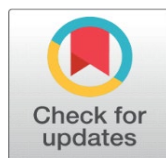
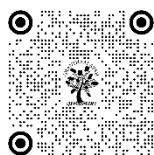


# RELEVANCE OF INDIAN MYTHOLOGY IN THE PURSUIT OF EQUILIBRIUM: RECKONING THE IMPACT OF THE CHARACTER OF SHIVA ON THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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## ABSTRACT

Maintaining balance in the restless 21st century, where human beings have become multitaskers, is vital. Some do the double duty to earn the necessities, while others overwork to afford luxuries. Even children are loaded with the indulgence of multiple activities in their schedule. From the binaries of home and office in social life to mind and body in an individual self, balance is one of the indispensable factors for leading a vigorous and peaceful life. It brings stability and consistency, and a stable mind effectively gains knowledge. Balance of mind can be achieved via various means, such as doing sports, dancing, crafting, practicing meditation or mindfulness, and so on. Yoga is one such medium that not only increases the capacity to acquire knowledge more efficiently but is also beneficial in keeping a person mentally, emotionally, and physically healthy, boosting overall productivity. It is also helpful in relieving stress, which is common nowadays. Yoga is believed to have originated from Shiva, an Indian mythological character and widely worshipped god in India, as he is also known as Adiyogi, which means 'the first yogi'. While Yoga is a trend around the globe, it originated and resides in the core of ancient India. For a better understanding of yoga, it becomes essential to understand the Indian culture, mythology, and the knowledge it provides. This article deals with Yoga's impact on building a healthy physical and mental environment for acquiring knowledge and how the character of Shiva helps in bringing balancing in life.

**Keywords:** Balance, Binaries, Indian Mythology, Knowledge, Shiva, Yoga

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indian mythology has evolved over time due to several social, cultural, and religious factors. It which has its origins in ancient literature such as the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* and served as the model for many gods, epics, and stories of morality. The meanings and depictions of these legendary characters and tales evolved along with Indian civilisation. The localisation of epics like as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* resulted from the formation of regional cultures and languages, contributing to the diversity of themes within the mythology. Indian mythology is still very important today since it provides a wealth of societal ideals, cultural identity, and moral precepts. These old tales' enduring themes—

such as the conflict between the forces of good and evil, the value of duty, and the quest of justice—resonate with contemporary audiences and offer direction in a world that is becoming more complicated. Celebrations, customs, and traditions derived from myths serve to fortify ties among communities and preserve cultural legacy by fostering a feeling of continuity and intergenerational identity. In addition, the teachings and philosophies ingrained in Indian mythology give distinctive viewpoints that contribute to international discussions on spirituality, ethics, and the human experience as interest in varied mythologies rises worldwide. Indian mythology, then, not only enhances the cultural environment but also promotes a more profound comprehension of the state of humanity in the modern world.

Indian mythical figures teach a multitude of lessons by serving as living examples of qualities and moral principles that are important to all ages. Characters such as Rama represent the values of dharma, or righteousness, and the significance of carrying out one's responsibilities regardless of the difficulties encountered. Durga is a representation of perseverance, empowerment, and the victory of good over evil. These mythical characters inspire compassion, selflessness, and humility via their stories, imparting ageless knowledge that guides moral behaviour and moral judgement in modern society. As a result, these characters' lessons strike a deep chord with us, providing direction and motivation for moral living and self-improvement.

