

Changing Nature of Yoga through the Ages

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Abstract

Introduction: When the history of yoga studied carefully, it has been conspicuous that the nature of yoga undergone a variety of changes from the remote antiquity to its present stage of development. **Objective:** Therefore, the objective of this study was to examine the facts to unveil how the nature of yoga has changed along with the change of ages. **Methods:** The qualitative data for study was collected from the findings of various researches as well as textual evidences of associated fields and an analytical and descriptive method was adopted for analyzing the collected data. **Results:** In the course of evolutionary phases of yoga, Austric, Dravidians and Aryans contributed a lot for shaping and moulding the nature of ancient yoga. Besides, the worship of mystic power, concept of mother-goddess and father-god, the evolution of yantra, mantra and tantra along with the impact of physical, socio-cultural as well as psychological factors have greatly been contributed in shaping and changing the nature of yoga through the ages. At the beginning of creation, the purpose of yoga was primarily 'mundane' rather than spiritual and the spiritual development at that time was only a secondary purpose. In the later ancient time, the sole nature of yoga practice was to attain 'spirituality' whereas in the medieval period; the nature of yoga transformed into a 'mystical nature'. Similarly, in the early modern period, yoga came out of the mysticism and evolved as a 'scientific' subject with 'social' and 'public nature. In the modern period, yoga has emerged as a 'therapeutic subject' and in addition to this, yoga also held its 'commercial nature'. **Discussion:** The study noticed that the entire concept, structure and nature of yoga have undergone an incredible changes in modern times and specifically, during the last sixty years (i.e., from 1960 AD to till the date). **Conclusion:** Thus, the study concluded that Yoga has achieved a variety of identities which have been accepted in different ways at different times throughout the course of its development.

Keywords: Yoga, mundane, spirituality, mysticism, therapeutic, commercial

Introduction

Yoga played an important role in the life and culture of human being. Being one of the oldest systems of Indian Philosophy, yoga is emphasized by all shades of Indian religion as a genuine means of concentrating mind to understand the reality. As a psycho-spiritual discipline, yoga helps to achieve the eternal peace and harmony among body, mind and soul. It is an astonishing means of transforming the individual consciousness into the universal consciousness by which an individual can achieved the state of self realization or liberation. Yoga also imparts a basic human ethical, social and spiritual value which pushes an individual towards a healthy and sustainable lifestyle filled with joy, peace and gratitude. But, the history of development of yoga has many places of obscurity and uncertainty due to its oral transmission of sacred texts and the secretive nature of its teachings. The beginnings of Yoga can be traced back to over 5000 years ago, which developed in the Indus-Sarasvati civilization in North-western part of India, though some researchers think that yoga may be up to 10,000 years old (Jones¹, 2000, & Beck², 1996). The discovery of an image in yogic posture in the ruins of Mohenjodaro of Indus Civilization along with the many primitive conceptions and observances are strong evidence to support that the yogic cult is of hoary antiquity. This ancient and original yoga was slowly refined and developed by the Brahmans and Rishis (mystic seers) who documented their experience, practices and beliefs in many ancient scripts like Vedas, Upanishads, smritis, puranas etc. When the history of yoga studied carefully, it was conspicuous that the nature of yoga undergone a variety of changes from the remote antiquity to its present stage of development. Therefore, it was very important for a yoga scholar to get the correct information about how the nature of yoga has changed along with the change of ages. Keeping this concept in mind, the present research problem has been selected.

Objective of Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the facts to unveil how the nature of yoga has been changed along with the change of ages.

Methodology of Study: The theoretical (qualitative) data for the study was collected from the findings of various researches as well as textual evidences of associated fields and an analytical as well as descriptive method was adopted for testing or analyzing the collected data.

Changing Nature Yoga through the Ages

In the course of evolutionary phases of yoga, Austric, Dravidians and Aryans contributed a lot for shaping and moulding the nature of ancient yoga. Besides, the worship of mystic power, concept of mother-goddess and father-god, the evolution of yantra, mantra and tantra along with the impact of physical factors, socio-cultural factors as well as psychological factors have been contributed in shaping and changing the nature of yoga through the ages. (Chaterji³, 1966).

