

Personal Growth through Ancient Teachings: The Relevance of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* Today

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Abstract

Patanjali defines yoga as “citta vṛtti nirodha”, the stilling of all states of the mind. One of the six major orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy is yoga philosophy. In ancient, medieval and most modern literature Yoga philosophy is often regarded as “Yoga.” The word “Yoga” was first mentioned in *Rigveda* (1700–1100 BC), one of the four sacred canonical texts of Hinduism. My paper will explore the significance of Yoga as a system of practical discipline and a system of philosophical thought in the twenty-first century. Yoga practices were first referred to in writing in the Hindu *Upanishads* (800-500 BC), and extensive teachings of yoga emerged several centuries later in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Around 400 BC, the Indian sage Patanjali composed the *Yoga Sutras*, which established the foundations of yoga theory and practice, including the widely recognised Ashtanga yoga. This presentation will contextualize various issues presented in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* in today's world. Practising Yoga consistently can help everyone reduce stress, relax, and rejuvenate. Yoga helps students develop multiple dimensions of their personality such as physical, emotional, and spiritual, and helps them live a happy and healthy life. Additionally, yoga teaches students how to become more hopeful, balanced, and cheerful. This paper will examine how “abhyasa,” or making consistent progress in the desired direction is at the core of a yoga practice.

[Keywords: Yoga, Yoga philosophy, Patanjali, Yoga Sutras, Asana, Abhyasa]

Introduction

Maharshi Patanjali is known as the “father of yoga.” Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* is considered a foundational text in classical yoga philosophy. He offered the earliest insights into the regulation of mind and thought as well as the universal principles controlling space and time. It is a universal guide to the practice of yoga and meditation. The *Yoga Sutras* are attributed to the ancient sage Patanjali, although there is debate about the exact authorship. Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* is regarded as part of a larger work the *Yogasastras*.

Yoga, according to Patanjali, is the union of body, mind, spirit, and soul. In his *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali systematically compiled 195 sutras (aphorisms) that provide practical guidance for realizing the oneness between our consciousness and Universal Consciousness (or Brahman). When followed and performed thoughtfully, yoga may help people realize their entire creative potential, their capacity for love and compassion, and their ability to succeed in all facets of their lives.

To enhance physical and spiritual well-being, yoga incorporates components such as asana (posture), pranayama (breathing techniques) and meditation. Yoga is an excellent form of exercise that involves many short-term and long-term physical benefits from improved flexibility to stronger muscles and bones. With prolonged practice comes a gradual loosening of the muscles and connective tissues that surround the bones and joints. Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* serve as the foundation for the entire system of yoga. Beyond physical postures, the Sutras guide us toward self-awareness and personal growth. Despite their ancient origins, the Sutras hold profound relevance in today’s dynamic and fast-paced world. Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* focuses on how to attain the direct experience and realization of the purusa: the innermost individual self, or soul.

Objectives of the Study

- To assess the relevance of Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras* today.
- To examine the benefits of practising yoga to enhance the physical, mental and wellbeing of an individual.

- To explore how Patanjali's sutras go beyond physical postures (asanas) and delve into meditation, ethical principles, and self-realization.

Methodology

This study is descriptive in nature and the data have been collected from various research papers, journal articles, and reference books.

Discussion

Patanjali systematized the practice of yoga into a comprehensive framework through his 196 succinct aphorisms or Sutras. These 196 aphorisms form a timeless “roadmap” of human consciousness. The *Yoga Sutras* were likely written in a style influenced by Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit. They offer guidance on living a meaningful material life through the “abhyasa” of yoga. Patanjali's teachings help us regulate life's challenges and find lasting contentment. The *Yoga Sutras* outline the philosophy and methodology of classical yoga, focusing primarily on the mind and its role in spiritual liberation (moksha).

There are 196 sutras presented in four *padas* or chapters in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. Each *pada* emphasises a different aspect of the science of yoga. These *padas* include Samadhi Pada, Sadhana Pada, Vibhuti Pada and Kaivalya Pada. They deal with concentration, practice, experiences and absolute freedom respectively. The *Yoga Sutras* offer profound wisdom for self-realization, inner peace, and spiritual growth.

