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WHY YOGA IS NOT A SPORT

My observations and comments:

Point No. 1- Whether Yoga education can legitimately be considered as one of the specializations under the discipline of Physical Education:

Regarding this point, I would like to recommend that it is always ideal if yoga education could be conducted separately as a foundational subject. But as there is lack of infrastructure, facilities and other hurdles it is not possible to do so. In this situation Yoga education can be taught as an allied subject with Physical education, BUT SUBJECT TO, the teachers those are teaching Yoga education should be well versed with the true concepts of Yoga. As, if teachers are not well versed, then they may teach distorted yoga practices and may give wrong Yoga education.

Point No. 2- Whether Yogasanas can be treated as competitive in nature and whether holding competition of performance of Yogasanas will not be violative of the very spirit and philosophy of Yoga:

Regarding this point, I would like to recommend that Yogasanas CAN NOT be treated as competitive in nature and holding competition of performance of Yogasanas will definitely be violation of the very spirit and philosophy of Yoga.

The explanations and reasons for both the statements are as follows:

Asanas have become so popular that hundreds of books are being written and published in various parts of the world. But they are in the form of numerous permutations and combinations of the selected few asanas. The subject is presented in the form of exercise system and modern principles of exercise are super-imposed on them. Thus, the original concept and techniques of asanas, as was used in the tradition of yoga, are distorted. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the basic concept of asanas and their purpose in the whole scheme of yoga which is otherwise very much overlooked.

Asana is one of the ancient Yogic Practices forming a base for all other practices and plays an important role in every kind of Yoga Sadhana. It is one practice, which has attracted great attention of masses.

Considering the publicity and popularity of Yoga in Modern times, we find that great attention is paid to the practice of Asanas. To consider the practice of Asanas alone as Yoga is a misconception.

In the traditional Ashtanga yoga 'Asana' forms the third step after the first two, namely, Yama and Niyama. Although Asana served a limited purpose of sitting motionless with comfort, in course of time the number of Asanas increased and today we get a variety of Asanas.

The characteristics of Asana have been concisely expressed by Patanjali in the Yogasūtra "Sthirasukhamāsanam." The words 'sthira' and 'sukha' represent two important characteristics. Asana should be stable and comfortable. The term asana can be defined on the basis of the two criteria of 'stability' and 'comfort'. These two characteristics practically answer all questions related to asana.

Generally, asana is looked upon as physical exercise. But it is not correct. The word 'sthira' normally denotes physical stability and the word 'sukha' represents mental state. The former is objective while the latter is subjective in nature. Use of both words together suggests psycho-physiological characteristics of asana.

Though the asana is practiced by the body, it brings effect on the mind. If the asana is a physical exercise, then we cannot attribute tranquillizing effect to it.

The objective of Yoga is 'cittavrittinirodha' and the same is attempted through all the steps of Yoga. Asanas are no exception to this.

Even if we consider asana as an exercise, it must be remembered that it is a special type of exercise, which is not only physical but also psychological in nature.

Another sutra of Patanjali, namely, "Prayatnaśaithilya anantasamāpattibhyām" gives further insight into the practice of asana. "Prayatnasaithilya" means "effortlessness." Practice of asana should be done "effortlessly"- with minimum of efforts."

'Anantasamāpatti' refers to the directing attention of the mind to vast objects, which helps in withdrawing body consciousness. This principle is better applied to the meditative asanas than the cultural asanas.

Asana in yoga is one of the characteristic techniques of spiritual discipline. It is distinctly a sign of transcending the human consciousness. The motionless position of the body imitates some other condition than human. Man by definition is mobile, agitated, unrhythmic. Asana is an 'ekāgratā' on physical plane. Just as an 'ekgāratā' puts an end to the fluctuations of mind so also asana puts an end to the mobility of the body by reducing the infinitely possible positions to a single posture. Refusal to

move in the asana leads to series of refusals of every kind on the path of Yoga.

Patanjali has also linked the practice of Asana with 'anantasamāpatti' which is beyond mere physical performance.

Today the practice of Asanas has become almost synonymous with yoga. What is the place of Asana in the whole discipline of yoga, however, will not be clear unless we deal with the historical development and critical analysis of the concept of Asana along with the various approaches to it.

