

## UNDERSTANDING PĀTAÑJALA YOGA SŪTRA ON 'ĀSANA' FROM SAṂSKṚTA COMMENTARIES\*

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### ABSTRACT

*A critical study of twenty-one easily available Saṁskṛta commentaries on Pātañjala-Yoga-Sūtras by seventeen commentators from different walks of life has thrown light on the acceptable as well as controversial points and has indicated areas for further studies, viz.,*

1. *'Āsana' as envisaged by Patañjali has a strong 'experiential base'.*
2. *The concept of 'āsana' will have to be taken at the level of the citta to understand and follow its experiential nature.*
3. *As none of the Sūtras dealing with 'āsana' have any instructional verbs, they cannot be treated at the level of doing" or 'to be done' only, but they require to be understood in the light of 'What is happening?' also.*
4. *The concept of 'ananta-samāpatti' as interpreted by the commentators does not give adequate practical and educational approach to its under-standing.*
5. *Likewise, interpretation of the concept of 'dvandv anābhighātaḥ' by commentators also seems to be inadequate.*

**Key words :** āsana, ananta-samāpatti, dvandva

### Introduction

Most of the recent literature on yoga is based on Haṭhayoga, and that too, with a lot of emphasis on - Haṭhayogic āsanās. Generally, these āsanās are presented as a system of physical exercises meant for keeping- fit and healthy. While highlighting the theoretical foundations of the subject, the authors (e. g., K. T. Behanan, 1938; James Hewitt, 1960; Swami Kuvalayananda

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and Dr. S. L. Vinckar, 1963; B. K. S. Iyengar, 1968; James McCartney, 1969; Pandit Usharbudh Arya, 1977) are seen to refer to Pātañjala- Yoga-Sūtras which is widely accepted as 'the source-book on Yoga.

A direct reading of the Pātañjala-Yoga-Sūtras-II/46, 47, 48 related to 'Āsana' does not overtly or covertly convey any meaning emphasizing the exercise aspect of 'āsanas' relating it to health and fitness. On the other hand, 'āsana' is described as a 'Yogāṅga' to be followed as an 'anusthāna' for the purification of the citta (PYS II/28).

Therefore, it was decided to scrutinize the Sanskrit commentaries on PYS to get the viewpoints of the commentators on the subject-matter and the findings are presented here.

### Material and Methods

Twenty-one easily available Sanskrit commentaries by seventeen authors related to PYS were scrutinized for this study. They are listed below in the alphabetical order of the authors.

\*(PYS=Pātañjala Yoga Sūtras)

Serial No.	Author
Name of the Commentary	
1.	Anantaśekhara "Candrikā"
2.	Ananta Paṇḍita "Paśa-Candrikā"
3.	Baladeva Mīśra "Yoga-Pradīpikā-Vṛtti"
4.	Bhāratamodāśina Tīpṇanāma on "Tattvavaiśārādī"
5.	Bhāva-Gaṇaka "Pradīpikā"
6.	Bhojarāja "Kāyamārtanḍa"
7.	Harīharānanda Aranya
	a) "Bhāṣavati"
	b) "Yoga-Kīrtikā"
	c) "Saralā-cikā on Yoga-Kīrtikā"
8.	Nāgoji Bhaṭṭa "Nāgojibhāṣya-Vṛtti"
9.	Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha
	a) "Yoga-Sūdhānta-Candrikā"
	b) "Sūtrārtha-Bodhinī"
10.	Rāghavānanda Śaṁkara "Pātañjala-Rahasyam"
11.	Rāmānanda yati "Maṇḍarāṭh"

12. Sadāsivendra Saraswatī "Yoga-Sudhākara"
13. Śaṅkarācārya "Pātañjala- Yogasūtra-Bhāṣya"  
"Vivaraṇam" "Tattva vaiśārādī"
14. Vācaspati Miśra "Bhāṣya on Yogadadana"
15. Vallabhācārya "Bhojavṛtti-Kiraṇa"
16. Vijñānabhikṣu "Yoga- Vārttikam"
17. Vyāsa "Vyāsa-Bhāṣya"

\*(The Sr. Nos. appear in brackets as References hereafter.)

The salient points, expressions and statements by the commentators to explain the Sūtras II/ 46, 47 & 48 related to 'āsana' were studied in detail to understand their significances and were rendered into English with the help of dictionaries and other source materials, keeping in view 'the practical and experiential nature of yoga'. Certain points were discussed with yoga-practicants also.

The observations were analysed further to come to the conclusions.