## 2. EXPLORING THE ESSENCE OF YOGA VIA THE CHARACTER OF SHIVA

Yoga was initially derived from the Sanskrit word 'Yuj', which means 'to yoke', i.e., 'to unite'. The term 'Yoga' means 'union', and a yogi is someone who has experienced the union, which means, at least for one moment, he has been in a state of absolute nothingness (Sadhguru, 2017, p. 5). Through Yoga, one attains a union of body and mind. The history of Yoga is uncertain "due to its oral transmission of sacred texts and the secretive nature of its teachings" ("History of Yoga", 2017). Yoga is a centuries-old tradition that originated in India, provides a comprehensive approach to mental and physical health. In addition to its physical advantages, consistent yoga practice fosters mental clarity and alleviates tension by employing mindfulness and relaxation strategies. It fosters emotional stability and self-awareness by promoting a profound connection between the mind and body. Yoga has the potential to enhance overall immunity, alleviate chronic pain, and improve cardiovascular health. It also facilitates spiritual development for individuals who are in pursuit of personal transformation and inner serenity. Yoga has become a widely recognised and accessible practice on a global scale due to its extensive benefits. It provides individuals of all ages and fitness levels with a means to improve their quality of existence and achieve a harmonious equilibrium between their body, mind, and spirit. Its development dates to nearly 5,000 years ago. The number might go up to 10,000 years. According to Timothy Burgin, a trained yoga instructor, Yoga's history is divided into four periods— Pre-Classical Yoga, Classical Yoga, Post-Classical Yoga, and Modern Period. Yoga contains four traditional paths— Bhakti, Karma, Jnana, and Raja, which means devotion, action, knowledge, and self-discipline. The goal of Yoga is freedom, and with constant practice, that freedom is within the reach of everyone.

Yoga has been a major part of religions that trace its origins in South Asia. Besides being a union of body and mind, yoga has many other meanings. Such as, according to the Yogasūtra of Patañjali, one of the essential yoga texts, Yoga is defined as 'the cessation of the transformation of awareness' (Yogasūtra 1.2). The state is known as samādhi. Furthermore, it is the goal of many contemporary yogic traditions. Swami Vivekananda, an Indian monk, and a religious teacher introduced Yoga Sutras in the West. Since then, Yoga has been an essential part of the globe becoming a "transnational phenomenon" and July 21 is celebrated as International Yoga Day (Srinivas, 2017, p. 2869). Yoga provides a multitude of advantages for both the body and the psyche. It enhances strength, improves posture, promotes balance, and increases flexibility in a physical sense. As well, it can assist in the management of chronic conditions such as arthritis and back pain, as well as cardiovascular health.

People often misunderstand the meaning of yogi and similar terms related to it. The word yogi "should not be confused with someone practicing asceticism and excessive self-mortification" (Banerjee, 2014, p. 297). A yogi<sup>ii</sup> is someone who practices Yoga regardless of their marital status. India has been the land of the greatest yogis of all time. The famous contemporary yogis include Sadhguru and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (Javaid, 2021). Sadhguru is among the most influential modern yogis of the 21st century. He is involved in various yogic activities all over the world. These Yogis often refer to a character from Indian mythology. This character is none other than Shiva, who is regarded as the founder of Yoga and the greatest yogi himself. He is depicted in a specific yogic posture, clothing, and ornaments in temples, calendar arts, homes, public posters, etc. Some of the yogis follow the cult of Shiva through their appearance. For instance,

Adi Shankaracharya imbibed the attire of Shiva in such a way that while looking at his portrait, one often gets confused about whether it is him or Shiva. Only a keen understanding of Shiva's apparel can help one to understand the difference.

