



Ashtanga Yoga in Sant Charandas' Eight-Limb System: A Yogic and Philosophical Analysis

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Abstract:

This research paper aims at the discussion of Ashtanga Yoga as per the teachings of Saint Charandas. Saint Charandas is an medieval era Indian saint known for integrating classical yogic practices with bhakti devotion. Drawing from his key works, particularly Ashtang Yoga treatise, the analysis explores how Charandas adapted Patanjali's eight-limbed yogic path, extending certain elements like yama and niyama, while integrating them in a devotional framework. Through a comparative yogic and philosophical analysis, this research shows Charandas' unique contributions to making the principles of yoga accessible to householders, elucidating inner realization over ritualism. The study highlights the syncretic nature of his system, intermixing Sant tradition, Vaishnavism, and yoga for spiritual achievement of liberation.

Keywords: Yoga, Ashtanga Yoga, Saint Charandas, Bhakti, Patanjali

1. Introduction

Saint Charandas has a prominent position in the yogic and religious tradition of India. He was born in Dehra village in Rajasthan state of India. He belonged to Krishna Bhakti tradition and propagated the system of Ashtang yoga or eight limb path of yoga. His great contribution in yoga is about making the yoga popular in the masses. He always emphasised to make Ashtang yoga, devotion, and such religious practices available for all, and to make sure that the real essence of yoga, devotion and religion should reach the common people in their pure and simplest form.

Saint Charandas wrote the book Ashtang Yoga that is a beautiful compilation of the essences of yogic texts like Hath Pradipika, Yogopanishad etc. This book depicts the Ashtang Yoga system in a very simple, effective manner that can be understood easily by the majority of the people. Ashtang yoga consists of yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, mudra, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi, which are elucidated by Saint Charandas with a great clarity in simple and pragmatic way. This treatise is popular in the masses due to its heart touching insights and easy to remember approach.

Ashtanga Yoga, or the eight-limb yogic path, is one of the basic frameworks in traditional Indian yoga philosophy, as framed by Maharishi Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras. This system gives a structured framework to attaining union between the individual self and the cosmic self, encompassing moral, physical, mental, religious and spiritual disciplines. The eight limbs—Yama (ethical rules), Niyama (observance rules), Asana (predefined physical postures), Pranayama (regulation of breath), Pratyahara (withdrawal of senses from subjects), Dharana (development of concentration), Dhyana (meditation on a subject), and Samadhi (self attainment or enlightenment)—serve as progressive steps toward inner realisation and liberation from all sufferings.

When Yoga integrates itself with devotion, prioritizing love and self surrender to a deity, it is called Bhakti Yoga. Saint Charandas holds a prominent place in the bhakti movement of northern India, which aimed to integrate the common people with the Hindu religion. Charandas blended yoga with nirguna (without form) and saguna (with form) devotion

along with Krishna Bhakti elements. His works on yoga, depicts Ashtanga Yoga as a supportive structure for devotion making it easily accessible to common devotees.

This paper discusses Ashtanga Yoga within Charandas' eight-limb yogic system, its adaptations, yogic applications, and philosophical importance. Charandas' approach generalized yoga, integrating it with the practice of Bhakti to promote inner divine awareness.

2. Saint Charandas : Historical Influence and Importance

Sant Charandas emerged as a prominent Saint during a period of religious movements in the medieval period, where bhakti dominated movements questioned orthodox traditional rituals and power hierarchies. In his childhood, Charandas faced early struggle after his father's death. When he came to Delhi, he engaged himself in business trade and gradually he immersed in the spiritual and religious practices. Various pilgrimages to sacred places brought him the divine visions of God. He saw sacred sites as inner accessible yogic realms through the practice of meditation.

Influenced by the bhakti tradition saints, Charandas highlighted the guru's role in guiding devotees toward detachment from their ego and illusion.

Charandas' teachings combined Vaishnava bhakti with yogic insights, inspired from texts like the Vasistha Samhita and Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. His philosophical doctrine viewed life as a continuous carnival, urging perseverance in moral conduct, concentration on divine sound (Shabd), and name chanting (Nam) for liberation. This dogma shaped his eight-limb yogic system, where yoga serves bhakti, prioritizing humbleness, detachment, and self realization over orthodox rituals.

3. Ashtang Yoga tradition of Saint Charandas

in the Yoga tradition of saint Charan Das, it is extremely important that there should be no emotional and intellectual barrier between the Guru and the disciple. The discussion of Ashtang Yoga starts with the query of a disciple of Saint Charandas, who presented his question before his sacred guru to know about the system and practice of Ashtang yoga that has eight components. Later, he explains about these eight components. First of all, he explains about the Yamas which are basically the ethical restraints designed to purify the body, mind and social conduct.

Instead of the traditional five Yamas mentioned in Patanjali's Yoga system, Charandas elaborates ten virtues that build the basic framework of yogic discipline. The first one is Ahimsa, which means non-violence or practicing harmlessness toward all creatures in thought, word, and actions. The second yama is Satya, the practice of full truthfulness and honesty. The third restraint is Asteya, which means non-stealing or refraining from coveting what belongs to others. Fourth is Brahmacharya, representing celibacy, continence, and the conscious control of vital energies. The fifth virtue is Kshama, which embodies forgiveness and the release of resentment, followed closely by Dhriti, meaning patience, mental fortitude, and perseverance through life's trials. The seventh Yama is Daya, signifying deep compassion and loving-kindness toward all creation. Eighth is Arjava, which stands for sincerity, straightforwardness, and alignment between one's inner thoughts and outer actions. The ninth practice is Mitahara, denoting a moderate, balanced diet and mindful eating habits. Finally, the tenth restraint is Shaucha, which refers to purity and cleanliness, both internally and externally. Together, these ten English translations—Non-violence, Truthfulness, Non-stealing, Celibacy, Forgiveness, Patience, Compassion, Sincerity, Moderate Diet, and Purity—comprehensively define the ethical baseline that Saint Charandas deemed essential for a yogi to achieve ultimate spiritual liberation and self-realization.

4. Socio-Spiritual Significance and Householder Accessibility

The most distinctive contribution of Sant Charandas lies in democratizing yogic practice. Prior to the medieval period, Ashtanga Yoga was frequently viewed as an austere, highly technical path reserved strictly for monastic ascetics who had formally renounced society. Charandas dismantled these barriers by translating complex Sanskrit doctrines into simple, evocative vernacular Hindi poetry.

He argued that complete social renunciation was unnecessary for liberation. By expanding yama and niyama to emphasize everyday social ethics—such as compassion, forgiveness, sincerity, and moderate living—he transformed daily household living into an active arena for yogic practice. In his framework, maintaining a pure diet (mitahara), engaging in honest work (arjava), practicing devotional chanting (japa), and cultivating forgiveness (kshama) are as effective for spiritual advancement as seated meditation in a remote cave.

5. Conclusion

Sant Charandas' eight-limbed system represents a practical synthesis of classical yoga and medieval devotional spirituality. By framing Patanjali's structural apparatus within the compassionate heart of Bhakti, Charandas created a balanced spiritual path accessible to all people. His extended emphasis on expanded ethical restraints (yamas) and internal observances (niyamas) grounded high philosophical ideals in daily moral conduct. Ultimately, Charandas demonstrated that classical yoga and devotional worship are not competing paths, but complimentary dimensions of a single journey leading to divine union, self-realization, and liberation.

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