We must distinguish between Asana as a concept and Asana as a technique. The conceptual understanding would lead us to gain proper insight into the techniques of Asana as well.

The meaning and scope of Asana

The word 'Asana' has been derived from the Sanskrit root 'ās' meaning to sit' (āsyate anena). This derivative meaning has been used to explain the term physically as well as metaphysically. Physically, it denotes posture – a sitting posture or a seat. Metaphysically it has been interpreted by several texts as 'establishment in the original state' (Svasvarūpe samāsannatā).

This metaphysical aspect of Asana is found expressed in the texts of Nāthayogins like 'Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati', jñānadīprabodha,, sabadī of yogi vicāranātha. In Jainyoga Asana is considered as withdrawing from Prabhāva (extra-version) to Svabhāva (introversion). Acharya Haribhadra calls it Sukhāsana. It is interesting to note that despite the fact that Jainyoga is full of rigorous ascetic practices, there are few Asanas involving difficult bodily postures as we find in Hathayoga.

Physically speaking Asana has two distinct meanings. Firstly, it denotes the seat on which the Sādhaka sits for his sādhanā. Secondly, it implies different postures of the body used during Yoga sādhanā.

Asana as a Seat :

Asana is an architectural expression implying a seat, a moulding, a type of structure. In Mānasāra (XXX-12,13) a three storied building is called Asana. Rigveda uses different terms like 'garta'. 'Vandhura' for the seat in Chariot. The word Asan means 'mouth' (Rig. 1.116.14, 5.76.6, 9.69.2). Other terms used by Jain writers for asana are Patta, Sthala, Sthāna. The term 'barhi' is used in Rigveda 10.15, 3-4, 3.42.2 for the seat prepared with sacred kuśa grass.

Significance of using different kinds of seats and their effects has also been mentioned in the yogic literature. For example, the kriyā-kānda of Gautamadharmasūtra states as follows:

“Poverty on the bamboo-seat. Emergence of disease on rock. Abundance of sorrow on the floor. Loss of fame on the grass-seat. Mental disturbance on the leaf. Accomplishment of knowledge on black skin. Emancipation on the tiger’s skin. Wealth on the cloth-seat. Removal of disease on the cane-seat. Silken garment giving health. The woolen blanket releasing from sorrow.”

Asana as a posture:

The antiquity of asana as a posture is very great. The excavations of the seals at Mohenjodaro and Harappa bear the testimony of the practice of asana.

In Vedas we do not get direct reference to the word āsana or names of asanas; yet we do get indications of some modes of sitting. The word ‘Mitajñu’ in Rigveda (Rg.7.95.4, 3.59.3) means assuming a squatting position. Another word ‘Abhijñu’ (Rg.1.37.10, 3.39.5, 7.2.4) means sitting on toes with knees raised as in utkātasana. Similar posture is practiced by Jains during meditation. The expression ‘Jānu ā acya’ (Rg.10.15.7) in Rigveda and ‘savyam jānu acya’ in śatapathabrāhmaṇa (śat.Br.2.4.2.2) mean ‘with leg folded’. In the prescribed ritual for manes it is customary to fold left leg while for divine beings right leg is folded, the other knee being raised during sitting. These prescriptions are obligatory. Sāyanabhāṣya on the Taittirīya has a reference to a pose similar to the Gomukhāsana, although no specific name is given in the text.

There is no mention of asana in the earliest Upanishads. The first mention is found in śvetāśvatara upanishad.

The epics like Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata śāntiparva (Adhy.237, 241, 317) and Yoga Vāsistha have direct reference to Asana as sitting postures. Mahābhārata mentions 12 types of yoga out of which Deśayoga and upāyayoga relate to the practice of Asana as a posture. When it is done in a suitable place in the forest cave, lonely place it is termed as Deśayoga. When one sits in a posture for Dhyāna or meditation it is called Upāyayoga.

From the available sources regarding sādhanā of Bhagawan Mahavira we find the mention of number of Asanas in which he was practicing Dhyāna.

In Aupapātika Sūtra we get a reference to a typical Asana in which the Sramanas were found to meditate. In this Asana the two knees were raised and head lowered. In this very text there is a discussion about Asanas under the analysis of Kayaklesha.

