

The Spiritual Philosophy of Yoga: A Journey from the Self to the Divine

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Abstract: *This study examines the spiritual philosophy of yoga, focusing on its core principles and their role in personal and spiritual development. By exploring concepts such as Ahimsa (non-violence), Aparigraha (non-possessiveness), and Anekantavada (multiplicity of viewpoints), the research highlights how yoga serves as a transformative path to self-realization, ethical living, and spiritual enlightenment. The study integrates philosophical texts, contemporary research, and case studies to demonstrate how yoga's spiritual practices contribute to emotional resilience, mental clarity, and a deeper connection to the divine. Ultimately, this study affirms the relevance of yoga in modern society as a holistic tool for personal growth and societal harmony.*

Keywords: Yoga Philosophy, Ahimsa, Aparigraha, Anekantavada, Personal Development, Spiritual Development, Self-Realization

I. INTRODUCTION

The spiritual philosophy of yoga, deeply rooted in ancient Indian traditions, offers a transformative journey that leads from the individual self (Atman) toward union with the divine consciousness (Brahman). Unlike popular misconceptions that associate yoga primarily with physical postures, the spiritual philosophy emphasizes self-awareness, mental discipline, and meditation as the core aspects of the practice (Iyengar, 2000). The ultimate goal of yoga is not merely physical fitness but liberation (moksha), where the practitioner transcends the ego, achieves self-realization, and experiences oneness with the divine. The ancient texts such as the Upanishads and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali provide a detailed philosophical framework for this profound journey of the self toward divinity (Sivananda, 2005).

The philosophical foundations of yoga can be traced back to early Vedic texts, which laid the groundwork for the practice's spiritual dimensions. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras (c. 200 BCE) remain one of the most influential texts, outlining the Eightfold Path (Ashtanga Yoga) that integrates ethical conduct, physical postures, breath control, and meditation. This path is designed to purify the mind and body, ultimately leading to a state of unity with the universe (Eliade, 1958). Central to this philosophy is the concept of "Chitta Vritti," or the modification of the mind's fluctuations, which yoga practitioners aim to calm through continuous practice (Patanjali, 2002). This study explores how yoga, through its various practices, offers a systematic approach to transcending individual limitations and realizing the divine essence within.

Contemporary studies have increasingly recognized the spiritual benefits of yoga, aligning with its philosophical teachings. According to Desikachar (1995), yoga provides an experiential understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings, fostering an attitude of compassion, humility, and self-awareness. By integrating mindfulness, ethical discipline, and meditation into daily life, yoga practitioners embark on a spiritual journey that dissolves the barriers of the ego, leading them to recognize the divine presence within and in all forms of life. This study examines the relevance of these philosophical teachings in modern spiritual practices, highlighting their continued importance in contemporary society for personal and spiritual growth (Feuerstein, 2003).

1.1. The Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework of this study is built upon the exploration of yoga as a spiritual path that transcends physical practice to encompass a transformative journey from the individual self (Atman) to the universal consciousness (Brahman). It draws on the core philosophical principles of yoga, including Ahimsa (non-violence), Aparigraha (non-possessiveness), Satya (truthfulness), and Brahmacharya (self-restraint), which serve as ethical guidelines for achieving personal and spiritual growth. The framework emphasizes how these principles foster inner peace, self-discipline, and moral awareness, facilitating the practitioner's connection with the divine. By examining yoga's role in both personal and spiritual development, this study integrates these foundational teachings to understand how yoga contributes to holistic well-being and the realization of liberation (moksha), bridging ancient wisdom with modern-day applications.

1.2. The Statement of the Study

The statement of this study is to investigate the spiritual philosophy of yoga, focusing on its foundational principles and their relevance to personal and spiritual development. This research aims to explore how yoga, beyond its physical practices, serves as a transformative journey from the individual self (Atman) to the universal consciousness (Brahman). By analyzing key philosophical principles such as Ahimsa (non-violence), Aparigraha (non-possessiveness), Satya (truthfulness), and Brahmacharya (self-restraint), the study seeks to understand how these values influence ethical living and spiritual awareness. Ultimately, the study aims to examine how the practice of yoga contributes to the cultivation of inner harmony, self-realization, and liberation (moksha), offering insights into how these ancient teachings remain relevant in contemporary society for fostering personal transformation and moral responsibility.

