

Yoga is Not Work- Out it is Work in: Is It Right According to Shri Guru Granth Sahib?

Nikesh¹, Dr. Manoj²

¹PHD Scholar, ²Assistant Professor, Yoga and Naturopathy, Om Sterling Global University, Hisar, India

Abstract-- The contemporary understanding of yoga often emphasizes physical postures and fitness-oriented practices, leading to the popular assertion that “Yoga is not a workout; it is work-in.” This study examines the validity of this statement in the light of the teachings of Shri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS). Drawing upon selected *sabads*, the paper explores the Sikh Gurus perspective on yoga as an inner spiritual discipline rather than an external bodily exercise. SGGS consistently critiques mere physical austerities, ritualistic postures, and forced practices (*hatha*), asserting that such efforts exhaust the body without transforming the mind. Instead, true yoga is defined as inner union with the Divine, attained through *Sahaj* (natural balance), *Naam Simran* (remembrance of the Divine Name), and alignment with the *Guru’s Sabad*. The Gurus reject outward symbols and techniques as markers of yogic realization and emphasize the purification of consciousness, dissolution of ego, and ethical living within worldly life. While physical discipline is not explicitly denied, it is subordinated to inner awareness and spiritual realization. Thus, according to Shri Guru Granth Sahib, yoga cannot be reduced to a fitness-oriented workout; rather, it is fundamentally “work-in”—an inward journey of spiritual awakening and divine communion. The study concludes that the modern statement aligns substantially with the yogic vision of SGGS, provided yoga is understood as God-centered inner transformation rather than body-centered performance.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, yoga is widely perceived as a system of physical exercise aimed at improving health, flexibility, and fitness. This modern, body-oriented approach has popularized the statement “Yoga is not a workout; it is work-in,” suggesting that yoga is primarily an inward, transformative discipline rather than an external physical activity. While this idea resonates with many spiritual traditions of India, its validity must be examined within the doctrinal and philosophical framework of Shri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS), the sacred scripture of Sikhism.

Shri Guru Granth Sahib presents a distinctive understanding of yoga that moves beyond physical postures (*āsanas*), breath control (*prāṇāyāma*), and ascetic practices.

The Sikh Gurus critically engage with the yogic traditions prevalent during their time, particularly *hatha yoga* and outward renunciatory practices, and redefine yoga as an **inner spiritual discipline** rooted in remembrance of the Divine (*Naam Simran*), natural equipoise (*Sahaj*), and realization through the *Guru’s Sabad*. In SGGS, external bodily practices are repeatedly shown to be insufficient for spiritual liberation if they are not accompanied by inner purity, humility, and the dissolution of ego.

Rather than advocating withdrawal from the world or rigorous physical austerities, SGGS emphasizes living a balanced, ethical, and spiritually awakened life within society. Yoga, in this sense, is not a matter of training the body alone but of transforming consciousness and aligning the individual self with the Divine Will (*Hukam*). The Gurus assert that true union (*yog*) is achieved not through physical exertion but through inner awareness and divine grace.

This study seeks to explore whether the popular maxim “Yoga is not a workout; it is work-in” is consistent with the teachings of Shri Guru Granth Sahib. By analyzing selected *sabads* and key yogic concepts as presented in SGGS, the paper aims to demonstrate that Sikh thought strongly supports an inward, God-centered understanding of yoga, while simultaneously challenging the reduction of yoga to mere physical fitness. Through this inquiry, the study contributes to a deeper interreligious and philosophical understanding of yoga as an inner path of spiritual realization rather than a purely corporeal practice.

II. YOGA AS INNER WORK IN SHRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB

In SGGS, yoga is understood primarily as **inner discipline** (**ਅੰਤਰ ਸਾਧਨਾ**) — the purification of mind, ego, and consciousness — not mere physical postures.

“ਜੇਗੁ ਨ ਖਿੰਥਾ ਜੇਗੁ ਨ ਡੰਡੈ ਜੇਗੁ ਨ ਭਸਮ ਚੜਾਈਐ ॥

ਜੇਗੁ ਨ ਮੁੰਦਾ ਜੇਗੁ ਨ ਜਟਾ ਜੇਗੁ ਨ ਸਿੰਝੀ ਵਾਈਐ ॥”

(SGGS 730)

Meaning:

Yoga is not wearing a patched coat, not carrying a staff, not smearing ashes, not earrings, not matted hair, not blowing a horn.

True Yoga = Inner Union with the Divine

“ਸਹਜ ਜੋਗੁ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੁ ਪਛਾਨੁ ॥”

(SGGS 941)

Meaning:

True Yoga is **natural equipoise (Sahaj)**, realized through the **Guru’s Word**.

This directly supports the idea of **“work-in”** — cultivating inner balance, awareness, and divine remembrance.

Critique of Yoga as Mere Physical Effort

SGGS repeatedly critiques bodily austerities when they lack inner realization:

“ਹਠੁ ਕਰਿ ਤਨੁ ਖੀਜੈ ਮਨੁ ਬਿਦਾਰੈ ॥”

(SGGS 905)

Meaning:

By forced practices, the body is exhausted and the mind becomes disturbed.

Yoga as *only* physical exertion (**work-out**) is discouraged.