Daśāśrutaskandhasutra mentions about practicing Dhyāna in different Asanas.

Acharya Haribhadra, the great writer on Jain Yoga used the word ‘Sthāna’ for āsana seema most appropriate because the term ‘āsana’ is used for sitting posture while ‘Sthāna’ refers to any condition of the body assumed for meditation.

This shows that this practice of Asanas was systematized and was in vogue at one time. However, later on it was relegated to background and today we are at loss to establish it again in practice.

Although the tradition of Jainyoga does not coincide with the Hathayogic practices we do find the influence of Hathayogic practices from 8th century to 12th century. Due cognizance seems to have been taken by later Jain Acharyas like Somadeva, Hemachandra, Shubhacandra etc.

Buddha himself had practiced Yoga under the guidance of Arada Kalam and Uddaka Rāmaputta and he is shown traditionally sitting in Padmāsana in every sculpture. In Buddhist Yoga various modes of sitting were assigned spiritual significance.

The period of Smriti literature is very long. Some Smritis had been composed before 500 B.C and some were written till about 1000 A.D. In one of the oldest and important Smrities, namely, Brihadyyogiyajnavalkya Smriti, we get elaborate description of Asana, both as a seat as well as a posture. The seat is described to be “cailājīnakuśottara” which is neither too low nor too raised which is used for taking a posture of Padmāsana. While describing the posture the following subtle points have been mentioned.

- Facing North-East and sitting erect.
- Pressing the Chin against chest
- Closing the mouth without touching the teeth
- Tongue pressing against the palate;
- Remaining steady like a rock.

-----(Brihadyyogiyajnavalkya Smriti.IX : 186- 190)

Considering all the ancient references it is not mentioned that asanas has competitive nature.

Definitional Analysis:

Definitional analysis of Asana may take into consideration the following points:

- a) Special feature of definition.
- b) Characteristics of Asana
- c) Salient points during performance of Asana. For example, center of gravity considered important for maintaining the posture for a longer duration.
- d) Purpose of Asana
- e) Suggested benefits of Asana
- f) Asana as a Yoganga in an integrated scheme of Yoga.

Definitional Analysis of Asanas

If we analyze the various definitions of Asana, we get three levels on which Asana could be considered. These three levels from gross to subtle are:

- a) Conditioning *Asanas*,
- b) Meditative *Asanas*,
- c) svarupa *Asanas*.

a) Conditioning *Asanas*

In this category we get *asanas* defined as contributing to the various aspects of health and fitness.

- i) kuryat tadasanam sthairyam arogyam cangalaghavam...

-----*Hatha Pradipika - I.17.*

(*Asana* brings physical and mental steadiness, health and a feeling of lightness).

- ii) sthira-sukham-asanam

----*Patanjala Yoga Sutra-II.46.*

(*Asana* is that which is stable and comfortable).

- iii) prayatnasaithilya-anantsamapattibhyam

-----*Patanjala Yoga Sutra –II.47.*

(Attained through effortlessness and attending to the infinite).

- iv) tato dvandvanabhighatah

-----*Patanjala Yoga Sutra –II-48.*

(Thereby one does not suffer from the pair of opposites).

- v) asanam yogasiddhyartham kayasodhanahetuna

-----*Rudra Yamala- 24.40.*

(*asana* is meant for the purification of the body in *yoga*).

- vi) Asanena bhaved drdham-----*Gherand Samhita-I.10.*

(*Asana* brings strength).

- vii) asanena dirghajivi rogasokavivarjitah

-----*Rudra Yamala- 24.135.*

Asanas remove distress and diseases and lead to longevity).

- viii) yena yena sukhasiina vidadhyur niscalam manah

tat tadeva vidheyam syan-munibhir bandhurasanam

-----*jnanarnava-28.11.*

(Such *asanas* should be performed which are comfortable and lead to tranquility of mind).

b) Meditative *asanas*

In this type of definition the emphasis is on appropriate sitting posture with a particular arrangement of the upper and lower extremities and erect spine which leads to tranquility of mind.

- i) samam kayasirogrivam dharayennacalam sthirah

sampreksya nasikagram svam disascanavalokayan

Bhagavadgita. VI-12.

