

Elements Of Yoga In Agni Mahāpurāṇa: A Textual And Comparative Study

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Abstract:

The Agni Mahāpurāṇa, one of India's renowned Mahāpurāṇas, provides a systematic account of Yoga which integrates ethical conduct, bodily control, consciousness, and spiritual learning. This article examines the aspects of Aṣṭāṅga Yoga that exist in Agni Purāṇa, with yama and niyama as moral disciplines, āsana and prāṇāyāma as principles of physical and psychological steadiness, and the higher limbs, pratyāhāra, dhāraṇā, dhyāna, and samādhi as learners in terms of inner understanding. It points to the Puranic aspect and focuses on nāḍī-cakra theory and ajapājapa that have developed subtle yogic physiology based on ethical and devotional dimensions under the guidance of dharma. The Agni Mahāpurāṇa (AMP) also provides context for the study in comparison to Pātañjali's Yoga Sūtras, Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā, and Bhagavad Gītā, the conceptualist for Yoga practice in the Puranic philosophy, and how yoga is a path for a deeper Hindu understanding, as we can see from bhukti and mukti.

Keywords: Agni Mahāpurāṇa, Aṣṭāṅgayoga, yama–niyama, nāḍī-cakra, ajapājapa, dharma.

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I. Introduction

Among the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas, the AMP has one distinctive aspect which I refer to as Viśvakośa. The AMP contains approximately 383 chapters, including cosmology, ritual, polity, medicine, grammar, iconography, philosophy, and Yoga. Lord Agni is transmitted to his brother Vasiṣṭha and to Vyāsa. Lord Agni goes from theology to practicality to liberation and to the spiritual space of spiritualism (*abhyudaya*). It is in this vast book, Yoga, that being not just an auxiliary discipline, but is more or less treated as a course that will bring them the enlightenment of their souls. *Prāṇāyāma*, *dhyāna*, *samādhi*, *mantra yoga*, *nāḍī-cakra* theory, *kuṇḍalinī* and ethical thought (*dharma*) are given in the AMP as we will understand the rest of this work. Unlike technical yogic treatises, the AMP includes yogic practice in a Puranic theology that is based more on Viṣṇu, Śiva and Brahman than that of the Puranic world, and thus adapts to the evolving and synthetic philosophy of Yoga. The Agni Purāṇa provides a textual study of Yoga, including *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga*, subtle physiology and ethical discipline. We contrast this work with *Pātañjala Yoga Sūtras* (PYS), *Haṭha Yoga text* (HYP) and *Bhagavad Gītā* (BG) so that we can see the continuity of the concept of Yoga and its divergence from the within the border yogic tradition.

Aṣṭāṅgayoga in Agni Mahāpurāṇa

The Agni Purāṇa places a strong emphasis on *Aṣṭāṅgayoga*, which is the means towards transcending suffering and understanding Brahman. Agni introduces Yoga as the law of the mind and explains how our soul can be realised so that we can unite our soul with the supreme Brahman. Yoga is defined as a focused consciousness and the way to know Brahman through God alone. The Purāṇa operates like the eightfold theory of *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*, where each limb is illuminated by meditation and mindfulness through the others. In this context, Yoga is not viewed from the perspective of ascetics; the Yogic mind, the spiritual aspect, ritual purity, and morality are well understood.

Yama and Niyama as Moral and Ethical Disciplines

Yama and *Niyama* are seen as Moral and Ethical Disciplines. Non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, controlled behaviour, and non-possessiveness are the five yamas according to the Agni Purāṇa, and they help to improve interpersonal conduct as well as maintain mental health. Non-violence extends beyond just physical non-injury to include verbal and internal non-harming, along with ethical discernment; for example, truthfulness does not harm a person (a sense of right and wrong). Purity, contentment, austerity, and self-study are the five niyamas, considered virtues that bring pleasure to others and not just to oneself, and they foster resistance. Pātañjali's *Aṣṭāṅgayoga* is built on strict ethical restraints and observation, helping people attain mental stability and higher states of consciousness. This aligns the AMP with the idea of ethical living and spiritual learning. The AMP is described as a systematic account of *Aṣṭāṅgayoga* for mental purification and spiritual healing as a mental

discipline. AMP Yoga is based on Patañjali's eightfold discipline and is embedded in the Puranic way of devotee worship and *Dharma*. Ethical restraint, breath regulation, and meditative practice are stated as developing the inner condition. The text places mental control and sensory withdrawal at the heart of deep absorption. Therefore, the AMP adapts the classical yogic philosophy to a theistic and soteriological view.