Thus, when an individual look into the history of development of yoga, one can find out the following different types of changes in the nature of yoga.

(I) Mundane Nature of Yoga

The verses of the Bhagavadgita⁴ (IV/1-3) confirmed that the science of yoga was taught by the supreme lord to Vivasvat at the beginning of creation. Vivasvat, on the other hand, handed it down to Manu and Manu taught it to his son Ikshvaku. In this way, the science of yoga moved down to the royal sages. The great teaching of yoga passed down from teachers to disciples from generation to generation and Ksatriyas were the custodians of this science. Narada Purana⁵ (II/420) highlighted the fact that Yogiraj Suka, son of Sage Veda Vyasa received the instructions in Yoga from the royal sage Janaka, the king of Mithila.

The primordial lord (i.e., Bhagvana) imparted the knowledge of Yoga to the Ksatriyas, at the beginning of creation whom he made the rulers of the earth with a view to strengthen the king, so that by virtue of their yogic power (supernatural accomplishments), they might be capable of protecting the earth along with Brahmanas and other subjects. In protecting the Brahmanas and other subjects, the protection of earth could be rendered easy (Sankara Commentary on Bhagvadgita⁶-IV/1). In the course of time, yoga was lost in this world and revived again in the lord Krishna's discourse to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kuruksetra (Bhagvadgita⁴-IV/2-3). In accordance with Brahmanical tradition records, the science of yoga was of Ksatriya origin and Lord Krishna himself belonged to the Ksatriya clan. The purpose of yoga practice among the Ksatriya was to achieve the yogic power (supernatural accomplishments) by dint of which, a king might become capable of protecting the Brahmanas and other subjects by defeating his enemy in war. The purpose of yogic science was primarily 'mundane' rather than spiritual. Spiritual development through yoga at this time (at the beginning of creation) was only a secondary purpose (Acharya Sankara's commentary on Bhagvadagita⁶-IV/I).

(II) Spiritualistic Nature of Yoga

In due course of time, yoga has been considered as a sole means of restraining mind and senses, self-realization and liberation by the Vedic sages, the sages of Upanishadic period (1500BC to 300BC), sages of Sutra period as well as Commentary period (300 BC to 1000 AD) of India. Many textual references of said period confirmed this supposition:

Yajurveda⁷ (34/44) mentioned that

*“Yukten Manasa Vayam Devashya Savituh Save /
Swargaya Shaktya //”*

That is, we (yogis) desirous of salvation, with a pure mind (with a pure conscience) are established in the infinite pure consciousness in the form of illumined bliss through yoga.

*“Tadvipraso Vipanvayo Jagrivanshah Samindhate/
Vishnoryatparamam Padam //” (Yajurveda⁷-31/15)*

That is, O human beings, who wake up from the sleep of ignorance and consciously praise God, and intelligent, yoga which universally illuminates the parampada (universal consciousness); you should also illuminate the same.

Manusmriti⁸ (6/6) also discussed with the techniques of achieving the Supreme God (super consciousness) through yoga.

Bhagvadgita⁴ (8/10) mentioned that:

*“Prayankale Manasacholana Bhaktya Yukto Yogabalen Chaiva /
bhruvormadhye Pranamaveshya Samyak Sa Tam Param Purushmupaiti
Divyam //”*

That is, that bhakti-oriented person should also attain that divine supreme consciousness after establishing the prana (vital energy) well in the middle of the forehead with the help of yoga and then meditate on it with a still mind.

Similarly, Shri Krishna advised to Arjuna that O Arjuna! By blocking the doors of all the senses, that is, by removing the senses from the objects (by the practice of Pratyahara) and by fixing the mind in the heart and establishing the prana in the brahma-randhra, become positioned in yoga-dharana (Bhagvadgita⁴ -8/12):

*“sardwarani samyama mano hridi nirudhya ch /
Murdhanyardhyatmanah pranamasthito yogadharanam //”*

In the Vedanta text "Vivek Chudamani", yoga practice has been described as a means of attaining God:

*“Uddharedamatmanam magnam samsaravaridhau /
yogarudhatvamasadya samyagdarshannishthaya//” (Vivek Chudamani⁹-1)*

That is, save your soul immersed in the ocean of the world, being engrossed in the philosophy of the soul, by becoming engaged in yoga.

