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Sarita Kushwaha
Sports Officer SSSWC, Bhopal,
Madhya Pradesh, India

Manoj Kumar Pathak
Head of Department,
Department of Physical
Education, Rabindranath
Tagore University, Bhopal,
Madhya Pradesh, India

Surya Namaskar: A brief introduction

Sarita Kushwaha and Manoj Kumar Pathak

Abstract

Surya Namaskar is well known and vital technique with the yogic repertoire. It is versatility and its application makes it one of the most useful methods to induce a healthy, vigorous, active life and at the same time prepare for spiritual awakening and the results of awareness. Yoga Asanas was first mentioned in the Atharva Veda Samhita (1500 BCE), which uses the term asana in a specifically Yogic context. The word yoga means 'unity' or 'oneness' and is derived from the Sanskrit word yuj, which means 'to join'. This unity or joining is described in spiritual terms as the union of the individual consciousness with the universal consciousness. The Sanskrit word 'asana' derives from the verbal root meaning to sit or to be present. In context to the Yoga tradition asanas means to be established in a particular posture` and the textual context indicates the latter meaning. There are various references in the Vedas, Brahmanas and Upanishads which indicate that the practices must have already been in existence prior to their being noted in these texts. Several Yogis scrutinized their relative merits by analytical comparisons and thus formulated a complete course of posture training. A few early postures, mostly meditative, in turn passed through a series of a modification before the whole system of physical education was finally perfected by the early Hatha Yogis.

Keywords: Yoga, meditation, surya namaskar, vedas

Introduction

Yoga has a complete massage for humanity. It has a massage for the human body. It has a massage for the human mind, and. It has also a massage for the human soul. Will intelligent and capable youth come forth to carry this massage to every individual, not only in India but also in every other part of the world? The history of Yoga Asana can be traced from Vedic scripture to the modern period, throughout which they underwent successive refinements. Yoga as a discipline was detailed first by Patanjali (BCE 600) in his Yoga Sutras, the first systematized treatise on Yogic theory and praxis. However, a physical culture existed prior to this and Patanjali's achievement lies in collating all these diverse traditions. The textual evidence indicates that Yogasana have evolved concomitantly with the general progress of Indian thought. Yoga is a system of physical and mental exercise designed to balance and unite the mind, body and spirit. Yoga has simple and effective body movements that strengthen one's back, firm the stomach, and redistribute body weight. Yoga exercise stretch and tone the body muscles. They increases endurance and improve flexibility. The practice of Yoga meditation has to be seen against the traditional backdrop of Hindu belief and culture. However, Yoga is not a religion. It is a system of psycho-physiological techniques that people can employ for spiritual enfoldment and its history is linked with that of Hinduism, into which it was incorporated by the Brahmins, the Priestly caste and Yoga's whole ration dieter is mystical, its ultimate aim being the experience of the reality underlying all manifest forms. Therefore to understand better yoga's goals, methods, and terminology, one should have some acquaintance with its Hindu and mystical frame reference. Sound mind lives in a sound body. As we know that children are the bank of energy and they know as a synonym of motion (active). It is much heard to teach them yoga or more specific yogic asana, while are static in nature. Surya namaskar is one yogic practice which is dynamic in nature and benefits at all level of fitness (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual). Surya namaskar is a complete yogic practice, also is one of the best means to improve physical fitness of an individual. An extension of this approach to life is also accurately articulated by our existing national health care systems, which cater to the physical, psychiatric, psychological and social aspects of life.

Corresponding Author:
Sarita Kushwaha
Sports Officer SSSWC, Bhopal,
Madhya Pradesh, India

Yet the World Health Organization (WHO) has also included the component of Spiritual Health in their definition and guidelines for health workers. Therefore, there is a need to fulfil this aspect of health and human well-being as postulated by the WHO. In this regard, the millennia old system of Yoga seems to give a positive and convincing answer. It is neither a religious system, nor a cult, nor a make-believe system of dogmas. It is a practical and experiential system based upon long standing human existential experiences which are above and beyond any religion, nationality, culture, profession, sex etc. It is secular and universal like physical education or the medical sciences. Scientific research carried out in the field of yoga in the recent past has helped yoga relaxation techniques to be recognized by top sportsmen. These techniques also have found a place in physiology and medical books. The work of neuroscientists and neuro-cardio-scientists working in collaboration with eminent Buddhist teachers and yogis has thrown some light on the mechanisms involved in Meditation Techniques and on the subject of human consciousness. The work of Dr. Jim Cabbat has been responsible for the recognition of the role played by yoga techniques and yoga approaches in pain and stress management, while the work of Dr. Dean Ornish has given a way to treat coronary blocks through life-style changes in which yoga played a crucial part. His yoga staff running the Program for Reversing Heart Disease credited Suryanamaskar as "the most beneficial yogic practice" for their heart patients. There are a number of ways through which an individual can make himself fit or more specific physically fit like weight training, running with moderate intensity, jogging, swimming, yogic practices and many more. Nowadays yoga or yogic lifestyle has been worldwide accepted as one of the best means for fitness. The graph of yogic practices is rising rapidly around the globe. Yoga is a lifestyle. It is beyond any religion, cast and country. Yogic practices are for the whole humanity. There are number of studies which conclude that yogic practice benefit at all levels like physical, physiological, psychomotor and spiritual.

