

Elements of Yoga in the *Viṣṇu Mahāpurāṇa*: A Philosophical, Ethical, and Comparative Study

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Abstract: The *Viṣṇu Mahāpurāṇa* (VMP) is an essential text in Puranic philosophy, as it is well organised in its presentation of yoga, along with metaphysics, ethics, devotion, and social order. In this article, we examine the yoga of the VMP and shall analyse it through the concept and practice of yoga from different aspects, including the *Aṣṭāṅgayoga* in philosophy, but also in morals and socio-religious perspective; and in comparison with Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*, it provides evidence and reference for structural continuity and doctrinal adaptation. The VMP emerges as a vital intermediary between classical yogic psychology and Puranic devotional culture, presenting yoga as a holistic discipline oriented toward purification, divine realisation, and harmonious social life.

Keywords: *Viṣṇu Mahāpurāṇa*, *Aṣṭāṅgayoga*, *Avidyā*, *Bhakti*, *Dharma*, *Mokṣa*.

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I. Introduction

Yoga is central to Indian philosophical, religious, and moral traditions, which continue to evolve across various languages, teachings, and practices. In contrast to the classical Patañjali system, in the context of psychological, socialisation, and education studies, Puranic literature offers philosophical insights into yoga at both cultural and social levels. As the VMP is also of a philosophy that is oriented more to the purpose of liberation of individuals from the clutches of ignorance and to the good and the sense of manhood and a spiritual system, yoga is an integral part of life, even if it is still a philosophy of a person who is just a student. The text has dialogical aspects, particularly stories told by Parāśara to Maitreya, in which yoga is presented as a means of escaping *avidyā*, purifying the soul, and freeing oneself from the clutches of *Mayā*. In this work, we examine the philosophical, ethical, and practical elements of yoga in the VMP and their relation to the yogic discourse, as compared with Pātañjala Yoga.

Philosophical Foundations of Yoga in the VMP

The VMP philosophy is based on the identification of Brahman with Viṣṇu; in that, they work simultaneously, immanently, with the transcendent. There is a point in this text that ignorance (*avidyā*) is the origin of bondage, arising from mistake: the self's perception of the body, senses, and ego, from mistake and from not being recognised. Liberation is attained through knowledge (*jñāna*) and an ethical purification and yogic discipline.

It is the ancient conversation between Keśidhvaja and Khaṇḍikya, narrated by Parāśara, which forms the basis of yogic theory. *Jñāna* is what liberated life is, and so is Keśidhvaja, which is what freed him from the bondage in life. It is said that yoga is a practical way of seeing that knowledge is real and can be experienced through the experience of that knowledge, thereby developing a direct sense of actual reality. Unlike the strict dualistic frame game of these principles, the VMP envisions liberation not as separation but as joining the supreme Brahman from an infinite physical world. Yoga is the bridge connecting metaphysical knowledge and spiritual experience.

Aṣṭāṅgayoga in the VMP

The VMP is one of the exceptional Mahāpurāṇa: it combines devotion, cosmology, and spiritual discipline. For *Aṣṭāṅgayoga*, there is an intriguing path to spiritual experience and union with the Supreme. It is not, for every reason, the systematisation of the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali at hand, but the Purāṇa integrates elements of ethical conduct (*yama* and *niyama*) with the love of Lord Viṣṇu in various aspects. Practices in the form of *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and *dhyāna* are present in the narratives, theology, and philosophical details. These practices aim to discover the Paramatman (Supreme Self) under which Viṣṇu resides. We also say that bhakti is very much a part of the yogic discipline, and in contrast with merely "pragmatic" systems, it functions as such. In this way, it develops the VMP as a theistic version of *Aṣṭāṅgayoga* and thus provides the bridge between classical

yoga and devotional spiritual life. The study of *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* in this VMP has a special mix of yoga, *Dharma*, and *Bhakti*.

Yama and Niyama in VMP: (Ethical and Disciplinary Dimensions)

The ethical foundation of yoga in the VMP is closely linked to the yogic emphasis on self-restraint (*yama*) and moral dedication (*niyama*). We explain virtues such as *ahimsā* (non-violence), *satya* (truthfulness), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacarya* (non-possessive, ethical attitude), and *aparigraha* in detail, but also provide the basic practice of purity, contentment, austerity, and self-study as they are very preparatory practices. However, they are also the most direct ways of pleasing Viṣṇu, and the VMP constantly insists that our verbal communication, actions, hurt, pain, and attachment must be treated with care and therefore worshipped. Thus, ethical living is the foundation of spiritual growth and understanding yoga. This ethical orientation reflects a strongly Puranic perspective in which yoga is inseparable from *dharma* and *bhakti*, and moral practice is, in fact, spiritual worship.