Āsana and Prāṇāyāma: Physical and Mental Steadiness

In the AMP, *āsana* is more than just a bodily posture; its stability (*sthira-sukham-āsanam*) is the physical foundation of Yogic discipline (AMP, Ch. 144). Practice develops bodily awareness, releases psychosomatic tension, and prepares the cognitive body for long-term focus (HYP II.6; PYS II.46). *Prāṇāyāma* does not have a separate reference for *āsana*, but it serves as a means of ensuring mindfulness about the mind through control over breath and energy (*prāṇa*). *Prāṇa* in the AMP is integral to the connection between breath and thoughts. In the PYS, breath regulation is important to maintain *citta-vṛtti* (YS II.49-50), and in the BG, moderate activity, sleep, and diet are to be maintained to keep a balanced mind (BG 6.16-17). Both *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* form the backbone of Yogic steadiness (physical and mental regulation). This balance of cognition will aid *pratyāhāra* with practice (*dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*), which is aligned with the PYS, to achieve perfect psychological and spiritual health.

Pratyāhāra: Sensory Withdrawal and Mental Control

In the AMP (Ch. XX), *pratyāhāra* is described as sensory withdrawal away from outside objects and to give a degree of autonomy (even the most insignificant information and thoughts are taken advantage of). In fact, *pratyāhāra* is the limb of the mind that is fundamental in higher levels of concentration (*dhāraṇā*) and meditation (*dhyāna*). PYS (2.54-2.55) in the classical BG also mention *pratyāhāra* as inward attention to what I am being aware of, where I can manage the mind better and so control my thoughts and emotions and I would be safer to be non-emotional to make sense of a lot of things when I think about it and to respond and meditate. Hence, *pratyāhāra* is a psychological regulation mechanism used to harmonise sensory input with ethical and cognitive discipline.

Dhāraṇā and Dhyāna: Concentration and Meditation

Building the *pratyāhāra*, the AMP defines *dhāraṇā* as the anchor that the mind wears in one place of focus and then its sense and perception at that location as to which point AMP (Ch. XX). *Dhāraṇā* strengthens cognitive power, reduces rumination, or to retain calm in the face of distractions. The mind is not able to be able to manage and be focused because when it is focused enough in a good way, you have some peace to concentrate and concentration. PYS (3.1-3.2): Mind focuses upon *dhyāna*, the mind is a single place in which consciousness is able to come together. Of all the meditation techniques in our path of meditation the BG has to do which is an integral tool for people to have solid presence of mind, so that to be able to respond to the *dharmic* duties of people, BG (6.10-6.12). Like HYP and other Haṭha yogic texts define breath control/body control, these exercises enhance the connection to body bonding through a spiritual and physiological context, which is then critical for meditation. Both *dhāraṇā* and *dhyāna* are complementary, the physical and cognitive processes of sensory withdrawal in the mind, the movement of concentration, consciousness, self-reliance and emotional strength. *Dhyāna* before *dhāraṇā* in AMP can also be seen rather as a poetic arrangement (*chanda*) when considered, without a thought behind the departure from what was once in the classic *Aṣṭāṅga* way of daily life.

Samādhi: Integration and Yogic Fulfilment

Samādhi is the culmination of the yogic path, where the mind fully embraces and integrates the entire sphere of learning towards the goal of learning. *Samādhi*, for example, in the AMP, when the fluctuations of the mind cease, and mental clarity, emotional balance, and spiritual wisdom become complete. In this sense, *Samādhi* can only be achieved through specific practice and not personal consciousness, representing a state of freedom and awareness in the presence of the objective of consciousness. Similarly, the BG describes *Samādhi* as being in accordance with mindfulness, self-control, meditation, body purification, and breath discipline as fundamental to it. In this way, we can view *Samādhi* as psychological integration and knowledge of higher consciousness in the AMP, which also indicates how yogic practice, with an integrated perspective of integration and knowledge, is part of the AMP philosophy.