In another place of "Vivek Chudamani"⁹ (48), it has been described that Shraddha, Bhakti, and Dhyana yoga are the unique means of liberation for a Mumukshu (who focused on attaining salvation). Only by having a position in these, one becomes free from ignorance, imaginary body, senses etc.

At one place of Yoga Vasistha, there is an instruction to meditate by narrating the necessity of meditation for realization of the Supreme Soul (Yoga Vasistha¹⁰, Sarga -39/27-30).

(III) Mystical Nature of Yoga

The word “mystical” signifies a sense of spiritual mystery, awe and fascination. In this period (1000 AD to 1900 AD), many small and big spiritual sects continued to flourish in various parts of India and distortions started to arise in the field of original forms of yoga practice. Different yogic techniques were practiced in different places by different spiritual sects and even the same yogic method was practiced differently in different places due to different philosophical and theological interpretations. The selfish and pretended people started to create distortions just for the fulfilment of their own interest. Apart from these, by putting more and more emphasis on dress, external showiness and flashiness, these elements kept spreading various kinds of misconceptions and irrelevant ideas regarding yoga and its practice. Consequently, a delusional atmosphere was created in the whole arena of yoga. In this situation, yoga was begun to be considered as so sacred that it was initiated by a Guru only to the keen disciple. Yogic process was not open to all and one had to prove to be worthy of it. This mystified the process and the sacred become secret and numinous in due course (Betal¹¹, 2006, Preface, p. viii). The yogic processes were not open to the scientific enquiry also as the science distanced itself; fearing to be fused into mysticism. Nor were the Gurus so cooperative in any scientific approach in this subject. Thus, yoga had become a personal talent, very sacred, secret and magical in nature (Miller¹², 2007). This mystical nature of yoga came to an end when Swami Vivekananda categorically explained and revealed the scientific approaches of yoga at the World’s Parliament of Religions in 1893.

(IV) The Public Nature of Yoga

Swami Vivekananda's new scientific explanation of yoga became a source of inspiration in the mind of researchers, who kept trying to unveil the mystical nature of yoga. As a result, efforts to establish yoga as a public subject like any other science begun with the initiation of 20th century. People started to think that “Happiness” is the essence of life and everybody should achieve it in their lives. But more importantly, it was hypothesized that the source of happiness is within the human being which an individual has to explore it. With this objective, a third force, sometimes called “Human Potential Movement” has emerged in field of psycho-spirituality. This unique system is based on the technique of yoga. Though, it was verified by our Indian sages, since the time immemorial, gradually gained momentum in this period (1900 AD to 1960 AD) from scientific interest. Many scientific experimentations were conducted to test the validity and reliability of yoga practice and as a result of this, experts found that it is so real and forceful that at a certain stage, it rises a latent or hidden power which energizes the vital functioning and makes the mind more constructive, attentive and tranquil (Singh¹³, 1999, p.168). By the end of this period, Acharyas, Maharishis, Scientists and Yoga Gurus gave a new dimension and orientation to the practice of yoga. The ancient concept and basis of Yoga have undergone a

great change in this period. The earlier individual sadhana (personal practice) has transformed into a movement of social transformation and thus, yoga became a subject of social and public interest, in place of personal practice method. Yoga has gone from its mere spiritual form of ancient times to being recognized as a scientific subject. Besides these, as a consequence of travelling to foreign countries by the Indian yogis and propagation of yoga therein the foreign countries, yoga has become a subject of international interest which one was once confined in India (Singh¹³, 1999, p.68). Thus, the aims and objectives of yoga practice became segregated into two dimensions: (1) spiritual achievement and (2) materialistic fulfilment (yoga for health, happiness and harmony). Thus the nature of the aims and objectives of yoga have become very widespread because people from different walks of life were taking interest in yoga from different angles. The use and applications of yoga has also shifted from a pure spiritual subject to scientific discipline and gradually became a scientific cum therapeutic subject of global significance in the later period.