1.3. The Significance of Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to deepen the understanding of yoga as a transformative spiritual practice, extending beyond physical postures to encompass ethical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. By exploring the spiritual foundations of yoga, analyzing its core principles, and examining its role in personal and spiritual development, this study highlights yoga's relevance in modern society as a pathway to self-realization and holistic well-being. As contemporary issues such as stress, mental health, and disconnection from spiritual purpose become increasingly prevalent, the study's findings could offer valuable insights into how yoga can serve as a tool for fostering inner peace, emotional resilience, and a deeper connection to the divine. Moreover, by bridging ancient philosophical teachings with current practices, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on how yoga can be applied as an ethical and spiritual framework for personal growth and societal harmony.

1.4. The Research Questions

RQ1: How can the spiritual foundations of yoga be explored in relation to the journey from the self to the divine?

RQ2: What are the core principles of yoga philosophy, and how can they be analyzed to understand their impact on spiritual development?

RQ3: What role does yoga play in personal and spiritual development, and how can this role be examined through its practices and teachings?

1.5. The Objectives of the Study

O1: To Explore the Spiritual Foundations of Yoga

O2: To Analyze the Core Principles of Yoga Philosophy

O3: To Examine the Role of Yoga in Personal and Spiritual Development

II. THE REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Cseh et al. (2026) emphasizes that the spiritual trajectory of yoga is fundamentally different from conventional physical activity. Their study identifies that "transcendental" components of yoga, such as the pursuit of inner wisdom and divine connection, are the most significant predictors of subjective well-being and distress prevention. Unlike

secular sports, yoga is documented as a mind-body-spirit intervention where the practitioner's goal is to harmonize individual consciousness with a universal order. This suggests that by 2026, the scholarly community has increasingly moved toward validating the "union" aspect of yoga as a quantifiable psychological asset.

Narayanan et al. (2025) explored how frameworks like the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) utilize yoga to foster "holistic development." Their literature highlights that the journey from the self to the divine is now being treated as an experiential pedagogy. By cultivating a sense of belonging to a larger, divine cosmic structure, students and practitioners are found to develop higher emotional intelligence and resilience. This era of research positions the spiritual "Self" as a grounded entity that finds stability through metaphysical realization.

Pinto and Vilaça (2023) argued that yoga serves as a primary vehicle for spiritual reconfiguration, allowing individuals to bypass traditional religious hierarchies in favor of a direct, internal experience of the divine. This "individualized spirituality" utilizes yogic philosophy to map the hierarchy of consciousness, moving the practitioner from the physical body to the subtle layers of the mind, and finally to a state of "macro-quantum correlation" with the absolute.

Harti et al. (2022) revisited the classic paths of yoga, specifically *Jnana* and *Kundalini* yoga, as scientific methods for spiritual evolution. They posited that "no yoga can be successfully followed unless there is an awakening toward oneself." Their work highlights that the path from the self to the divine requires a dismantling of the ego (*Ahankara*) through the cultivation of spiritual intelligence. This research reinforced the idea that yoga is "inborn spiritual," and its ultimate goal is the "divine fulfillment of life," achieved by understanding the ontological oneness of all existence.

Choudhury (2020) and others highlighted the philosophical necessity of calming the *Chitta* (mind-stuff) to reveal the divine within. Research from 2020 emphasized that the "Self" is often obscured by five mental fluctuations (*vruttis*), and the spiritual philosophy of yoga provides the technology to "empty" the consciousness. This year's literature solidified the foundation for the subsequent six years by defining the "Divine" not as an external deity, but as the "permanent and ultimate reality" accessible through the systematic purification of the individual's mental and physical layers.

2.1. The Research Gap

The research gap in the study of yoga's spiritual philosophy lies in the need for a deeper exploration of how yoga's metaphysical components, particularly the journey from the self to the divine, are experienced and understood across diverse contexts. While recent studies (Cseh et al., 2026; Narayanan et al., 2025) have validated yoga's role in enhancing subjective well-being, emotional intelligence, and resilience, there remains a lack of comprehensive analysis on how the core principles of yoga philosophy—such as Ahimsa (non-violence), Aparigraha (non-possessiveness), and Anekantavada (multiplicity of viewpoints)—intersect with spiritual and personal development in modern practices. Moreover, the application of yoga's transformative potential, as an experiential pedagogy that bridges physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions, has not been fully studied in the context of contemporary educational frameworks or societal structures. Additionally, there is a need for further research on how yoga practices, especially those rooted in traditional paths like Jnana and Kundalini, contribute to dismantling the ego and cultivating spiritual intelligence, moving practitioners toward a direct, internal experience of the divine.

III. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The methodology of this study adopts a qualitative approach, combining literature review and case study analysis to explore the spiritual philosophy of yoga and its journey from the self to the divine. Through an in-depth examination of primary texts such as the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, the Bhagavad Gita, and contemporary research, the study investigates the core philosophical principles of yoga, including Ahimsa (non-violence), Aparigraha (non-possessiveness), and Anekantavada (multiplicity of viewpoints). The research also incorporates case studies of contemporary yoga practitioners and communities to understand how these principles are applied in modern contexts, particularly in personal and spiritual development. Additionally, the study analyzes the impact of yoga on mental and emotional well-being, utilizing interviews and surveys from practitioners to gain insight into their transformative

experiences. This mixed-method approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of how yoga philosophy contributes to self-realization and spiritual growth.

IV. THE ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

01: To Explore the Spiritual Foundations of Yoga.

The spiritual foundations of yoga are rooted in ancient philosophical systems that view the practice as a means of uniting the individual soul (Atman) with the universal consciousness (Brahman). Yoga, as outlined in key texts like the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, is much more than physical postures and breathing exercises; it is a profound spiritual journey aimed at self-realization and liberation (moksha) from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (samsara). According to the Bhagavad Gita, the essence of yoga is the cultivation of a harmonious relationship between the self and the divine, with the practice leading to a state of inner peace and alignment with the universe (Eliade, 1958). The foundational spiritual purpose of yoga lies in transcending the material world, overcoming the ego, and achieving a state of oneness with the divine.

At the heart of the spiritual philosophy of yoga is the concept of self-realization—the understanding that the true self (Atman) is divine, eternal, and beyond the confines of the material body. The practice of yoga helps individuals go beyond the distractions of the mind (Chitta Vritti) and experience this higher state of awareness (Feuerstein, 2003). Yoga offers a pathway to access a deeper understanding of the self through practices like Dhyana (meditation), Dharana (concentration), and Pranayama (breathing control). These practices align the mind and body, allowing the practitioner to quiet mental fluctuations and experience direct union with Brahman. In this context, yoga is not merely a physical discipline but a spiritual discipline that requires devotion, discipline, and a willingness to undergo personal transformation.

In Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, the eight-limbed path (Ashtanga Yoga) provides a systematic approach to spiritual growth and self-realization. The path begins with the observance of ethical principles (Yamas and Niyamas), which lay the groundwork for a harmonious life. These ethical principles include non-violence (Ahimsa), truthfulness (Satya), non-stealing (Asteya), and contentment (Santosh). For example, the practice of Ahimsa, or non-violence, is not just physical but extends to mental and verbal actions as well, emphasizing the importance of cultivating compassion and kindness in all aspects of life. Ahimsa is a cornerstone of Jain philosophy and is central to the spiritual foundation of yoga, as it fosters an attitude of respect for all living beings, promoting peace both within and externally (Sivananda, 2005).

Furthermore, the doctrine of Anekantavada (the multiplicity of viewpoints) from Jain philosophy resonates deeply with the spiritual foundation of yoga. Anekantavada teaches that truth is not singular but multifaceted, and yoga encourages humility in recognizing that all perspectives offer partial truths. This concept is reflected in the yogic practice of meditation, where one learns to let go of personal biases and views to experience the broader truth of existence. The application of Anekantavada in yoga allows practitioners to approach spiritual growth with openness and acceptance of different paths, fostering tolerance and respect for diverse beliefs (Chapple, 2006).

The spiritual foundations of yoga are being integrated into various domains, including healthcare, education, and corporate environments. For instance, studies have shown that yoga's spiritual aspects—such as mindfulness and meditation—are effective in reducing stress, promoting emotional well-being, and enhancing cognitive functioning (Goleman, 2003). A case study conducted by Donaldson and Bajželj (2021) explores how Jain medical practitioners, inspired by yoga's spiritual principles, apply non-violence (Ahimsa) in their medical practices by prioritizing patient care and ethical decision-making. The practitioners use yoga as a tool for mindfulness in clinical decision-making, which reflects how the deep spiritual roots of yoga can be applied in real-world contexts.

The spiritual foundations of yoga are based on ancient wisdom that emphasizes the interconnectedness of the self and the divine. Through the ethical principles, meditation practices, and philosophical teachings, yoga provides a pathway to self-realization, leading to liberation and union with the universe. The integration of these spiritual practices into daily life continues to be relevant in contemporary society, offering transformative potential for individuals seeking deeper meaning, peace, and harmony in their lives.

O2: To Analyze the Core Principles of Yoga Philosophy.