(Keeping the body with head, neck upright and still, direct the gaze at the tip of the nose without looking in any direction).

ii) samagrivasirah-skandhah samap&sthah samodarah
vasistha samhita-III-45.
(Head, neck, shoulders, back and abdomen in one straight line).

iii) karacarana-samsthana-visesah
yogacintamani.
(Particular arrangement of arms and legs).

iv) sarira-vinyasa-visesah asanam
smartayoga.
(*asana* is a particular disposition of the body).

v) sukhenaiiva bhaved yasmin ajasram brahmacintanam
asanam tadvijaniyat anyatsukhavinasanam
tejobindupanisad-I.25.

(*asana* is that in which one is able to meditate on *brahman* comfortably for a long period).

c) svarupa-asana

Here the *asana* is considered as the establishment in the highest stage of *yoga*.

i) asanamiti svasvarupe samasannata
SSP- II. 34.

(*asana* means establishment in one's own original state).

ii) svarupe yat sadakalam-asanam tat sukhasanam
rajayogarahasyam.

(*asana* called *sukhasana* is that which enables one to remain in the original state all the time).

iii) asanasthah sukham hrde nimajjati
sivasutra –III.16.

(That on which a *yogi* sits with the sense of full identification with the Divine is *asana*). Here *asana* is metaphysical meaning mentally establishing in *parasakti* and always being mindful of her.

iv) madhyamam pranamasritya pranapana-pathantaram
alambya jnanasaktim ca tatstham caivasanam labhet
netratantra –VII-2.

(After resorting to *madhyama prana-udana* of upward going nature-‘and which is born of *susumna* which is between *prana* and *apana*, one should depend and rest upon *samvid* -Supreme I-consciousness. That stay on *sa/vid* is *asana*’).

From the above description it will be found that *asana* is continuum of yogic process, which starts with the physical aspect arranging upper and lower extremities and ends in the complete stability of the body and mind. The chief principle governing the concept and technique of *Asana* is stability with varying degrees. Just as the processes of *Dhāranā*,

Dhyāna and Samādhi are various degrees of the absorption of mind and virtually one single process, similarly we can think of the concept of Asana.

The importance of the principle of stability in Asana has been greatly eulogized and beautifully described by yoga rasāyana. It says as follows:

“One who can be stable in the āsana, is fit for undergoing Yogic practices; with unstable body one cannot have a stable mind. When āsana becomes stable, surely the mind too gains stability. The movement of Prāna indeed slows down. The fickleness of the senses too is surely set at rest. Then one gets established in Yoga and therefore one should practice āsana.”

Thus in nutshell we may express Asana as stability of body and mind.

Comparison of No. of Asanas
(From ancient Yoga texts)

1. Hathapradīpikā (Jodhpur Ms.)	...	108
Asanas		
2. Yogāsanamāla	...	102
Asanas		
3. Rudrayāmala	...	100
Asanas		
4. Hatharatnāvali	...	78
Asanas		
5. Hathasanketacandrikā	...	48
Asanas		
6. Yogasiddhāntacandrika by Nārāyanatīrtha Commentary on PYS	...	38
Asanas		
7. Gheranda Samhitā	...	34
Asanas		
8. Hathayoga - Āsana Laksanam	...	32
Asanas		
9. Nārada Purāna	...	30
Asanas		
10. Jogapradīpikā (Hindi)	...	34
Asanas		

Inclusion of Asanas in the Physical Education Curriculum:

It is our common observation that Asanas have become a part of physical education programme in schools. However, Asanas were included in the curriculum of physical education for the first time in 1927 by the Shri K.M.Munshi Committee, appointed by the then Bombay Government. Later in 1937 when Kuvalyananda Committee was appointed by the Bombay Government to prepare the plan for physical education in the Bombay State, the committee emphasized on the indigenous physical activities and included some Yogasanas in the curriculum. **But it was very**

