



Yoga in Indian culture: From ancient wisdom to modern lifestyle

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Abstract

Yoga is one of the oldest and most important parts of Indian culture. It is not just a way to work out; it is a whole way of life that brings balance to the body, mind, and spirit. The idea of yoga comes from old Indian texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Yoga Sutras of Maharishi Patanjali. The word "yoga" comes from the Sanskrit word yuj, which means "union" or "connection" between the individual soul and the universal consciousness. As time went on, different types of yoga emerged, including Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Raj Yoga, and Hatha Yoga. These paths help people become more disciplined, grow spiritually, and find peace within themselves. Yoga has had a big impact on Indian culture, changing how people live, what they believe, and their spiritual practices. Yoga is a good way to stay healthy and mentally stable in today's world, where stress and health problems are on the rise. The UN's celebration of International Yoga Day on June 21 shows that yoga is now practiced all over the world and is an important part of living a healthy and balanced life.

Keywords: Yoga, indian culture, patanjali, ashtanga yoga, holistic health, modern lifestyle

Introduction

Yoga is one of the most important and oldest parts of Indian culture. It has taught people all over the world how to live a healthy, balanced, and harmonious life. It is not just a set of exercises or physical postures; it is a way of life that connects the body, mind, and spirit. The main goals of yoga are to find yourself, find peace of mind, and improve your health. For thousands of years, Indian sages and seers have used yoga to help them grow as people and show society and culture a balanced way of life. The Rigveda, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Patanjali's Yoga Sutras all talk a lot about the principles of yoga. This shows how old it is and how important it is to culture.

Yoga has made a name for itself all over the world today. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to the United Nations General Assembly on September 27, 2014, and asked the world to celebrate International Yoga Day. On December 11, 2014, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) passed the Yoga Day resolution. This led to the first worldwide celebration of "International Yoga Day" on June 21, 2015. This choice shows that yoga is no longer just an Indian tradition; it has become a part of the world's cultural heritage that benefits all countries and cultures.

Meaning and Origin of Yoga

The Sanskrit root "yuj," which means to unite or focus, is where the word "yoga" comes from. It means that the person's soul is connected to the divine. In Indian culture, yoga has been around for almost 5,000 years. The earliest evidence of yoga comes from seals found in the Indus Valley Civilisation (2600–1900 BCE). They show a person sitting in a yogic position.

The Vedas are thought to be texts that help the soul on its journey and lead it to the truth. The Rigveda is the first book to use the word "yoga." The Atharvaveda calls yoga the way of knowledge and action. The Upanishads, which are highly respected spiritual texts in Indian culture, also contain the teachings of yoga. The Upanishads do not depict yoga as a

structured practice; rather, their objective is to convey self-realization.

Yoga in the Epic Period: The epic period, especially the Ramayana and Mahabharata, talks about different types, principles, and practical uses of yoga. The Ramayana says that the four main parts of yoga are austerity, meditation, samadhi, and self-control. Lord Rama is a Karmayogi because he always does the right thing. The Bhagavad Gita from the Mahabharata is well-known as a yoga text. It includes Karma Yoga (the yoga of action), Jnana Yoga (the yoga of knowledge), Bhakti Yoga (the yoga of devotion), and Dhyana Yoga (the yoga of meditation).

Maharishi Patanjali made a very important contribution to the philosophy of yoga. He wrote the "Yoga Sutras" around 200 BCE. This book is considered the most important book on yoga philosophy. Patanjali described yoga as a methodical, scientific, and useful way to do things. He called the eight parts of yoga "Ashtanga Yoga." Patanjali didn't just teach people how to do yoga; he also taught them how to use it to improve their mental, moral, and spiritual lives. This is still true today.

Major Types of Yoga

Raj Yoga: The word "Raja" in Sanskrit means "king" or "supreme." So, Raj Yoga means "the yoga of kings," "the highest yoga," or "the supreme yoga." Raj Yoga helps people understand themselves and set themselves free (kaivalya). Ashtanga Yoga by Patanjali is also a type of Raj Yoga. Patanjali split Ashtanga Yoga into two parts: Bahiranga (external) and Antaranga (internal). Yama (social discipline), Niyama (personal discipline), Asana (physical postures), and Pranayama (breath control) are all part of the first group, Bahiranga Yoga. The second group includes "Pratyahara" (withdrawing the senses), "Dharana" (focusing), "Dhyana" (meditating), and "Samadhi" (joining with the divine). Raj Yoga is the way to master the soul, and Ashtanga Yoga is the way to do this.