Shiva is among the most worshipped gods in India and neighbouring countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Indonesia. He personifies the idea of balance. Shiva's character is essential in preserving cosmic balance because his character makes sure the cycle of creation, preservation, and dissolution goes harmoniously. His dual character as the home figure with Parvati and the austere Yogi symbolises a great equilibrium between participation with the world and spiritual detachment. Shiva's cosmic dance, performed in his Nataraja form, represents the dynamic interaction between creation and destruction, which upholds the order of the cosmos. Control over primordial energies and the fusion of opposites are reflected in his iconography, which includes features like the Ganga pouring from his locks and the snake around his neck. In addition, the marriage of Shiva and Parvati represents the harmonious balancing of the forces of the masculine and feminine. Shiva represents a deep balance via these facets, balancing the various facets of life and highlighting the needed harmony between order as well as chaos. There are many forms of Shiva, of which 25 are regarded as the most important. It is believed that he first appeared in the form of "Adiyogi – or the first yogi" (Sadhguru, 2017, p. 25). When Parvati, Shiva's wife, provoked him, he became Adi Guru or the first Guru (p. 25). The day when Shiva, as Adiyogi transformed himself into Adi Guru form, is celebrated in India as Guru Purnima. According to Indian mythology, the seven disciples known as the Sapta Rishis, who waited for eighty-four years for Shiva to grant them eternal knowledge, were taught "a systematic exposition of yoga in a scientific manner", and yoga was imparted "as a technology with which every human being can evolve himself" (p. 9). These Sapta Rishis then scattered throughout the world, enlightening the masses with the techniques of yoga. Out of them, "Agastya Muni has been most effective in terms of bringing the spiritual process into practical life, not as a teaching, philosophy or a practice, but as life itself." (p. 10). An Indian family still follow the yogic teachings of Agastya through the daily chores, like eating, sitting, etc. Shiva as Adiyogi is considered as the pioneer of yoga. It is also said that the "first yoga programme took place on the banks of...Kanti Sarovar" in the Himalayas (p. 99). He turned towards the south to teach his seven disciples, which symbolises the sun's southward journey and the period known as Dakshinayana, so he is called 'Dakshinmurti', which means "the great teacher who faced south" (p. 100). Sadhguru's Adiyogi explained that there is no human 'being' as it is always human 'becoming', which means that we humans, with no established quality, can become whatever we want. *Shiva Samhita*, an Indian mythological work, is in a dialogical form where Shiva, the guru, instructs his wife Parvati, who is his shishya<sup>iii</sup>. Shiva teaches various aspects of yoga in the book. Though it is a lesser-known work, but is one of the ancient texts on Yoga. This authentic ancient text gives a "unique contribution to Yoga which is not seen anywhere else" (Prasad, 2018, p. 17). According to Adiyogi, memory is divided into eight forms, i.e., atomic, elemental, evolutionary, inarticulate, articulate, karmic, genetic, and sensory.

*Lord Śiva's Song*, translated by Andrew Nicholson, is a philosophical poem that centers around Shiva, considering him as the principal god. Through a series of dialogues, Shiva teaches the sages about the ways of life. It has a chapter entitled In this chapter, Shiva teaches Vyasa about the form of Yoga. Yoga, here, is divided into two parts, 'the yoga of non-being' and 'the great yoga' (p. 126). When the latter is attained, the liberated person sees the universe as the lord himself. Youngsters nowadays believe in the power of the universe. The vibrations, commonly known as vibes, that we transmit into the universe are reflected in nature. Hence, "what goes around comes around." (Stone, 2001). The concept of *karma*<sup>iv</sup> fits well here. The eight means of Yoga, as told by Shiva in this text, are breath control, sense withdrawal, meditation, concentration, observances, posture and absorption (p. 127). The character Shiva gives the readers a proper meaning of each state of Yoga and philosophically explains its beneficial effects. Its knowledge is given to a "student who is full devotion" (p. 145). Willingness is vital for practising Yoga. Shiva is famous not only as a Yogi but also as a perfect consort of Parvati. He imbibes within himself the qualities women wish to have in their husbands. People in India, especially unmarried girls, keep 16 *Somvar Vrat*<sup>v</sup> to get a good husband who imbibes within himself the qualities of Shiva. This Indian mythological character epitomises the harmonious coexistence of two realms, serving as a symbol of balance within the Indian collective consciousness. Individuals in the modern era also want this equilibrium in their life, which can be achieved via the use of Yoga. Isha Kriya is a guided meditation created by Sadhguru, who suggests chanting this line– "I am not to the body; I am not even the mind" while meditating ("Isha Kriya", 2019). Most of our problems are related to our minds– how we see and perceive whatever goes around us. Once a person rises above the concept of the 'I', the ego, and understands that the physical body and the mind are nothing but materials of the world that bound us and that individuality lies beyond the physical world with the universe, he/she might get liberated from the shackles of life. Yoga, for years, has been acknowledged as an effective way to deal with psychological stress.