clear to Swami Kuvalayanandaji that Physical Activities from Physical Education are dynamic in nature and Yogasanas are purely static in its nature. In the Training Institute for Physical Education established at Kandivli (Bombay) by the Govt. of Bombay Yogasanas formed a part of training programme for the teachers. In 1956 when the National Plan for Physical Education was prepared, a curriculum of Yogic exercises (mostly asanas) was accepted along with other activities. Thus Yogasanas became integral part of physical education programme. In order to systematise Yogic training Govt. of India, Ministry of Education, for the first time in 1959 introduced a scheme of Yogic training for the in-service physical education teachers. Accordingly, the first Yogic training course was organised under the direction of Swami Kuvalayanandaji. Because it was known to Swami Kuvalayananda that if proper Yoga education must have been implemented in the school then proper educated teachers of yoga should be appointed. Swami Kuvalayanandaji had also earlier in 1932 organised training of Asanas to the secondary school teachers at the request of the Govt. of Uttar Pradesh.

Application of Asanas :

Today a great attraction for the practice of asanas is due to the interest of promotion of health and physical fitness. Many-a-practitioner are convinced about the utility of asanas.

When the children reach school age asanas can be of direct help to them. Asanas bring immense improvement in the behavior of children. Children are very receptive to asanas and this situation must be taken advantage of for their welfare.

With the onset of adolescence certain psychological problems arise in the children. The biological changes create emotional tensions and moods, which are trying both for children and their parents. Asanas can help in preventing these emotional fluxes from getting out of hand as well as helping the body to develop.

As children grow up the practice of asanas is found useful in developing physical and emotional capacities of the children. One of the observations made is that the children in their memory by means of the practice of asanas.

There are number of aspects of the application of asanas to sports. Firstly, as a means of preventing injuries; secondly, as a therapeutic method of curing these injuries; and thirdly, for the promotion of particular games and sports.

Every game and sport involves vigorous movements, which shorten muscles and make them more susceptible to pulls and strains. The more intensive and vigorous the exercise the greater is the need to stretch the muscles. Slow Stretching of the muscles through asanas can prevent muscle injuries in sports.

Warming up procedures are adopted by the trainers and athletes not only to improve the performance in sports but also to avoid injuries. The

key to good warming up is to increase the pace so gradually that the muscles have time to adjust. The steady stretching in the asanas provide exactly this opportunity because of their progressive nature.

In the cure of sport injuries, especially to correct muscle spasms, the important factor is ability to stretch the muscles GENTLY so that no long term damage is sustained. Stretching through asanas speed up the healing process of any injury by improving circulation and taking the pressure off the nerves and tissues.

By promotion in sports we mean improvement in basic fitness, increase in specific sports skills and understanding and control of certain psychological factors. It has been reported that even a short-term training in asanas elicits definite improvement in basic fitness factors.

Specific sports skills depend on proper neuro-muscular co-ordination, which can be easily obtained through asanas. Practice of asanas also contributes to the ability to concentrate, which seems useful for such activities like gymnastics where external distractions or non-relevant stimuli, which interfere with the performance, are to be controlled.

Stretching exercises are included now in training and conditioning programme. But the nature of stretching exercises is different from the stretching in asanas. Former is dynamic while the latter is static. We may compare the two stretching procedures as follows :

Asana and Exercise

The term *asana* etymologically means sitting position, which is devoid of movement or having very little movement. The term 'exercise' scientifically defined means repeated movements of particular parts of the body. There is no exercise without movement. The basic principle in any exercise is movement. The word static signifies absence of movement while the term dynamic invariably suggests movement.

Do *asanas* involve movement? Should we consider *asanas* as exercise? On the basis of the definitions of *asana* and Exercise we have to consider them different.

The difference between *asanas* and physical exercises may be stated as follows:

Asanas

1. *Asanas* involve very little or no movement and are maintained for some time.
2. *Asanas* consume minimum energy,
3. *Asanas* bring optimum tone in the muscles and affect the mind to become tranquil.

4. *Asanas* can be advantageously practiced by old people and by heart patients.
5. Practice of *asanas* leads to freshness by removing physical lethargy.
6. *Asanas* do not increase the muscle mass but improve the muscle tone and functioning of the vital organs by increasing the blood circulation in the abdominal organs.
7. *Asanas* keep the spine flexible and joints supple.
8. In *asanas* the emphasis is on slow stretching which is static in nature.

