the ways of Indian knowledge, including Yoga. This article deals with the impact yoga can create in building a healthy physical and mental environment for acquiring knowledge.

Keywords: balance, binaries, Indian mythology, knowledge, Shiva, yoga.

Introduction

Yoga originally derived from the Sanskrit word 'Yuj', which means 'to yoke', i.e., 'to unite'. Through Yoga, one attains a union of body and mind. The history of Yoga is uncertain "due to its oral transmission of sacred

texts and the secretive nature of its teachings" ("History of Yoga"). Its development dates to nearly 5,000 years ago. To some scholars, the number might go up to 10,000 years. According to Timothy Burgin, a trained yoga instructor, Yoga's history is divided into four periods- Pre-Classical Yoga, Classical Yoga, Post-Classical Yoga, and Modern Period. Yoga contains four traditional paths, Bhakti, Karma, Jnana, and Raja, which means devotion, action, knowledge, and self-discipline, respectively. The goal of Yoga is freedom, and with constant practice, that freedom is within reach of everyone. Yoga has been a major part of religions that traces its origins in South Asia, i.e., Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism. People from religions such as Christianity and Islam have also adopted it. Yoga, besides being a union of body and mind, has many other meanings. According to the Yogasùtra of Patañjali, one of the essential yoga texts, Yoga is defined as 'the cessation of the transformation of awareness' (Yogasùtra 1.2). The state is known as samàdhiⁱ. Furthermore, it is the goal of many contemporary yogic traditions. Swami Vivekananda, an Indian monk and a religious teacher, introduced Yoga Sutras in the West. Since then, Yoga has been an essential part of the rest of the world. It, with time, became a "transnational phenomenon" (Srinivas 2869). July 21 is celebrated as International Yoga Day.

People often need to understand the meaning of yogi and its related terms. The word yogi "should not be confused with someone practicing asceticism and excessive self-mortification" (Banerjea 297). The related terms are 'Gurus', who teach people how to dispel spiritual darkness, 'Swamis' are regarded as the spiritual masters and 'Rishis' are the Seers. Sadhus are the renunciates who leave behind the material world and move to the forests or caves. Sadhus are also known as 'Baba'. Baba means grandfather or father in many languages. However, in the case of Sadhus, the word 'Baba' has acquired a derogatory meaning over time due to some instances in the recent past. Whether married or unmarried, the one who practices Yoga is known as a yogiⁱⁱ. It is the most famous term mentioned above. India has been the land of the greatest yogis of all time. The well-known include Adi Shankaracharya, Abhinavagupta, Lahiri Mahasaya, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi, Swami Kunalayananda, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, Tirumalai Krishnamacharya and Paramanansa Yogananda, K. Pattabhi Jois, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, B.K.S. Iyengar and Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh or Osho. The famous contemporary yogis are Sadhguru and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (Javaid). Among them, Sadhguru is one of the most influential modern yogis of the 21st century. He is involved in various Yoga activities all over the world. These Yogis often refer to a god from Indian mythology. This god is none other than Shiva, who is considered the founder of Yoga and the greatest yogi himself. He is depicted in a specific yogic posture, clothing and ornaments. Some of the yogis follow the cult of Shiva through their appearance. Such as, while

looking at the portrait of Adi Shankaracharya, one often gets confused about whether it is him or Shiva. Only a keen understanding of Shiva's attire can help one to understand the difference.