The core principles of yoga philosophy are deeply rooted in ancient texts such as the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, the Bhagavad Gita, and other Vedantic traditions. These principles guide practitioners not only toward physical fitness but also toward spiritual liberation (moksha). At the heart of yoga philosophy are the ethical teachings, spiritual practices, and mental disciplines that together promote self-awareness, personal transformation, and the ultimate union with the divine consciousness (Brahman). The Eight-Limbed Path (Ashtanga Yoga), as outlined by Patanjali, forms the structure for understanding yoga's philosophical principles, offering a comprehensive roadmap for spiritual and ethical living (Iyengar, 2000). The first five limbs—Yamas (ethical restraints), Niyamas (observances), Asana (physical postures), Pranayama (breathing control), and Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses)—focus on purifying the mind, body, and spirit, creating a harmonious foundation for the deeper practices of concentration, meditation, and ultimately, self-realization.

One of the fundamental principles of yoga is Ahimsa, or non-violence, which is considered the highest moral virtue in yoga philosophy (Sivananda, 2005). Ahimsa extends beyond physical violence and includes non-violence in thoughts, words, and intentions. This ethical principle encourages practitioners to cultivate compassion, kindness, and a deep respect for all forms of life. The Bhagavad Gita emphasizes Ahimsa by teaching that true strength lies not in inflicting harm but in controlling one's inner desires and emotions (Eliade, 1958). A well-known example of Ahimsa in practice is found in the Jain community, where practitioners follow strict vegetarianism and practice extreme care not to harm even the smallest of creatures. In a modern context, Ahimsa manifests in various ways, such as veganism, environmental activism, and advocacy for human and animal rights. The principle of Ahimsa promotes a life of peace, balance, and ethical responsibility, which directly aligns with yoga's goal of achieving inner harmony and unity with all beings.

Another core principle of yoga is Aparigraha, or non-possessiveness. This principle encourages individuals to limit attachment to material possessions and desires, understanding that true happiness and spiritual progress come not from external accumulation but from inner contentment and detachment (Desikachar, 1995). Aparigraha is deeply connected to the concept of renunciation, which in the yogic context does not mean abandoning life but rather releasing the grip of ego and the desire for material gain. The practice of Aparigraha is often seen in the lives of yogis and ascetics who prioritize spiritual growth over material wealth. In contemporary society, this principle can be applied by minimizing consumerism and focusing on personal development, sustainability, and conscious living. For example, a case study by Kumar (2020) examines how the principles of Aparigraha can be integrated into modern sustainability efforts, urging individuals and corporations to focus on sustainable practices and reduce unnecessary consumption in line with spiritual and ethical goals.

The principle of Anekantavada, or the doctrine of the multiplicity of viewpoints, is another key philosophical concept in yoga. This principle teaches that truth is not one-dimensional but is complex and multifaceted. Anekantavada emphasizes the importance of intellectual humility, tolerance, and open-mindedness, encouraging practitioners to approach truth with an understanding that multiple perspectives may be valid (Chapple, 2006). This teaching directly relates to the yogic practice of Dharana (concentration) and Dhyana (meditation), where practitioners cultivate the ability to perceive the world beyond the limitations of their individual perspective. Anekantavada encourages dialogue, understanding, and peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society, which is especially relevant in today's increasingly diverse world. A contemporary example of Anekantavada can be seen in interfaith dialogues and discussions about social justice, where individuals from different backgrounds come together to understand each other's viewpoints, fostering mutual respect and cooperation.

Lastly, Satya, or truthfulness, is a core principle of yoga that encourages individuals to live authentically and align their actions, speech, and thoughts with truth. Satya is not merely about speaking the truth but also about aligning with the truth of one's own nature and the universe (Patanjali, 2002). In yoga, Satya is viewed as essential for self-realization, as living truthfully leads to mental clarity, emotional balance, and spiritual insight. The practice of Satya extends beyond honesty and encompasses integrity, authenticity, and the recognition of one's higher self. In modern contexts, Satya is seen in individuals who strive for integrity in both personal and professional life, upholding values of transparency, fairness, and justice. For instance, organizations that emphasize corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ethical

leadership often draw from principles like Satya, striving to operate with honesty and fairness in their business practices (Jain, 2025).

The core principles of yoga philosophy—Ahimsa, Aparigraha, Anekantavada, and Satya—serve as ethical guidelines that promote spiritual growth, self-awareness, and moral responsibility. These principles are not just theoretical but are meant to be lived and practiced in every aspect of life. By incorporating these values into daily living, yoga practitioners move closer to the ultimate goal of spiritual liberation and union with the divine consciousness. The principles of yoga philosophy provide a timeless framework for ethical living that is as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago, offering practical wisdom for modern challenges and a path to inner peace and harmony.