### Observation and Comments

#### I. General :

1. It is very difficult to determine conclusively the chronological order of these commentaries. It is commonly agreed that Vyāsa-bhāṣya (17) is the oldest available commentary followed by Vācaspati's 'Tattvavaiśārādī' (14). However, the recent discovery of a commentary claimed to be authored by Adi (the First) Śaṅkarācārya (13), if proved genuine, will be earlier than that of Vācaspati.
2. Most of the commentators do not seem to be Yogis, nor Yoga-practicants in the strict sense of the term. They seem to be either grammarians, or proponents of Nyāya, Sāṃkhya or Vedānta Darśanas, or Vaiṣṇavaite, etc., as can be postulated from the manner in which they have treated the Yoga-sūtras in their commentaries, or from other works to their credit.
3. Vallabhācārya (15a) and Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha (9a) have extensively quoted various Haṭha texts in their commentaries along with the various concepts of Haṭhayoga which refer to the health and fitness aspects of the 'āsanas'. However, they fail to give us the right type of insight into Patañjali's Sūtras on 'Āsana'.

II. Observations in respect of individual Sūtras related to 'Āsana' :  
PYS-II/46 : "STHIRA-SUKHAM-ĀSANAM"

**Observations**

A. According to some commentators, this Sūtra indicates the characteristics or attributes (i.e., 'Lakṣaṇa') of 'āsana' (3, 9b, 10, 11, 14 & 15).

B. The expressions used by different commentator to convey their understanding of this Sūtra are as follows:

1. 'avayava-yathā-anutpatti-lakṣaṇam' (12).  
i. e., "A condition in which there is disturbance from any part of the body".
2. 'dha-cālana-rāhitya-lakṣaṇam' (12)  
i. e., "The absence of body movements"
3. 'niścalam' (2,11)  
niṣkampam (1,6)  
i.e. without movements"
4. 'sthiram' (I, 3, 6, 7a, 8, 9a 10, 13 & 14)  
i. e., "Steady".
5. 'sthira-sukham' (15a, 17).  
i. e., "Comfortable steadiness".
6. 'sukham-anudvejanīyam' (6)  
i. e., "Comfort-undisturbed."
7. "sukha-pradatve-sati-śarīra- vṛtti-sthiratvam" ( 15a ) .  
i. e., "Comfortable feelings leading to ness in body behaviour".
8. 'sukhāvaham' (3, 7a, 7c, 9b. 11 & 14)  
i. e., "Feelings carrying comfort".

**Comments:**

- (1) A good study of these expressions makes it clear that 'an experiential aspect' is indicated by them rather than any particular kind or type of 'positioning or position (If the physical body only'.
- (2) Some commentators like Bālarāmodāsīna. Vijñānābhikṣu, Śaṅkarācārya, Vācaspati Miśra and Vyāsa have even advocated the use of 'a belt' ('yoga-paHakam?'), or leaning against a pillar or wall (stambha' or 'sopāśraya') to achieve this 'experiential dimension asana'.

- (3) However, it is commonly seen that many of the modern writers try to explain the concept of 'āsana' as mere 'position or positioning of the body', completely neglecting and overlooking the 'experiential aspect' so clearly brought out in this sūtra by various commentators.

PYS-II/47: "PRAYATNA-ŚAITHILYA-ANANTA-SAMĀPATTIBHYĀM"

- A. Most of the commentators (1 to 16 except 4 & 15) refer to this Sūtra as 'the Means' (i.e., 'Upāya') to accomplish 'āsana'. Even though Vyāsa has not 'used this very term 'upāya' specifically in his 'Bhāṣya', the same meaning is implied in his commentary (17).
- B. This Sūtra has generally been divided into two components, viz.,  
(i) PRAYATNA-ŚAITHILYA"  
and  
(ii) "ANANTA-SAMĀPATTIḤ"
- C. In respect of "PRAYATNA-ŚAITHILYA"  
we come across the following expressions in different commentaries
- C1. akleśena (1,6)  
i.e., "Without any pain or distress".
- C2 'bahu-vyāpāra-nivṛttiḥ (5, 8).  
i. e., "Without much of a strain".
- C3 'bahu-vyāpāra-abhāvaḥ (3,4, 15 & 16).  
i. e., "Absence of excessive effort"
- C4. 'gamana-grhakṛtya-tirthasnānadi-viśayo yaḥ prayatno manasa utsahah-tasya-saithilyam (12).  
i.e., "Indifference towards the activities connected with tours, household duties, pilgrimage, etc."
- C5. 'mṛtavat-sthitireva' (7a, 7b, 7c).  
i. e., "Staying totally unconcerned like a corpse".
- C6. 'prayatna-uparamāt' (4, 9a, 9b, 11, 13, 15a, 15b & 17).  
i. e., "Effort or exertion getting reduced or diminished" .
- C7. 'svābhāvika-prayatna-śaithilyam' (14).  
i. e., "Natural relaxation of effort/exertion".
- C8. 'yadā yadā-āsanam bandhānilmi-iti-ichhām karoti prayatna-saithilye-apiā-klesenaiva tadā tadā āsanam sampadyate'(6).  
i. e., "The 'āsana' gets accomplished whenever the desire to perform it is without distress

and with relaxation of effort".