Shiva as Adiyogi

Shiva is among the most worshipped gods in India and neighbouring countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal and Indonesia. There are many forms of Shiva; 25 are regarded as the most important. He first appeared in the form of "Adiyogi – or the first yogi" (Sadhguru 25). When Parvati, Shiva's wife, provoked him, he became Adi Guru or the first Guru, and that day is celebrated as Guru Purnima in India. (25). Adiyogi transmitted knowledge about the nature of life to his seven disciples, who were thirsty for knowledge. It is also said that the "first yoga programme took place on the banks of...Kanti Sarovar" in the Himalayas (99). He turned towards the south to teach his seven disciples, which symbolizes the sun's southward journey and the period known as Dakshinayana, so he is called 'Dakshinmurti', which means "the great teacher who faced south" (100). Adiyogi explained that there is no human being as it is always human becoming. That means we human beings, with no established quality, can become whatever we want to. Shiva Samhita, an Indian mythological work, is in a dialogical form where Shiva, the guru, instructs his wife Parvati, who is his shishyaⁱⁱⁱ. In it Shiva teaches various aspects of Yoga. Though it is a lesser-known work of Yoga, it is one of the ancient texts on Yoga. This authentic ancient text gives a "unique contribution to Yoga which is not seen anywhere else" (Prasad 17). According to Adiyogi, memory is divided into eight forms, i.e., atomic, elemental, evolutionary, inarticulate, articulate, karmic, genetic and sensory.

Lord Śiva's Song, translated by Andrew Nicholson, is a philosophical poem that centres around Shiva, considering him as the principal god. Through a series of dialogues, Shiva teaches the sages about the ways of life. It has a chapter entitled "The Highest Yoga". In this chapter, Shiva teaches Vyasa about the form of Yoga. Yoga, here, is divided into two parts, 'the yoga of non-being' and 'the great yoga' (126). When this great Yoga is attained, the liberated person sees the universe as the lord himself. Youngsters nowadays believe in the power of the universe. The vibes we transmit into the universe come back to us in some form. The concept of karma^{iv} It can also be related to this case. The eight means of Yoga, as told by Shiva in this text, are breath control, sense withdrawal, meditation, concentration, observances, posture and absorption (127). Shiva provides the readers with a proper meaning of each state of Yoga and explains, in a philosophical manner, the beneficial effects of Yoga. Its knowledge is given to a "student who is full devotion" (145). Willingness is vital for practising Yoga. Shiva is famous not only as a Yogi but also as a perfect consort of Parvati. He imbibes within himself the qualities women wish to have in their husbands. People in India, especially unmarried girls, keep 16 Somvar Vrat^v to get a good husband like Shiva. This Indian Mythological character balances both worlds. His existence, in the Indian consciousness, is a mark of equilibrium. People of the contemporary world require this balance in their lives as well.

Yoga as a Salvation for Contemporary World

With the growing urbanization, the villages in India are becoming more like cities. People have started working in various fields, and progress is rapid. They now not only have to handle their families with their low wages, but they also have the urge to take care of their individual needs, as modernization demands. It is challenging to balance work and personal life these days, especially in a developing country, where the youths are paid far less for their hard work and constant efforts. Getting well-paid jobs becomes difficult as youngsters undergo a series of tests. Various policies have been introduced to lessen the burden on students at schools and colleges to decrease suicide rates. Nevertheless, do these policies ensure jobs for youngsters in the future? Passing the exams for well-paid jobs is like climbing a mountain top. In such a case, the talented and frustrated people keep trying harder each day. It takes a toll on their psychic health. The stress level increases with the desire to progress. Therefore, they suffer from anger issues and depression, and their physical health too deteriorates. Studies have shown that "almost 80% of all diseases and illnesses are related to stress, particularly coronary heart disease, cancer, migraine headache, hypertension, and insomnia" (Chong 32).

Mind and body are connected. It is said that a healthy mind rests in a healthy body and vice versa. The contemporary youth is finding ways to tackle their physical and mental health. While people around the world are following Yoga as a medium to attain the union of body and mind, the youths of India rarely pay attention to it. They prefer going to the gym to shape themselves and, if stressed, to the psychiatrists. Sadhguru is talking about Isha Kriya. Isha Kriya is a guided meditation created by Sadhguru Suggests chanting this line: "I am not the body; I am not even the mind" while meditating ("Isha Kriya"). All our problems are related to our minds. Once a person rises above the concept of the 'I', the ego, and understands that this body and mind are nothing but materials of the world that bound us and that individuality lies beyond the physical world with the universe, he/she might get liberated from the shackles of life. Yoga, for years, has been acknowledged as an effective way to deal with psychological stress.