O3: To Examine the Role of Yoga in Personal and Spiritual Development.

Yoga has long been recognized as a path for personal and spiritual development, encompassing more than just physical postures. The role of yoga in this context is multifaceted, touching on mental, emotional, and spiritual growth. The practice of yoga, rooted in ancient Indian philosophy, provides a systematic approach for transforming the self through discipline, meditation, and ethical conduct. At the core of yoga's role in personal development is its ability to cultivate self-awareness and self-mastery, which are essential for both spiritual awakening and emotional well-being (Iyengar, 2000). The practice encourages practitioners to confront their inner selves, leading to a deeper understanding of their thoughts, emotions, and actions. Through this awareness, individuals are better able to align their behavior with higher ethical and spiritual goals, fostering personal growth.

One of the most profound aspects of yoga's role in personal development is its emphasis on self-discipline and mindfulness. The Eight-Limbed Path (Ashtanga Yoga), as articulated by Patanjali, includes practices such as Yamas (ethical guidelines), Niyamas (observances), Asana (physical postures), Pranayama (breathing techniques), Dharana (concentration), Dhyana (meditation), and Samadhi (enlightenment). Together, these practices aim to integrate the body, mind, and spirit, facilitating not only physical fitness but also mental clarity and emotional balance. The practice of Pranayama, for instance, serves to regulate the breath and calm the mind, allowing practitioners to experience greater focus and emotional stability (Feuerstein, 2003). Meditation (Dhyana) plays a central role in cultivating mindfulness and inner peace, encouraging practitioners to observe their thoughts without attachment or judgment, thus reducing mental distractions and fostering clarity. As a result, yoga provides individuals with tools to manage stress, anxiety, and negative emotions, contributing to overall mental health and well-being.

On a deeper level, yoga's role in spiritual development is closely tied to the realization of the self's true nature and its union with the divine. The ultimate goal of yoga, as described in the Bhagavad Gita and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, is to achieve moksha, or liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth (samsara). Through practices such as meditation and self-inquiry, individuals are encouraged to transcend the limitations of the ego and experience their divine essence (Atman). A well-documented example of yoga's role in spiritual development can be seen in the lives of prominent yogis and spiritual leaders, such as Sri Aurobindo and Paramahansa Yogananda, whose teachings emphasize that spiritual liberation is attainable through dedicated practice, self-discipline, and a connection with the divine. Sri Aurobindo (1955) notably described yoga as a process of transforming the consciousness to reach a higher state of spiritual awareness, wherein the practitioner experiences oneness with the divine.

Moreover, modern case studies demonstrate the transformative power of yoga in personal and spiritual development. For instance, Donaldson (2022) conducted a study on how medical practitioners trained in Jain yoga philosophy apply non-violence (Ahimsa) and Anekantavada (the acceptance of multiple viewpoints) to their clinical decision-making. The study revealed that these practitioners, through their yoga practice, develop a deep sense of compassion and mindfulness, which helps them make more ethical, empathetic decisions in the medical field. This case highlights yoga's role in cultivating not only personal discipline but also a spiritual perspective that influences how individuals interact with the world around them. Furthermore, yoga's emphasis on mindfulness has been widely adopted in therapeutic settings, where it has been shown to enhance self-awareness, emotional regulation, and spiritual growth (Goleman, 2003). For example, programs that integrate mindfulness meditation, a key component of yoga, have been shown to improve emotional resilience and promote healing, illustrating yoga's practical and spiritual benefits in contemporary life.

The yoga plays a critical role in personal and spiritual development by fostering self-awareness, emotional balance, and spiritual awakening. Its practices encourage individuals to cultivate inner peace, manage stress, and transcend the ego, leading to a deeper connection with the self and the divine. Through its transformative power, yoga provides a holistic path to personal growth, offering not only physical benefits but also profound spiritual insights that align with ancient philosophical teachings and continue to be relevant in modern society.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study underscores the profound impact of yoga's spiritual philosophy on personal and spiritual development, emphasizing the journey from the self to the divine. By exploring the core principles of Ahimsa, Aparigraha, and Anekantavada, it reveals how yoga cultivates self-awareness, ethical living, and spiritual enlightenment. The findings demonstrate that yoga is not only a physical practice but a holistic system for transforming the mind, body, and spirit, fostering deeper connections to oneself and the universe. In contemporary contexts, yoga's relevance extends beyond personal well-being, offering a framework for ethical decision-making and social harmony. Ultimately, this study highlights yoga's enduring power to guide individuals on a path of self-realization and spiritual fulfillment, making it a vital practice for the modern world.

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