Physical Exercises

1. Exercises involve repetitive movements.
2. Exercises consume more energy
3. Physical exercises are prohibited for the heart patients and have limitations for the elderly persons.
4. Exercises lead to fatigue and may not be suitable for all persons.
5. Physical exercises being of the nature of the contraction of the muscle increase the muscle mass.
6. Exercises can bring the rigidity of the joints and in the spine.
7. Exercises being of the nature of repetitive movements the stretch are seldom held.
8. Exercises being jerky there is a tendency to force the body to certain extent.

The philosophy and physiology of *asana* is different from that of physical exercises. The purpose of physical exercise is to cater to the needs of the body bringing physical fitness.

The ultimate purpose of *asanas* is to reduce the disturbances of the mind and bring effect in the individual. In exercise you force while in *asanas* you try to relax as much as possible. Even if we consider *asana* as an exercise, it must be remembered that it is a special type of exercise, which is not only physical but also psychological in nature.

The results of *asanas* are achieved through the following mechanism:

By directly influencing the body organs like muscles, joints, ligaments, visceral organs, etc. and By influencing the autonomic nervous system.

These mechanisms are involved in the maintenance and promotion of psychophysical health.

Asana is a starting point on the path of Yogic discipline. Although cultural *asanas* could be taken advantage of for health purposes, we have to understand the rationale of the practice in *asanas*.

Historically it will be seen that the number of cultural *asanas* was very small in ancient days. More emphasis was laid on the meditative *asanas*. But when it was observed that prolonged practice of meditative *asana* was not easy probable the efforts were made to suitably condition the body by bending and stretching various muscles and organs in different

directions. Gradually it was experienced that with the practice of cultural asanas some common ailments of the body are eliminated giving rise to feeling of well being. Later description of such asanas included the benefits from those asanas.

Thus it will be seen that the idea of removing possible hindrances in the prolonged sitting in meditative asana was always prominent behind the introduction of various cultural asanas.

For sportsman the pressure, importance of the competition, conditions are not the problem. The problem is their reaction to such situations. This reaction can be significantly self-chosen. Yogic techniques help in achieving perfect physical and mental harmony and harmony with the surroundings. In all yogic techniques the emphasis is on absolute equilibrium and conscious control of emotions. The basic principle of all yogic techniques is to achieve an increased state of concentration and awareness.

For the sportsmen it is important to understand how to improve the sports performance and training and to achieve physical and mental control.

Scientific studies on the mechanism of yogic techniques suggest that the body control is achieved through passive concentration and not through active efforts. These dimensions operate in all the physical, emotional and mental activities. Yogic techniques help sportsmen to learn autonomic control via passive concentration.

Sports training require a holistic approach. The human being is a psychosomatic unit. There is no mind-body separation. The mind influences the body and vice versa. Athletes are no exception to this rule. A holistic approach is required both when aiming for top competitive results as well as when seeking a greater sense of well being and deeper unity of body, mind and spirit. In sports training physical, technical, tactical, theoretical and psychological preparation and regeneration are inseparable units. Yoga techniques indirectly affect technical and tactical preparation. They also have significant direct effects on the physical, psychological, theoretical, preparation and on the regeneration of the strength process.

Sports training need psychological preparation, which could be general and specific. General psychological preparation helps to develop basic mental skills such as goal setting, relaxation techniques, concentration and visualization. Specific psychological preparation is for getting self-mastery, i.e. control of emotions. The four necessary basic steps towards self-mastery are body awareness, breath awareness, attention focus and concentration. Through Yogic techniques sportsman is able to control his autonomic and unconscious functions. Yogic techniques can be used in sports preparation for warm up, cool down, regeneration, compensation of muscle dysbalances, synthesis of mind and body, activation or deactivation of the body and as supplement exercises.

There is an interrelationship among the four basic steps. Body awareness facilitates breath awareness and breath awareness facilitates body awareness. Similarly body and breath awareness facilitate attention focus and attention focus facilitates breath and body awareness and lead to the development of concentration.

Consciously controlled breathing can be used as a technique for enhancing mental and physical powers. We still have to learn a lot about the latent human resources and energy which breathing techniques can release. Learning to breathe in an optimal way may prove to be the key to release the vast but virtually untouched treasure house of potential, which we all possess.