Integration Note: The limbs of the Agni Purana (*pratyahara* → *dharana* → *dhyana* → *samadhi*) may, in that case, represent a positive psycho-ethical framework, as in Patañjali's *Aṣṭāṅgayoga* on moral behaviour, physical control, sensory integration, and integration for mind and spiritual growth.

The Subtle Body (nāḍi and cakra)

With the subtle *nāḍi* and *cakra* systems acting more as channels of meditation and movement of *prana*, we are shown that purification of this *nāḍi* is needed for mental and higher yogic self-awareness and

enlightenment. They are very similar to the HYP, which purifies the *nadis* to breathe and meditate to get closer to nature and the higher purpose in reality. Our cakras are awakened to develop consciousness in a progressive process, as expressed again in *Haṭhayoga*, where *prāṇa* rising through the central channel is associated with consciousness. *Ajapajapa*, which is guided by breath-linked *mantra* awareness (the spontaneous meditation of *ajapajapa* can be seen as within our life), means one senses a harmony between breath and the mind according to *Haṭhayoga* to provide an easy mental experience (as is the case for our mind and the mind in the meditation process, but not with awareness). However, the AMP defines these yogic practices as part of the ethical basis of *Dharma* by arguing that yogic knowledge cannot be attained without good things (behaviour) associated with good things. **Comparison with Patañjali's Aṣṭāṅga Yoga**

Similarity

As *Aṣṭāṅgayoga* is, in our sense, a disciplined and progressive approach to mental purification and spiritual achievement in both the AMP and PYS. The eight-step system of *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi* is quite common to Yoga Sūtras, thus highlighting yogic roots (YS II.29). Ethical discipline comes before everything and spiritual awareness; a moral process must be practised for the mind to be stable as well. Both books have also seen Yoga in a physiological frame where man can control his/her own state (spiritual mind). AMP doesn't use the technical term *citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*, though there is a clear connection between the experience of sensory discipline (in terms of concentration and meditation).

Differences

Despite being architecturally similar, they differ more in orientation and style. The YSP are based on *Sāṃkhya* metaphorically and have a quick, technical, aphoristic way of describing Yoga as a process of liberation (*kaivalya*). In contrast, AMP puts *Aṣṭāṅgayoga* into relation with the Puranic view and theology and links yogic behaviour to *dharma* (attentiveness, dedication, ritual presence, worship). Yoga in AMP is more oriented in the case of Hinduism or *Mukti*, so that it has a more universal approach, in the words of Hinduism. And whereas Patañjali's teaching system is methodologically objective and focuses in principle on *Īśvara*'s importance over all other values and practices, the AMP places more emphasis on divine grace and ethical living, supporting the yogic success. We thus see that AMP puts yogic discipline in a more secular and cultural framework to be adopted and made accessible to a wider audience, which has the core of *Aṣṭāṅgayoga*.

II. Conclusion

In this paper, we have outlined the *Aṣṭāṅgayoga* system that underpins the AMP system as a holistic and fully integrated yogic model in Puranic terms. The study shows that the AMP is still the eightfold yogic system of yoga, but developed on the principles of ethics, devotional, and *dharmic* aspects of Yoga. From the AMP's standpoint, moral discipline is the key to the development of humanity - if we can't feel good about *yama* and *niyama* in ourselves, there is no way to be mentally stable and spiritual, and as Puranic philosophy implies, the Agni Purāṇa is focused more on the physical stability in the body and how we should discipline our emotions. Thus, the pathway of the spiritual path of the AMP is one being in the centre. The use of *nāḍī-cakra* theory and *ajapajapa* in the book adds additional context to the subtle yogic physiology as it connects the regulation of *prāṇa* with meditation and ethical practice in a meditative way. A comparison between the AMP and PYS in structure and discipline is apparent as the AMP is a model in its emphasis that Yoga will be closely linked with veneration, ritual and spiritual happiness and spiritual development; it is different in philosophy (as the technical and aphoristic Yoga Sūtras are too), it is Yoga from a technical point of view to a complete (accessible) approach in terms at least to spiritual and religious aspects for a man in the world view (the nature of the yogic practice and a person from his spiritual nature; the way which it combines with the spiritual path). This study makes the AMP one of the more important texts to discover how such a Puranic assimilation of classic Hindu philosophy and theology was extended to a more secular and ethical perspective.

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