Surya Namaskar: Surya namaskar is known as Sanskrit *सूर्यनमस्कार*, in English has Sun Salutation (literature meaning salute to the sun), is a common sequence of Hatha Yogasana. Its origins lie in a worship of Surya, the Hindu solar deity. This sequence of movements and asanas can be practiced on varying levels of awareness, ranging from that of physical exercise in various styles, to a complete sadhana which incorporates asana, pranayam, mantra and chakra meditation. It is often the beginning vinyasa within a longer yoga series. Surya namaskar may also refer to other styles of "Salutations to the Sun". Surya namaskar (DSN) In addition to the above definition, it is essential that the speed is very high of one round of Surya namaskar is performed in 9 to 10 seconds, making approximately 30 rounds of Surya namaskar per five minutes. Usually during one session, several hundred rounds are performed. Synchronizing the breath with the movements of the body is very important. The basic breathing principle is to inhale during backward bending postures and exhale during forward bending postures. The Hatha Yoga Pradipika, the oldest known yoga text does not mention Sun Salutations. The oldest documented book with clear depictions of asanas is the Sritattvanidhi, though there is no mention of Sun Salutations

in the text, it does describe the asanas Sarpasana (Bhujangasana), Gajasana (AdhomukhShwanasan), Uttanasana and series of asanas done in tandem, similar to surya namaskar.

Traditional surya namaskar: Traditional Surya namaskar is a sequence of 12 asanas (poses) that usually starts the practice. Surya means sun, and Namaskar means blessing. According to the traditional Surya namaskar practice of Yoga it should be done at dawn facing east where the sun rises. But with the adaptation to modern life we practice it throughout the day and to every direction. Traditional Surya namaskar is like the chorus of a song, like a mantra. Traditional Surya namaskar (TSN) In addition to the above definition, it is essential that the speed is very low of one round of Surya namaskar is performed in 19 to 20 seconds, making approximately 15 rounds of Surya namaskar per five minutes. It is the stage of the practice where all feel they belong and familiar with the parts of the whole-the words of the song or the poses of the sequence. As in a chorus, we all collect our strength and practice a few breaths together in harmony, creating a communal empowering energy of unified practice. A study on the effect of Surya namaskar on cardio vascular and respiratory parameter on school students for 45 day was conducted. The students were trained to perform Surya namaskar in slow manner so that each round took 6 minutes each pose took 30 second for 30-40 minutes. results showed that the systolic blood pressure, peak expiratory flow rate, force vital capacity increased significantly and heart rate, respiratory rate decrease significantly after the practice of Suryanamaskar and the conclusion drawn was that the beneficial effect of Surya namaskar could be applied all school student to improve their physical and sports activity. But on the other side there was no control group, only pre- post observations were taken and time duration was 45 days only for physiological changes. Although Traditional Surya namaskar has different variations and is adapted to every style of practice (vinyasa, ashtanga, shivananda etc.) but every practitioner knows their own private sun salutation. In Veda Trucha Kalpa Namaskar is also known as surya namaskar.

Origin: The earliest writings containing references to sun worship are in the Rig Veda and are dated to the 3rd millennium B.C, though the exact date of origin is still in dispute. There are numerous references praising the Sun for the purpose of good health and prosperity. Some of these Vedic hymns were incorporated into NityaVidhi, the daily obligatory routine for Hindus, for the wellbeing of the individual through salutations to the Sun. This daily conduct was termed Suryanamaskar, literally "sun salutations". Physical prostration to the Sun while showing complete surrender of oneself to God is the main aspect of this practice. The forms of Suryanamaskar practiced vary from region to region and from school to school. Two such popular practices are Trucha Kalpa Namaskara and Aditya Prasna. Method of Performing Surya Namaskar Trucha Kalpa Namaskar is a method of performing Surya namaskar using three ruchas from the Veda:

- 1) Trucha Kalpa Namaskar has its origins in Rig Veda.
- 2) Each Mantra in Veda is called a "Trucha". Group of three Trucha is called as Trucha. The practitioner make a resolution in the beginning of surya namaskar by praying to the Sun as mark of respect as well as request

for good health and strength to work hard. Puranic Origins Aditya Hridayam is another ancient practice which involves Suryanamaskar. It is the procedure of saluting the Sun which was taught to Sri Rama by the Sage Agastya before his fight with Ravana. It is described in the "YuddhaKhanda", canto 107 of the Ramayana. In total, there are 124 names praising the Sun in the whole practice. The names in verses 10 - 13 are given below: In verses 15 - 20, salutations to the Sun are described. An example from the 15th verse is: "The resplendent among the splendid. Oh! God, appearing in twelve forms (in the shape of twelve months of the year), salutations to you". Dhyana mantra (To start with) Then dhyana mantra is recited/chanted. Verse: "ॐ धारः सदसवित्रमंडलमध्र मध्यरानारार्ण सरससजासनसंननिविष्टः केरुरिआनमकरक डलिआन ककरीटीहरीहरणमरिप रधत् शंखचक्रः" Meaning: Always worship the Sun (our energy source) sitting at the Centre of the solar system (savitra mandala madhyavarti) on Lotus, wearing Keyoor, Makarkundal crown and holding conch, chakra and having glittering golden body. Tantric tradition Tantric yogis use Suryanamaskar practice along with energizing breathing to absorb solar energy into their bodies. There is a whole branch of tantric science known by the name Surya Vidya. An advance form of such a tantric version of Suryanamaskar involves direct experience of the unity of the sun that exists both outside and inside of our bodies.

Suryanamaskar: "The Solar plexus is connected with the Sun, that's why it is Called "Solar" plexus. When the first rays of the Sun fall on the solar plexus, it is very good for your body. Doing Surya Namaskar (Sun Salutation) yoga asana in the early morning is very good"-Sri Sri Ravi Shankar The practice of Suryanamaskar as a complete and perfect com-pounded blend of body movement, breathing and concentration is used in many Indian schools and ashrams since it was considered by the ancients of India to be a form of Kriya (purification), or body oblation, which would give an abundance of health, vitality and spiritual upliftment. The fact that some authors call it Kriya indicates its strong purification qualities. The routine differs greatly from state to state with regards to the recommended pace of movement, number of repetitions, sequence of asana and the emotional approach (whether ritual or physical exercise). In ritual form, the movements are accomplished very slowly with devotion and mantra repetition and the central pose is the Ashtanga Namaskar. The exercise version requires a high number of repetitions (often more than 200) to be performed quickly (less than 20 seconds per round). Dr. Swami Gitananda from Ananda Ashram in Pondicherry reports that he was able to identify seventeen such distinct Suryanamaskar routines; other sources mention even the number of forty. Over the years, especially when they were performed as a part of ritual, these routines were renamed and no one can find such names as Chandra Namaskar, Guru Namaskar, Hanuman Namaskar, etc. Of course, they differ with regards to the body movements used but the main idea of the original Suryanamaskar remains intact. Most of the asanas in the procedure themselves have been documented in old literature. "Sashtang Dandavat", which is the central asana of Suryanamaskar, was practiced in India,

from time immemorial, as a form of showing respect and complete surrender to God. "Bhujangasana" was described as one of the thirty-two most important asanas in the "Gheranda Samhita" (dated around 1800 C.E.), which describes the yoga prevalent in North East India. The "AdhomukhShwanasana" was described in the old wrestling text of "Malla Purana" (dated before 1750). "Sarpasana" (Bhujangasana), "Gajasana" (AdhomukhaShwanasana), "Uttanasana" and the series of postures done in tandem which are similar to Suryanamaskar are all described in "Sritattvanidhi" which was written by the order of Krishnaraja Wodeyar III (1799-1868) to capture the Hindu knowledge of his time. Other References Other sources which cite early use of Sun Salutations are history of Aryan medical science from 1896, which claims that in India there are various kinds of physical exercise indoors and outdoors. But some of the Hindu's set aside a portion of their daily worship for making salutations to the Sun by prostrations. This method of adoration affords them so much muscular activity that it takes to some extent the place of physical exercise. Historically it is widely believed in the state of Maharashtra that Shivaji Maharaj, Sage Samarth Ramdas and the Marathas have performed Surya namaskar a physical exercise to develop able bodies. This is not surprising since vyayama (physical exercise in Sanskrit) traditionally has been influenced by spirituality. Many physical practices have ingrained spiritual values in them. In addition spiritual training is considered as a part of physical training from ancient times in India. "Lack of activity destroys the good condition of every human being, while movement and methodical physical exercise save it and preserve it". -Plato Aditya Hridayam is another ancient practice which involves a variation of Surya Namaskar. It is a procedure of saluting The Sun, taught to Sri Rama by Sage Agastya, before his fight with Ravana. It is described in the YuddhaKaanda Canto 107 of Ramayana. There are many benefits of Surya namaskar on various body parts physical abilities and physiological aspects. It can reduce the risk of heart disease, lung cancer, type 2 diabetes, stroke, and many other sicknesses. Psychomotor abilities helps improve the condition of your lungs and heart, and will make you feel strong.

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