Yoga: A Traditional Efficiency Booster

India is a diverse country which remains traditional at its core. No matter how many technical or scientific advancements have been made, people desire to stick to their traditions here. Every individual has a sense of the traditional past that they never want to let go of. In academics, Indian Tradition is vibrant with various texts which teach about almost all aspects of life regardless of space and time. Keeping this in mind, the

Department of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) of the Indian government established a Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) which contains numerous books on Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Yoga (Chakravarty 297). It plays a crucial role in preserving our national heritage. Yoga, an ancient traditional practice, has many health benefits that students need to gain these days. Even corporates nowadays are "introducing Yoga for employees as a means to relieve their stress and improve productivity" (Satpathy 89). Through observation, it was concluded that the "Yogic Lifestyle can increase productivity" (Satpathy et al. 93). It calms down the mind. It keeps it in the centre, eliminating the unnecessary stress created by the busy environment everyone lives in. There is a "positive relationship between yoga practice and psychological well-being" (Gaiswinkler). Regular Yoga can relax your mind and maintain a healthy relationship between the body and mind. Yoga, with time, will increase the capacity to gain knowledge as the person indulged in the task will perceive information more clearly. A review done by Cecilia S.M. Chong and colleagues revealed: "positive effects of yoga on stress reduction in healthy adult populations" (32).

A study was conducted in which Yoga was taught to students in a school setting, and it was concluded that the "effects of participating in school-based yoga programs appeared to be beneficial" (Serwacki 101). Many yoga training programs are conducted at schools and academic institutes to maintain the psychological balance of children. An article by Stueck and Gloeckner talks about one such training programme specifically directed towards children. It was a stress-handling programme conducted on 48 students in grade five. It shows that negative feelings such as aggression and helplessness were vividly reduced (371). Being unable to reach the desired position even after tremendous hard work makes a person self-critical. People are so busy handling their life problems that no one gets time to listen to a stressed-out loved one. Lack of communication makes it even more complex, and people feel suffocated. Yoga is a self-help technique that acts as a lifesaver for frustrated people. There are many yoga styles, such as breathing techniques, meditation, and physical postures. It has become easy to access videos teaching Yoga through social media. Parents and teachers at home and school should motivate young children and inculcate this healthy habit of practising Yoga.

Conclusion

Research reveals that Yoga positively impacts an individual's stress level and overall personality development. It manages physical health, and people who indulge in Yoga often find it easy to tackle their problems more efficiently than others. Students worldwide, especially in developing countries like India, go through much hard work, which drains them entirely in many cases. Despite looking for other alternatives,

such as visiting doctors and turning self-critical at the time of crisis, one can find the answers to all the tricky questions in one's own culture. Shiva as a character from Indian mythology is drawn in such a way that his existence in the traditional texts and portrayal in various places as a yogi itself provides some people an immense power and understanding of numerous questions that unnecessarily hover around. Indian Traditional knowledge exists regardless of time and space. We should respect the richness of our texts and tackle the issues regarding stress and workload. Yoga should be mandatory in schools, and parents should also push their children towards this healthy practice. Yoga, regardless of age, should be practiced by everyone. Youths who find it challenging to settle mentally must practice it daily.

Notes

ⁱ Sanskrit word meaning 'concentration'

ⁱⁱ Female term is *yogini*, though *yogi* can mean both male and female as well

ⁱⁱⁱ *Shishya* is a Hindi word meaning 'a female disciple'. According to the *Shiva Purana* her early birth she was Sati, Shiva's 1st wife and also her disciple. But, here, she is Parvati, having a conversation regarding Yoga with her husband

^{iv} It derived from the Sanskrit word *Karmam*. According to the Oxford Dictionary it means "the sum total of a person's actions in this and previous states of existence".

^v Fasting for 16 continuous Mondays. Monday is considered as the day of Lord Shiva in Hinduism

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