D1. With reference to the second component,

Paṇḍita (2), Bhoja Rāja (6) Hariharānanda Āraṇya (7a) and Śaṅkarācārya (13) as,-

## "ANANTA-SAMĀPATTIḤ"

D2. The following expressions are found in various commentaries related to this component of the Sūtra-

- (a) 'Ananta' being taken to represent the "Limitless Universe":
  - i. 'anantam viśva-bhāvam vyāpya sthitam cittam' (13).  
i.e., "Let the awareness of 'Limitless Universe' fill and stay in Citta".
  - ii. 'ākāśādi-gata ānantye cetasaḥ samāpattiḥ' (1,6).  
i.e., "Let, the absolute awareness develop sky-like 'Limitlessness' ".
  - iii. ananta-ākāśam-asmi-iti bhāvanāt "samāpattiḥ" (7b, 7c).  
i. e., "Develop or merge into such a feeling that 'I-am-the-limitless- space !sky'".
- (b) The mythological figure "Śeṣa Nāga" (the king of serpents) is taken to represent 'ananta':
  - i. anante nāganāyake sthiratara-phaṇasahasra-vidhṛta-viśvamaraṇḍale samapannam taddhāraṇayā taditmatapannam' (3, 9b, 11, 14).  
i.e., "Identifying oneself with the steadfast thousand-hooded Lord Ananta, the King of serpents, sustaining the Universe".
  - ii. Versions conveying similar sense have been given by other commentators who use the word 'pṛthivī' (Earth) instead of 'viśva' (Universe). (5, 8, 9a, 10, 12, 15a, 16).
- (c) 'Ananta'--defined as 'Mahat':  
'Ānantye-parama-mahatve vā samapannam' (7a).
  - i. e., "Merging with the 'ĀNANTYE, that is, 'parama-mahatve' which may be the first evolute of Prakṛti."
- (d) 'Ananta' is not defined, but indicates a particular condition of the citta:'anante-vā samāpannam cittam' (17).
  - i. e., "Citta becoming one with 'Limitless' ".
- (e) Some commentators relate 'ananta-samāpatti' with the 'absence of awareness connected with the body':  
'deha-ahaṅkāra-abhāvāt' (6) or  
'deha-abhimāna-abhāvena' (11)
  - i. e., "Absence of the 'I-am-the-body' consciousness.
- (f) Bālarāmodāśīna (4) does not provide any explanation for these terms.

### Comments

- (1) Most of the commentators as mentioned under D2 (b) ii., seem to prescribe 'Visualization of Lord Ananta steadily supporting the Earth'. For many people, this prescription will mean an 'exercise in 'imagination' only, particularly for those who have been educated in modern science. For, they know that the earth is neither static, nor it is supported by any snake as claimed by the Hindu Mythology. For them, this indicates a fictitious notion amounting to 'vikalpa' in Patañjali's terminology.
- (2) Similarly, 'visualization of the 'Infinite' nature of the Universe' may also be difficult for some persons.
- (3) The term 'Ananta' has other meanings also, like, 'Viṣṇu', 'Brahmā', etc.
- (4) Like that of the earlier Sūtra (i. e., 11/46), the contents of this Sūtra also indicate a strong 'experiential dimension' referring to certain happenings inside the body and mind of the individual. This experiential aspect based on the inner-happenings have been brought out by the commentaries of Bhojarāja, Rāmānanda Yati and Vyāsa ( 6, 11, 17).  
PYS-II/48: "TATAḤ DVANDVA-ANABHIGHĀTAḤ"

### Observations

- A. It is clearly mentioned by most of the commentators that this Sūtra indicates the 'result' ('phala/siddhi' of 'āsana' (1 to 16 except 4 and 13).
- B. The following expressions are used to explain the concept of 'dvandas'
  - i) 'śītoṣṇādi' ( 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9a, 9b, 10, 11, 13 &17).  
i. e., "Cold and heat, etc."
  - ii) 'śītoṣṇa-kṣut-trṣṇādi' (6.7a, 7c).  
i. e., "Cold and heat, hunger and thirst, etc."
  - iii) 'śītoṣṇa-sukhadhkhā-mānāvamānādi' (12, 15b).  
i. e., "Cold and heat, pleasure and pain, respect and disrespect, etc "
  - iv) 'śītoṣṇa-kilmakrodhādi' ( 15).  
i. e., "Cold and heat, lust and anger, etc."
  - v) Bālarāmodāśīna (4) does not provide any explanation for the term 'dvandva'.