The first chapter or Samadhi Pada of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* offers the meaning of yoga. In the second sutra of the 1st *pada*, Patanjali defines yoga as “citta vṛtti nirodha” (meaning “the stilling of the fluctuations of the mind”). The 51 sutras in this section speak to those who have already embraced yoga into their daily life and focus on themes of enlightenment, concentration, and meditation.

Central to the Sutras is the concept of “Ashtanga Yoga” (or the “Eight Limbs of Yoga”) which provides a comprehensive framework for personal growth and spiritual wellness. The eight limbs of yoga (Ashtanga Yoga) involve practices such as Yamas

(ethical disciplines), Niyamas (Observances), Asana (postures), Pranayama (breath control), Pratyahara (withdrawal of senses), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation), and Samadhi (absorption or enlightenment).

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, despite being ancient, offer timeless wisdom that remains relevant in today's world. The *Yoga Sutras* must be studied today for several compelling reasons:

1. **Philosophical Foundation:** *The Yoga Sutras* offer an organized philosophical framework for evaluating the objective and practice of yoga. They outline the eight limbs of yoga and provide an all-encompassing approach to both physical and spiritual well-being.
2. **Purpose of Practice:** While physical postures (asanas) are popular, Patanjali reminds us that yoga is about "chitta vritti nirodhah" or "the stilling of the fluctuations of the mind". Yoga refers to a journey towards self-awareness and inner serenity, not simply physical health. It helps everyone manage stress, anxiety, and overall well-being.
3. **Learning Meditation and Mind Control:** Patanjali's teachings emphasise the importance of meditation (Dhyana) and the control of the mind ("Chitta vritti nirodha"). The sutras provide insights into various techniques and states of meditation, as well as how to attain mastery over the fluctuations of the mind.
4. **Universal Principles:** The principles that are outlined in the *Yoga Sutras* are irreplaceable and eternal despite their antiquity. They reflect on basic human experiences like liberty, self-control, ethics, and meditation.
5. **Relevance to Modern Issues:** The *Yoga Sutras* provide useful methods for reducing stress, enhancing mental sharpness, and attaining inner peace in today's hectic and stressful world. The principles and advice of Patanjali are extremely applicable to addressing contemporary problems like anxiety and exhaustion.
6. **Integration with Science:** Many principles of yoga outlined in the *Yoga Sutras*, such as mindfulness and concentration practices, have been validated by modern scientific research. Reviving these teachings can help bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary scientific understanding.

7. **Cultural Heritage:** Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* formulates a significant part of India's cultural and spiritual heritage. Reviving the yoga tradition helps preserve and honour this heritage while making its benefits accessible to a global audience.
8. **Inner Transformation:** The systematic approach of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* can facilitate profound inner transformation. Additionally, it helps individuals cultivate self-awareness, emotional resilience, and spiritual growth.
9. **Applying Yoga Philosophy to Daily Life:** The sutras provide practical guidance on how to incorporate yoga philosophy into daily life in addition to theoretical understanding. This covers moral precepts, self-control, awareness, and the development of virtues like contentment and compassion.
10. **Community and Global Harmony:** Yoga fosters connection. By practising the ethical principles advocated in the *Yoga Sutras*, such as non-violence (ahimsa) and truthfulness (satya), individuals can contribute to creating a more harmonious and compassionate society. Modern practitioners can build supportive communities.

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* provides motivation and guidance for those who consistently practise yoga and meditation. They offer an understanding of the phases of spiritual growth and encouragement to continue developing one's practice. The *Yoga Sutras* is frequently studied by academics and practitioners with an interest in comparative spirituality and religious studies in order to comprehend the text's connections with other philosophical systems and spiritual traditions.

Conclusion

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* offers a roadmap for holistic living, bridging ancient wisdom with contemporary life. Reading Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* can be beneficial for an array of issues, such as learning about the classical yoga philosophy and developing practical meditation practices, as well as getting insights into spiritual development and human consciousness. Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* provides an opportunity to achieve self-improvement, holistic well-being, and the fusion of traditional wisdom with contemporary lifestyle, all of which are advantageous to both people and society at large. Following the principles outlined in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, people today can

develop a holistic lifestyle that incorporates mental well-being, physical wellness, moral integrity, and spiritual fulfilment—values that remain relevant even after centuries. Examining Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* now is beneficial for learning the origins of yoga as well as for acquiring useful knowledge that might improve one's mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness in the modern world.

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