

Yoga and Ayurvedic Medicine

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Abstract:

In the contemporary global market for wellness, the combining of Yoga and Ayurveda is common. More than a married couple, Yoga and Ayurveda are deemed sisters, born of the same scriptural family, the Vedas. A recent example of this seemingly familial relationship is found in the promotional material of the Moksha Festival, which is one of the many Yoga events held annually in world. It is billed as “a celebration of wellness, spiritual expansion and conscious living through: Yoga, Health, Ayurveda, Sacred Music and Spiritual Art, and the festival’s websites. Ayurveda is the sister science to Yoga. Together Yoga and Ayurveda work to words the goal of helping a person achieve health, happiness, and ultimately liberation. According to Ayurveda and Yoga, health can only be achieved by the balanced and dynamic integration of body, mind and spirit with the changing cycle of nature.

Key Words: Yoga, Ayurveda, Ayurvedic Medicine, Science in Yoga.

Introduction:

The idea that Yoga and Ayurveda are “Sisters” might seem somewhat unsurprising to those who practise Yoga for health and wellbeing, because “New age Ayurveda” is marketed as an alternative health therapy. Furthermore, those who have learnt Yoga in India are unlikely to question the compatibility of Yoga with Ayurveda, for they would be aware that some of the most prominent Indian gurus of Yoga in the twentieth century were knowledge about Ayurveda. For example, Krishnamacharya’s son Desikachar has written that his father would rely on his “great knowledge of Ayurveda” to read the pulse of his students and prescribe changes in diet and medicines.

In more recent decades, some gurus have profited from combining Yoga and Ayurveda. For example Baba Ramdev, whose televised Yoga classes have become popular in India, is the head of a prosperous business for Ayurvedic products, known as Patanjali Yogpeeth. Similarly, Maharshi Mahesh Yogi is known worldwide for his teachings on Transcendental Meditation (TM) since 1985, this guru has prompted “Maharshi Ayur – Ved”. Which has been described as “among the most successful models of a globalised Ayurveda. In 2014, the Indian government established a separate ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unnai, Siddha and Homoeopathy, which promotes Ayurveda and Yoga in tandem.

The interplay between Yoga and Ayurveda raises two questions. Firstly, how old might this relationship be and, secondly, was it as intimately connected in pre – modern times as it seems today? The first question is relatively easy to answer because textual evidence from the classical period of India's history suggests that some kind of relationship dates back to the beginning of the first millennium, although not to the time of the composition of the Vedic hymns, as claimed by some. One of the oldest and most authoritative texts of Ayurveda, the Charakasamhita, that is generally ascribed to the first century CE, has a chapter on Yoga that contains a system with eight auxiliaries. This indicates that physicians of the time were willing to adopt Yoga. As Dominik Wujastyk has observed, Charaka's Astangayoga predates the patanjalayogasastra and it appears to have been influenced profoundly by Buddhism. In addition, there is evidence which suggests that patanjali himself had some knowledge of Ayurveda, because his commentarial definition and discussion of disease, which is mentioned in sutra 1.30 is similar to one given by Charaka. After considering this as well as a list of bodily constituents and their relation to the humours in the patanjalayogasutra, Philipp Mass concludes:

On the whole, the system of medical knowledge which Patanjali was acquainted is clearly Ayurvedic, and of early classical style.

The research for this article prompted by the second question posed above on the synthesis between Yoga and Ayurveda. I will attempt to give a preliminary answer by

assessing the shares terminology, theory and praxis between a reasonable and the foundational works of Ayurveda. As such, this article is structured as follows:

1. Corpus of Texts on Yoga and Ayurveda
2. Theory
3. Praxis

Brief History:

1. Corpus of Texts on Yoga and Ayurveda

The yoga corpuse examined in this article of text that teach physical techniques and meditative absorption either as auxiliaries within a system of Yoga or as autonomous systems in themselves. These works were composed between the eleventh and the nineteenth century.

- The Fourfold System of Mantra – Laya – Hatha – Rajayoga

The Dttatreyayogasastra (12-13th c)

The Yogabija (14th c)

The Amaraughaprabhodha(14th c.)

The Sivasamhitha (15th c.)

- Rajayoga

The Amanaska, chapter 2 (11th -12th c.)

- Hatha – and Rajayoga

The Yogataravali (14th c.)