The following expressions are found in respect of the concept of 'anabhighatah'

- i) 'anabhighātaḥ-cittalāmbanam' (5).  
i. e., "The dūa resting (on 'ananta') is not struck (by the dvandvas')." (Sūtra 5.1)
  - ii) 'atāḍanam' (9b, 11).  
i. e., "Not beaten (by the dvandvas)".
  - iii) 'na-abhibhūyate' (3,7a, 10, 13, 15, 16, 17).  
i.e. (The 'dvandvas') do not sprout up at all."  
iv) 'na-abhihanyate' (1,6, 12).  
i. e., "does not suffer (from the dvandvas)".
  - v) 'apīḍanam' (9a)  
i. e., "( The dvandvas) do not cause trouble"
  - vi) 'nāśayet' (7b, 7c).  
i. e., "( The dvandvas) get annihilated".
  - viii) Bālarāmodāśīna (4) and Nāgoji Bhaṭṭa (8) do not provide any explanation to this term 'anabhighātaḥ'.
- D. According to Bhāvā-Gaṇeśa (5), the concept of 'dvandva-anabhighātaḥ' gets directly related to citta.

### Comments

- (1) The various terms used by the commentators to indicate the nature of the 'dvandvas' are the phrases traditionally used in the Sanskrit Literature. But, for a student of yoga, their implications at the practical and experiential level look to be somewhat problematic, if not impossible.
- (2) It is felt that no commentator has tried to explain the term 'dvandva' in a convincing manner having a direct relation to 'āsana'.

PYS-II/49 : "TASMIN SATI ŚVĀSA-PRAŚVĀSAYORGATI-VICHHEDAḤ  
PRĀṆĀYĀMAḤ"

### Observations

- A. All the commentators relate 'tasmin-sati' with 'āsana'
- B. Vyāsa (7) correlates 'tasmin-Sati' with 'āsana-jaya' which is again related to 'dvandva-anabhighātaḥ' by using the expression-'sati-āsanajaye'.
- C) Anantadeva (1) mentions 'tasmin-sati' as 'āsanasthairya', thus connecting it with prayatna-śaithilya' and 'anantasamāpattiḥ.
- D. Some commentators (7b, 9b, 11, 12, 13, 17) are seen to describe Prāṇāyāma' as an outcome ('pariṇāma'/'phala'/'siddhī') of āsana and describe this Sūtra as the indicator (lakṣṇa--) of 'prāṇāyāma'.

Comments Nil.

### Discussions and Conclusions

- I. The contents of the commentaries on the three Sūtras- 11/46, 47 & 48 related to 'āsana' strongly indicate its 'experiential' nature. However, an enquiring mind with the background and approach of modern scientific thinking looking for the practical guidance and aspiring for a personal experience, fails to get adequate information and understanding from them. This necessitates the need for re-interpretation of these Sūtras from a modern educational and psycho-physical view point. This might have already been attempted by commentators writing in languages other than Saṁskṛt (Hiroshi Motoyama, 1981; P. V. Karambelkar, 1986; Rohit Mehta, 1975; Swami Digambarji, 1985).
2. Even though the Sūtras themselves do not contain any instructional verbs, no commentator has tried to highlight on this aspect. However, due to the very nature of the Sūtras themselves 'āsana' cannot be treated 'at the level of doing' or 'to be done' only but it requires to be understood in the light of 'What is' or 'What is happening' as a phenomenon or a process also. Practical help and guidance from living teachers and guides become a "must" for this.

Interestingly, commentators like Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha (9a, 9b) and Vallabhācārya (15a, 15b) and others have extensively referred to techniques from Haṭha-yoga, probably to indicate suitable practices to trigger-off these processes in due course of time. Moreover these commentators have discussed the health and fitness aspect of āsanās as is done by Haṭha texts and modern writers on Yoga.

3. It is felt that the concept of 'ananta-samāpatti' as interpreted by the commentators does not give an adequate practical and educative approach to its understanding under the changed socio-cultural environment.
4. Likewise, interpretation of 'dvandvānabhighātaḥ' also seems to be inadequate requiring re-interpretation.
5. From the present study it is felt that study of other commentaries by people from different walks of life and socio-cultural backgrounds (like Hiroshi Motoyama, and many others as quoted above) becomes a necessity to develop an adequate understanding of the practical nature of 'āsana' as a 'Yogāṅga'.

#### Authors' Note :

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