While talking about India, Berk said that, "it is obvious that the cultural identity and a cultural heritage of a nation live in mythological mode" (2016, p. 69). No matter how many technical or scientific advancements have been made, people desire to stick to their traditions here. "Like empirical science, but in a different way, myth gives sense to the world through causes and effects. All myth is an etiology" (Losada, 2015). In academics, Indian tradition is vibrant, with various texts teaching about almost all life aspects regardless of time and space. Keeping this in mind, the Department of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) of the Indian government established a Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) which contains numerous books on Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Yoga (Chakravarty, 2010, p. 297). It plays a crucial role in preserving our national heritage. Even corporates nowadays are "introducing Yoga for employees as a means to relieve their stress and improve productivity" (Satpathy, 2018, p. 89). It was concluded through observation that the "Yogic Lifestyle can increase productivity" (p. 93). It calms the mind and helps to remain focused, eliminating the unnecessary stress created by the busy contemporary environment everyone lives in. There is a "positive relationship between yoga practice and psychological well-being" (Gaiswinkler, 2016). Regular Yoga can relax your mind and maintain a healthy relationship between the body and the mind. Yoga, with time, will increase the capacity to gain knowledge as the person indulged in the task will perceive information more clearly. A review done by Cecilia S.M. Chong and colleagues revealed: "positive effects of yoga on stress reduction in healthy adult populations" (p. 32).

A study was conducted in which Yoga was taught to students in a school setting, and it was concluded that the "effects of participating in school-based yoga programs appeared to be beneficial" (Serwacki, 2012, p. 101). Many yoga training programs are conducted at schools and academic institutes to maintain the psychological balance of children. An article by Stueck and Gloeckner discusses one such training programme specifically directed towards children. It was a stress-handling programme conducted on 48 students in grade five. It demonstrates that negative feelings such as aggression and helplessness were vividly reduced (p. 371). Shiva symbolises the constantly evolving conflict between discipline and liberation, stillness and movement, as a symbol of both energy and asceticism. Based on his teachings, yoga encourages people to discover their inner landscapes and strengthens the bond between the body, mind and spirit. Shiva is a character that continues to guide and inspire contemporary yoga practitioners in their search of holistic health and self-discovery because he embodies virtues like resilience, mindfulness, and harmony. Shiva's character and the teachings delivered through his character have a great impact on today's youth because they align with their pursuit of self-discovery and a deeper meaning in life.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Research reveals how an Indian mythological character is helpful in attaining balance. Shiva's portrayal as Adiyogi enlightens the world about the significance of yoga in the contemporary world. Yoga positively impacts an individual's stress level and overall personality development. It manages physical health, and people who indulge in Yoga often tackle their problems more efficiently than others. Students worldwide, especially in developing countries like India, go through tremendous hard work, which often drains them entirely. Despite looking for other alternatives, such as visiting psychiatrists and turning self-critical at times of crisis, one can find the answers to all the complexities of life in one's own culture. Shiva, as a character from Indian mythology, is drawn in such a way that his existence in the traditional texts and portrayal in various places as a yogi provides people with immense power and understanding of numerous questions that unnecessarily hover around and disturb life. Indian Traditional knowledge exists regardless of time and space. One must respect the richness of the ancient traditional texts and tackle the issues regarding stress and workload. Yoga ought to be compulsory at educational institutions, and parents should actively encourage their children to engage in this beneficial activity. Yoga is a practice that should be embraced by individuals of all ages. Young individuals who struggle to adapt to life must engage in daily practice of Yoga. Shiva's persona possesses numerous additional traits that could potentially offer solutions to various life challenges that are yet to be explored.

### Notes

<sup>i</sup> Sanskrit word meaning 'concentration'

<sup>ii</sup> Female term is *yogini*, though *yogi* can mean both male and female as well



<sup>iii</sup> *Shishya* is a Hindi word meaning 'a female disciple'. According to the *Shiva Purana* her early birth she was Sati, Shiva's 1<sup>st</sup> wife and also her disciple. But, here, she is Parvati, having a conversation regarding Yoga with her husband

<sup>iv</sup> It derived from the Sanskrit word *Karmam*. According to the Oxford Dictionary it means "the sum total of a person's actions in this and previous states of existence".

<sup>v</sup> Fasting for 16 continuous Mondays. Monday is considered as the day of Lord Shiva in Hinduism.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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