- Sadangayoga

The Vivekamarthanda (12th – 13th c)

The Gorakshasathaka

- Astangayoga

The Vasisthasamhitha (12 – 13thc.)

The Yogayagnavalkya (13th -14th c.)

- Others

The Amrtasiddhi (11th c.)

The Gorakshasathaka (14th c.)

The Chandravalokana (13th – 14th c.)

The Khecharividya (14th c.)

Most of my statements on Ayurveda are based on the contents of the so – called great triad of classical Ayurveda, namely, the Carakasamhitha the susrutasamhitha and Vagbha's Astangahrudayam. Where possible, I have consulted other works on Ayurveda and Rasasastra. However, a more systematic search outside the brhatrayi would further enrich further enrich the points of discussion raised in this article.

2.Theory

If the author of a Yoga text incorporated descriptions of physiology that rely on Ayurvedic Terminology and theories, as seen in the Brhatrayi this might provide more robust evidence for the use of specialized Ayurvedic knowledge in a Yoga tradition. This type of evidence is rare in the early corpus and difficult to trace because these texts do not reveal their sources. Furthermore, although some texts of the early corpus have description of digestion and vital points that are conceptually similar to Ayurvedic Physiology, there are also enough significant differences to suggest a non – medical source, as will be seen in the examples taken from the Yogayagnavalkya and the Amrtasiddhi. In contrast to this, some texts of the late corpus, such as the Yuktabhavadeva and the Hathasanketacandrika, quote Ayurvedic texts explicitly or contain passages which can be proven to derive from them. These instances provide more solid ground for assessing how and why these authors combined Ayurvedic theory

with Yoga. The mere presence of basic Ayurvedic knowledge of medicines, and some occasionally quote or borrow from Ayurvedic texts.

Fire, Digestive Fire and Digestion

Nearly all of the Yoga texts in the corpuse refer frequently to a yogins inner fire. It is clear from from expressions, such as jatharagni, that this fire is located in the abdomen. Many Hathayogic practices are credited with increasing the body's heat, and the fact that it can result in Rajayoga, which is the goal of Hathayoga, signifies the important role of yogins inner fire in the soteriology of premoderen Yoga traditions. According to Amruthasiddi, the practice of these mudras stimulates digestive fire, which initiates a chain reaction of increasing nutrient fluid, then bodily constituents and finally the foremost vital fluid, which in this text is probably semen. This process leads to a number of mundane benefits.

3.Praxis:

I would like to turn my attention to yoga techniques that were singled out in some texts as being partuclarly effective in healing diseases. Their curative role raises questions such as whether they were modelled on Ayurvedic techniques or therapies and whether the yogins who practiced them were presented as physicians. There are several accounts of yoga therapy in the corpuse consulted for this article and one of the se therapies was written by an Ayurvedic doctor who composed large compendiums on Yoga. The role of asanas in healing diseases was acknowledged in one of the oldest texts of the early corpuse. In defining the six auxiliaries of its Yoga, the vivekamarthanda says the following:

The best of yogins curse diseases by Yogic posture, sin by breath retentions and mental problems by withdrawing. He obtained stability of mind by concentration, wondrous power by meditation, good and bad.

Conclusion

If Yogins took medicines and if vaidyas appropriated some Yoga techniques, the findings of this study suggest that such interaction had little influence overall on the

texts of the Yoga traditions that have been consulted. The authors of the early corpus tend to confine themselves strictly to the topic of yoga. One could argue that this alone is why so little information on Ayurveda is found in these works. However, this could not be said of the late corpus because many of its authors were willing to integrate information from various traditions on topics related to Yoga. Nonetheless, like Sundaradeva, the majority of these authors appear to have lacked the will to combine Yoga and Ayurveda in any significant way. The instances in which they will to combine Yoga and Ayurveda in any significant way.

Ideally, I would have liked to have searched more extensively for passages on Yoga in Ayurvedic and alchemical texts that date from the tenth to eighteenth century, but such research has remained beyond the scope of this article. I know of only one such passage which probably derives from a Yoga text. A section on Yoga in the alchemical compilation called the Anandakanda appears to be based on an early recension of the Vivekamarthanda. Further research may reveal the extent to which alchemists integrated teachings specific to premodern Yoga traditions in their literary works.

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