It is only recently that hyper performance phenomena have begun to be seriously researched, usually to enhance athletic performance. The psychic element is now accepted in sports performance and sports training. Peak performance cannot be attained simply by mechanically training the body. Mind too must be brought into play. Now the psychic element in athletic training is taking systematic and explicit forms.

Contribution of Yoga to Sports:

Let us consider how yoga contributes to the promotion of Sports. This may be studied from the following points of view:

- A) Yoga for the prevention of sports injuries.
- B) Yoga for the cure of sports-injuries.
- C) Yoga for the promotion of sports.
- D) Yoga for the maintenance of physical fitness during the participation period as well as off-season.

A. Yoga for prevention of Sports injuries

Every sport involves vigorous movements All vigorous activities shorten muscles and make them more susceptible to pulls and strains.

As a result of continuous contractions of muscles without stretching, the following conditions are observed:

- i) Movement of joints is inhibited.
- ii) Full contraction of antagonist muscles is prohibited.
- iii) The alignment of the body gets disturbed due to shortened muscles.
- iv) The movements become inefficient and cause general discomfort.
- v) There is an increased possibility of injuries.
- vi) The pumping action within each muscle is not to the maximum limit.

The counteract ill-effects of reputed contractions in sports stretching of the muscles is very essential.

It is necessary to remember that more a person involves himself in intensive and vigorous exercise, the more he needs to stretch.

Herbert A. de Vries has shown the utility of stretching procedures in the prevention of athletic injuries when athlete exercises vigorously their muscles are injured slightly. With healing the affected muscles become shorter and tighter. Such a muscle is more frequently injured.

In sports like running, the muscles most commonly injured by pulls and strains are the hamstrings and the calf muscles. Athletes competing in running sports should regularly practice stretching.

Most professional athletes stretch players of Basketball teams and football league teams who undergo stretching programme have not experienced any major muscle pull. 'Stretching is the most injury preventive in sports today', says Bob Bowman.

It is accepted by the trainers that "warming up" is necessary not only to avoid injuries but also to improve the performance in sports. Various "warming up" procedures are available and depending upon 'specific sport, selected "warming-up" procedures are followed. Calisthenics have been very popular upto recent times. But now a- days stretching is considered more important than calisthenics. Some avoid calisthenics and start with stretching programme and the results are reported to be excellent. The key to a good warming up is to increase in pace of work-output so gradually that the muscles can adjust to the increased pace and remain free from injury. The steady stretching in Asanas prepares such a background.

Athletes engaged in running events should perform at least the following Asanas to prevent injuries during running events.

(a) Padahasthasana-- Stand erect with feet apart. Lean forward. Let loose your hands allowing them to touch the ground. Relax the trunk. Maintain this passive stretch comfortably from a few seconds to a couple of minutes according to the capacity. After some practice feet may be kept together. Always return to the standing position slowly.

(b) Pachimatana-- Take a sitting position with legs extended and feet together. Place the hands comfortably on the legs. Bend in the loins, drop the head down, let loose the body and maintain the bend comfortably without much strain. This will allow a further bend possible. Do not give jerks; do not actively strive to bend. Feel the stretch all along the back. Maintain the pose comfortably for some time and then slowly release.

(c) Ugrasana-- In a sitting position spread your feet away and take about 2 to 3 feet distance. Place the hands comfortably on the legs. If possible grasp the toes. Then slowly bend the trunk and head down as far as possible in a relaxed way. Get the feeling, of stretch in the groins and increase it gradually by further bend without any discomfort. No jerky action should be introduced, during the performance of this asana.

The above three Asanas may be considered as progressive in nature, yet they could be performed one after another.

(d) Halasana — Lie, on your back. Place your hands on the sides. Raise the legs slowly up to 90° angle while stopping at 30°, 45° and 60° for a few seconds. Then slowly take them towards the head and touch them on the ground. Maintain this position for a few seconds. Slide the legs further away from the head and maintain. Then withdraw the extended hands, make a finger lock with them, place behind the head and stretch the legs as far as possible.

No jerks are permitted in the above Asanas. Maintenance at every stage is important. Do not make haste to reach the final stage in the asanas. First stage is also as important as the final one. Do not -exceed your limits.