(V) Nature of Yoga in Modern period

The entire concept, structure and nature of yoga have undergone tremendous change in modern times (i.e., from 1960 AD to 2022 AD). If these changes are noticed carefully, it would be cleared that in the second half of 19th century, and the first and second decades of 21st century, yoga has been accepted in various ways. Out of them, the (i) therapeutic and (ii) commercial nature of yoga became most prominent.

(i) Therapeutic Nature of Yoga

A number of factors are responsible for considering yoga as therapeutic means. Factors like (1) impact of scientific and industrial progress, (2) over ambition and ultra-materialistic view of people, (3) rejection of the importance of social, ethical and spiritual values and spiritual practices in the smooth maintenance of health and life, (4) lack of self-discipline and self-controlled capacity and (5) miss-interpretation of modernity (Gupta¹⁴, 2000) have dis-ordinate the smooth functions of 'body-mind' equipment. The situation has brought forth crisis level of chronic psychosomatic disorders which had posed a greater challenge to modern medical system and thus created highest socio-economic burden in the society (Nagendra, Nagrathna and Rajesh¹⁵, 2010, p.38-41). Though pharmaceutical treatment is more common to treat psychosomatic disorders, yet relief was not permanent because the agent of treatment was pharmaceutical which interacted with human physiology only. Due to its symptomatic nature, modern clinical medicines did not played any vital role in sorting out of psychological problems born out of tension anxiety, frustration, conflict etc. Naturally, the pharmaceutical treatment did not carry out any effective role in the alleviation of deeply rooted mental afflictions (kleshas) and emotional upsurges, though give temporary relief. Besides, the advances in medical technology have increased the cost of medical care at excessive level. Another important

shortcoming of modern medicine was noticed by the experts regarding its inability to recognize the interactive nature of different aspect of human existence such as physical, psychological, social and spiritual in respect of ideology of illness and maintenance of health and well being (Goel and Goel¹⁶, 2010, p.90). Modern clinical medicine only includes physical systems and physiological symptoms and does not consider the totality of human being which consists of not only body and mind but also one's divine essence i.e., the soul or consciousness (Bijlani¹⁷, 2010, p.64). Because of these, the modern pharmaceutical drugs have failed to prevent and cure psychosomatic and lifestyle related disorders. Under this situation, scientists were in search of a panacea to alleviate the psychosomatic epidemic and as a consequence, the movement of holistic health (integration of body, mind and consciousness in the form of mind-body medicine) was emerged in the second half of nineteenth century as a by-product and manifestation of the contemporary thrust on the revision of modern healing frameworks (Bijlani¹⁷, 2010, P.65). This unique system of drugless and cost effective medicine was the ancient system of yoga which was based on the principles of psycho- spirituality. Experts found that yoga becomes so forceful at a certain stage of its practice that it makes the mind more constructive, more attentive and more tranquil by eradicating all the deep rooted mental afflictions (Betal¹¹, 2006). On account of these qualities, yoga was considered as a unique type of therapeutic means in curing many disorders and specifically, 'Nija vyadhi' (psychosomatic disorders).

According to Swami Niranjananda¹⁸ (2000), in the 1960s, yoga was seen more as a physical practice. Yoga teachers taught yoga for adornment the waistline, for getting rid of facial wrinkles and for beautifying the body through asana. He stated that in the 1970s, people took interest in Meditation, Relaxation techniques of yoga and consequently, they came to the forefront. He mentioned that in the 1980s, yoga was applied in specific areas of society, specifically for prisons, rehabilitation centres and aged people. This time, yoga came with the flavour of a family practice also. He added that in the 1990s, there was a renaissance in yoga philosophy. People wanted to know the purpose and aim of yoga and to define it from the perspective of their modern needs. During this period, yoga has been considered as a source of value development, attitudinal change and behavioural modifications, character building as well as personality development.