Karma Yoga: The Upanishads talk about Karma Yoga as the first type of yoga. "Action" is the literal meaning of "karma," which everyone does in this world, whether they know it or not. When you add "yoga" to "karma," it means doing things with awareness and mindfulness. Krishna tells Arjuna in the Gita, "योगः कर्मसु कौशलम्" (Skill in action is yoga). "कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन" You have the right to do your duty, but not to its rewards. So, you should do your duty without worrying about what will happen.

1. **Bhakti Yoga:** Bhakti Yoga is the practice of connecting with the divine through love, devotion, and complete faith. The practitioner gives God their mind, thoughts, actions, and feelings here. Lord Krishna says, "Give up all your responsibilities and only trust in Me." "I will free you from all your sins." Through respect, trust, service, and surrender, Bhakti Yoga connects the devotee to God. It's not just a way to get free; it's also a beautiful, emotional, and close experience that makes life feel divine.
2. **Jnana Yoga:** The Upanishads say that it is a way to meditate and reach one's natural abilities, which is another part of yoga. Jnana Yoga is a type of meditative yoga that focuses on knowing who we really are and what we can do. In the Bhagavad Gita, Jnana Yoga means getting rid of ignorance and realising that the individual soul and the supreme soul are one. "अशेषेण द्रक्ष्यस्यात्मन्यथो मयि" says Lord Krishna to Arjuna: "Through knowledge, you will see Me entirely within yourself."
3. **Hatha Yoga:** The word "Hatha" in yoga books comes from two seed mantras: "Ha" and "Tha." "Ha" stands for Pingala Nadi, which is the right side of the body and represents the sun and the dynamic force of prana. "Tha" is the Ida Nadi, which is the left side of the body and represents the moon and the mental force.

Hatha Yoga mainly focuses on breathing control (pranayama) and physical postures (asanas). These two energies wake up the pranic power in the body. The Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Gheranda Samhita are ancient texts that explain the physical and pranic parts of yoga in a scientific way. Their goal is to get the body ready for spiritual practice, control prana, and eventually move toward liberation and meditation.

The Impact of Yoga on Indian Culture

Indian culture has been greatly changed by yoga. It's not just a way to get fit; it's also a part of spiritual and philosophical thought that comes from the Vedas, Upanishads, Gita, and Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. Yoga has helped Indians understand deep ideas like self-knowledge, the nature of Brahman, and liberation (moksha). Yoga has inspired a balanced, disciplined, and pure way of living in India. Yogic postures, breath control, and meditation are very important in daily and seasonal routines. Yoga has also had an effect on literature, art, music, and dance, where meditation, postures, and spiritual practices are shown in a creative way. Yoga education also became important through the guru-disciple tradition, which taught values like peace, compassion, nonviolence, and tolerance in society. Yoga has been a way for people to improve their own lives and the lives of others, making India known as a spiritual nation.

The Relevance of Yoga in the Modern Era

In today's world, where people have more things, mental unrest, stress, and restlessness are also spreading quickly.

People have made progress in technology, but they are becoming more and more incomplete and restless on the inside. During these times, yoga has spread beyond India and is now a good way to improve mental and physical health all over the world.

People today are dealing with a lot of physical and mental health problems, like anxiety, insomnia, high blood pressure, and depression. The World Health Organization (WHO) says that mental health problems are becoming more common. Yoga, meditation, and pranayama are some natural ways to deal with these issues that don't have any side effects. Studies have shown that yoga calms the nervous system, strengthens the immune system, and makes the brain work better. Harvard Medical School studies show that people who do yoga regularly have better mental focus, tolerance, and self-control. The UN's decision to make June 21 International Yoga Day shows that yoga has become a worldwide tradition. Yoga is now being taught in schools, hospitals, and workplaces in many countries.

Conclusion

Yoga is more than just a workout in Indian culture; it's a way of life that makes a person whole at the body, mind, and soul levels. Yoga has taught people all over the world, not just in India, how to live a healthy and happy life for hundreds of years. In today's world, where people are dealing with stress and imbalance, yoga is a powerful tool that can help people live a balanced and meaningful life.

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