The phenomenon of quicker physiological and psychological recovery after rigorous sport activity is equally important in the prevention of injury. Among the numerous recovery techniques such as active, passive and Yogic relaxation, investigated on the Cardiovascular recovery and subsequent performance, Mall, (1983.) has reported that Shavasana or Yogic relaxation technique proved to be most effective than the other techniques. However, he suggested that a stronger muscle contraction is necessary for Shavasana recovery to activate the muscles for subsequent explosive work.

B) Yoga for the cure of Sports Injuries:

Asanas — The Yogic stretching exercises not only prevent sports injuries but also cure certain sports injuries in the form of muscle spasms etc. Herbert de Vries has reported utility of stretching procedures of Hathayoga in relieving certain conditions of muscles due to injuries in sports. The tightness of muscles is relieved by steady stretching.

C) Yoga for promotion of Sports.

Application of Yogic exercises has a considerable scope in the promotion of sports. Promotion of sports depends on:

- (i) Basic fitness factors,
- (ii) Specific sports skills and,
- (iii) Psychological factors.

i) Promotion of basic fitness factors through Yoga

Excellent performance in any sport is governed by the several factors of physical fitness. The important ones may be mentioned as: Speed, Strength, Stamina, Suppleness, Stability and Neuromuscular co-ordination. Although not many scientific researches have been done, but the works have shown enough evidence about how yoga could be gainfully employed in the promotion of basic fitness factors.

ii) Promotion of Specific Sport Skills

Development of sports skills depends on the proper neuromuscular co-ordination. The co-ordination seems to be better influenced through the Yogic exercises.

Stretching improves the performance of all sports. It has now become almost customary to say, "If you stretch your muscles, you can run faster".

iii) Promotion of Psychological Factors.

Emotional factor is very important in the performance of sports. If rightly used, emotions can contribute to the improvement of the performance in sports. Emotions are governed by the working of autonomic nervous system. Control over the autonomic nervous system brings the emotional disturbances down. Yogic exercises as a group play a significant role in training of the autonomic nervous system. Stretching exercises like asanas, relaxation techniques and breathing exercises in form of Pranayamas are excellent in conditioning the autonomic nervous system...A few studies made on the effects of short-term Yogic routine have shown the utility of Yoga in the achievement of emotional stability.

D) Maintenance of Physical Fitness participation period and in off-season.

Physical fitness is a must for any good performance in sports. Different sports require different type of fitness emphasizing on a particular fitness factor. However, general level of physical fitness is necessary for every sportsman. The law of use and disuse suggest that if you want to be fit you must exercise. The routine of exercise differs from individual to individual according to purpose. Sportsmen also select different routines of exercise during the season of participation.

But basic levels of physical fitness must be maintained even during off season.' This can be attained excellently by indulging in Yogic routine. Yogic exercises deal with the vital organs of the body on which health depends. The precursor of physical fitness lies in the efficient working of the vital organs of the body and yoga aims at it. The various selected Asanas giving different movements to the spine, controlled respiration, relaxation technique and concentration practice as a whole forms an excellent routine to care of the health of vital organs of the body.

Thus it will be seen that Yoga can contribute to promotion of sport whether we use the term sport in a restricted sense or in a wider sense. The concept of life time sports suggest that exercise is for everyone including those persons who have various handicaps. From this point of view Yoga could be fittingly called life—time sports. Yoga, therefore, not only contributes to the other sports but also is a sport by itself, which is excellent in nature.

Principal Points to be derived from the study of Asanas :

Asana as a technique is of great antiquity. Asana has some purpose to serve, which can be varied according to individual considerations right from feeling of well being to help in meditation. Asanas cater to the need of individual variations. As many individuals as many asanas. Asanas have complementary relationship. All asanas contribute to stability and comfort necessary for meditative mood. Asanas derive psycho-physiological benefits.

Stability and comfort are the main characteristics of Asana. Asana is an end as well as means. Asana as a means indicate different techniques. As an end it represents stable and comfortable meditative pose forming essential background for the attainment of highest state of consciousness called Samadhi.

The utility of such an asana is for the higher practices such as Pranayama and Meditation. If we do not understand this, we are likely to be deluded.

With regards,
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