The first decade of the twenty-first century became a period when yoga has been explained from the standpoint of practical as well as theory. As a consequence, yoga was included as subject of higher education by many universities of India which was evident with the establishment of Yoga Universities and Yoga Departments or Institutions as well, in the field of higher education. Scientific investigations on Yoga, Post Graduation and Ph.D. programs were also initiated with proper curriculum. Thus, a deepening of yogic knowledge in theory and practice was going to happen at that time. The problems like what is the effect of

various yogic processes on the body and mind; the effect of meditation on blood pressure, hormones and glands; the aim of the Kriya and Kundalini etc got solution. In this way, people tried to increase their understanding of yoga to make it a part of their personal culture (Swami Niranjananand, Ganga Darshan, December, 2004).

(ii) Commercial Nature of Yoga

One most prominent feature of this advanced period (from 1960AD to till the date) was that the journey of large number of Indian Gurus and Yogis to the "Famous hub of Materialism on Western Shores". Great many imposters exploited the gullibility of the disillusioned youth. Hundreds more prevailed with regards to making "'Big Names'" for themselves' purposes, building enormous associations which looked like huge business organizations; hoarding fortunes and gathering countless "devotees" for the sake of Eastern enchantment or Yoga. Subsequently, the new "Jet Age Guru" appeared. Gone was the parsimonious ethos. Gone was the basic living and the unassuming way. Gone were the authority of wants and the discipline of body, brain and feelings. Gone were the moral and moral limitations. "Harmony at any cost" turned into the advanced Mantra. An extraordinary allure was made to the "passionate vacuum" the "anxiety" which is so pervasive in the modern, urbanized society. Colossal fortunes and other worldly domains were implicit the West" (Bhavanani¹⁹, 2013). The new Gurus lived in five star inns, claimed personal luxury planes, involved palaces and manors and rode in Rolls Royce's. They recruited publicizing organizations to introduce an "attractive picture" and utilized every one of the limited time tricks of the industrially disapproved of West to bait pupils and devotees. Swamiji gave "Diksha" to one and all, and the title "Master" to anybody prepared to pay a heavy "Dakshina". Accordingly, one could see a man and lady, wearing the orange Gurva, strolling down the road, clasping hands and smoking cigarettes. Medicates additionally became weaved with Yoga in the Western brain. The hipsters legitimized their utilization of marijuana with the possibility that "Shiva smoked a chillum". Mind-growing medication encounters, compound highs, were mistaken for Samadhi. The cutting edge Guru has no remorse about self advancement and the tranquil normally unshaven countenances; of many "Masters" everything being equal, should be visible grinning from paid promotions all over. Inescapable issues and embarrassments additionally rose, and a considerable lot of the major "Indian Gurus" were associated with immense sexual and monetary outrages, blamed by their lady pupils for sexual temptation. Numerous different Gurus were involved in monetary tricks. Mantras were sold by many Yogi's essentially as much as US dollars 300 "per mantra" in the 1970's. Communities were set up in which taught, astute devotees gave their expert administrations uninhibitedly to the establishments, permitting their Gurus and pioneers to live in unparallel profligacy. A few associations even broke into splits utilizing vicious strategies

against one another. Courses in Yoga and other "New Age Therapies" were organized and bundled appealingly. The charges for "Yoga guidance" were high and **"Yoga" turned into a commodity to be "sold"** (Bhavanani¹⁹, 2013).

Conclusion

The present study unearthed that at the beginning of creation, the nature of yoga was 'Mundane', in the later ancient time; the sole nature of yoga practice was 'spirituality' and in the medieval period, the nature of yoga transmuted into a 'mystical nature'. Similarly, in the early modern period, yoga came out of the mysticism and evolved as a 'scientific' subject with 'social' and 'public nature'. The entire concept, structure and nature of yoga have undergone tremendous changes in modern times and specifically, during the last sixty years (1960 AD to till the date). In this modern period, yoga emerged as 'therapeutic subject' and in addition to this, simultaneously, yoga also held its 'commercial' nature. The meeting of the materialistic culture of west with the spiritual culture of the east has created a huge number of cross currents in regard to this ancient science, a shaking up and a mixing up of concepts, lifestyles and practices. The study also reflected that the ancient word "Yoga" has taken on thousands of new associations, some of them enlightened and some of them self-seeking and even, pleasure-seeking! Thus the study concluded that Yoga has achieved a variety of nature and variety of identities which have been accepted in different ways at different times throughout the course of its development (i.e., from ancient to modern period).

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