Āsana, Prāṇāyama and Pratyāhara in VMP

The VMP presents an eight-limbed yogic framework including restraint, observance, posture, breath control, withdrawal, meditation, and absorption. Each limb is not just a separate idea, but rather an approach that follows one another in an inward direction. Posture is clearly considered very stable and disciplined in meditation. Breath control denotes how the essential breath will continue, in both seeded and seedless ways, at a level of peace of mind. Withdrawal is what we call the withdrawal of senses from the outside, and in turn, the mind turns itself inward. In particular, we focus on purified concentration, the purified mind focusing precisely on Vishnu as the top support of all the energies. Meditation is uninterrupted contemplation of the mind, while absorption is the absence of conceptualisation to the end of consciousness that yields the realisation of Brahman.

Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna, and Samādhi in VMP: (Meditation and Liberation)

Higher limbs of yoga are kept in mind in the VMP. Meditation on Viṣṇu is portrayed as purificatory fire, which burns karmic impurities and makes a clear use of abstract metaphor for spiritual transformations. Concentration is not only mind control but also inner cleanness, in which spiritual clarity arises.

Samādhi will be the result of yogic efforts, and so the meditator, meditation and object disappear except that the concept in the meditator and object become interchangeable. The moment all signs of what we did is that nothing can touch us, and consciousness lies in its very pure state in the service of Brahman. And the entire world has gone to that place at once (i.e., the moment of liberation in the afterlife).

The VMP therefore presents meditation as an art form of psychological practice and a devotional study, at once incorporating yogic techniques and theological realisation into every aspect.

Socio-Philosophical Dimensions of Yoga in VMP

Another unique thing about the VMP is its integration of yoga in social and ethical life, as a Mahāpurāṇa text also makes it clear that the practice of *varṇa-āśrama-dharma* constitutes authentic worship of Viṣṇu. Yoga is not exclusive to renunciants, but can be delivered in a disciplined manner to householders and rulers. Through a synthesis between inner discipline and social responsibility, the VMP portrays yoga as a civilizational ethic. This understanding of yoga in general is connected to the Puranic journey of universalising yoga because it suits all stages and roles of life.

Comparative Analysis with Pātañjala Yoga

Many of the similarities with the work of Patañjali, one of the most famous yoga Sūtras, and VMP are evident. The books talk about ignorance as the primary cause of bondage, an ethical focus, and a fourfold path to liberation. We can see the practice, mind protection, concentration, and meditative absorption, noting that they are all very different in nature. The most structural points are that for Patañjali, it is very clear that this yoga is primarily theistically neutral, with God not included, whereas in the VMP yoga, the supreme Brahman is Vishnu. Patañjali's liberation is described as isolation (the loneliness of the soul), while in VMP it is the union (close to the divine). So Patañjali uses so-called aphorisms and psychological theory; the VMP is narrative, symbolism, and theology. And Puranic yoga is very agile, with many diverse features from one to another.

II. Conclusion

The VMP is a holistic way of thinking about yoga as the product of both traditional yogic practise and Puranic religious lives. The text does just that—retains all the rigour of *aṣṭāṅgayoga* but integrates it into devotion, ethics and social responsibility with the texts of it. It makes yoga, and the way it is applied to people and society, clear. In this regard, while Patañjali's is a derivative one, its VMP is a creative one that is open to interpretation and has its roots in yoga itself. The VMP is therefore very important for the development in history of yoga in India.

It also changes the concept of yogic discipline by integrating metaphysical insight into true spiritual experiences on the ground. A sense that bhakti has been connected to yoga; that yoga is not just for those who lose their way, but is accessible for our communities. The text also stresses that *dharmā* is the basis for the life of the yogis and that spirituality is an ethical art. Such a presentation style makes philosophical ideas accessible. Moreover, the presence of meditative activities means the spirit of the yogic past is in line with the traditions of spirituality. At the same time, it foreshadows later progress in bhakti movements. The VMP thus plays a role in the democratisation of yoga in the Puranic age. It proves the continuum of yogic thought across texts, and so it is essential to investigate the integration of yoga, commitment and social values in classical Indian spirituality to know.

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