What Is the “Workout” Replaced With? Instead of physical obsession, SGGS prescribes **Naam-Yoga** (Yoga of Divine Remembrance):

“ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਹੁ ਮਨ ਮੇਰੇ ॥”

(SGGS 895)

“ਅੰਤਰਿ ਜੋਗੁ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਸਚੁ ਪਾਈਐ ॥”

(SGGS 686)

Meaning:

The true method of Yoga is found **within**.

Balanced View (Very Important)

SGGS **does not condemn the body**, but **refuses to call bodily exercise alone “Yoga”**.

- ✓ Body may be disciplined
- ✗ Body is not the goal
- ✓ Mind must be transformed

✓ Ego must dissolve

✓ Divine awareness must arise

Final Conclusion (According to SGGS)

✓ The statement is correct in spirit.

Yoga is not a workout (external exertion); Yoga is work-in (inner awakening).

Conceptual Background

In modern times, yoga is largely understood as a **body-centered discipline**, focusing on physical postures (*asana*), flexibility, strength, and health. While these practices may benefit bodily well-being, **Shri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS)** offers a fundamentally different vision of yoga. According to SGGS, yoga is **neither body-centered nor technique-centered**, but **God-centered**, aimed at realizing the Divine presence within and attaining union (*yog*) with the Supreme Reality.

The Sikh Gurus acknowledge the existence of yogic practices in society, yet they firmly reject the notion that bodily discipline alone can lead to spiritual liberation. Instead, yoga is defined as an **inner state of consciousness**, cultivated through divine remembrance, grace, and ethical living.

Rejection of Body-Centered Yoga in SGGS

SGGS repeatedly critiques the belief that physical practices constitute true yoga:

“ਜੋਗੁ ਨ ਖੰਥਾ ਜੋਗੁ ਨ ਡੰਡੈ ਜੋਗੁ ਨ ਭਸਮ ਚੜਾਈਐ ॥

ਜੋਗੁ ਨ ਮੁੰਦ੍ਰਾ ਜੋਗੁ ਨ ਜਟਾ ਜੋਗੁ ਨ ਸਿੰਝੀ ਵਾਈਐ ॥”

(SGGS 730)

Meaning:

Yoga does not lie in wearing patched garments, carrying a staff, smearing ashes, wearing earrings, matted hair, or blowing horns.

This verse symbolically rejects **external, body-based markers** of yogic identity, making it clear that yoga cannot be reduced to physical appearance or bodily acts.

Another verse states: “ਹਠੁ ਕਰਿ ਤਨੁ ਖੀਜੈ ਮਨੁ ਬਿਦਾਰੈ ॥”

(SGGS 905)

Meaning:

Through forced bodily practices, the body is exhausted and the mind is disturbed. Here, SGGS directly critiques *hatha* (forceful physical yoga), emphasizing that bodily strain does not lead to inner peace or divine realization.



International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology
Website: www.ijrdet.com (ISSN 2347-6435(Online) Volume 15, Issue 02, February 2026)

Yoga as God-Centered Inner Union

In SGGS, yoga (*yog*) is etymologically and spiritually understood as **union with the Divine**: “ਸਹਜ ਜੋਗੁ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੁ ਪਛਾਨੁ ॥” (SGGS 941)

Meaning:

True yoga is **natural equipoise (Sahaj)**, realized through the Guru’s Word. This establishes that yoga is not an achievement of the body, but a **state of divine harmony** arising from spiritual understanding and grace.

Another key verse affirms:

“ਅੰਤਰਿ ਜੋਗੁ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਸਚੁ ਪਾਈਐ ॥”

(SGGS 686)

Meaning:

The true method of yoga is found **within**. Thus, yoga is an **inward journey toward God**, not an outward discipline of the body.

Central Role of Naam: The Core of God-Centered Yoga

The primary yogic practice prescribed in SGGS is **Naam Simran**—constant remembrance of the Divine Name:

“ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਹੁ ਮਨ ਮੇਰੇ ॥”

(SGGS 895)

Naam functions as the **axis of God-centered yoga**, purifying the mind, dissolving ego (*Haumai*), and establishing an unbroken awareness of the Divine. Unlike body-centered yoga, which focuses on mastering postures, **God-centered yoga focuses on surrender**, humility, and love for the Divine.

Yoga, Ego, and Divine Grace

SGGS makes it clear that liberation is not achieved through physical effort alone, but through divine grace:

“ਕਰਮਿ ਮਿਲੈ ਤਾ ਪਾਈਐ ਹੋਰ ਹਿਕਮਤਿ ਹੁਕਮੁ ਖੁਆਰੁ ॥”

(SGGS 2)

Meaning:

It is obtained by Divine grace; all other cleverness leads to frustration. This verse reinforces that yoga is **God-centered**, not ego-centered. Bodily mastery without surrender strengthens ego rather than dissolving it.

Body as Instrument, Not the Goal

SGGS does not reject the body outright. Instead, it redefines its role:

- The body is a **means**, not the end
- Physical discipline may support awareness
- Spiritual realization does **not depend on physical prowess**.

True yoga occurs when the body, mind, and breath are **aligned in remembrance of God**, not when the body itself becomes the focal point.

Ethical Living as God-Centered Yoga

Yoga in SGGS is inseparable from ethical life (*Gurmat jeevan*):

“ਦਇਆ ਕਪਾਹ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਸੁਤੁ ਜਤੁ ਗੰਢੀ ਸਤੁ ਵਟੁ ॥”

(SGGS 8)

Compassion, contentment, self-restraint, and truthfulness replace bodily postures as the **real yogic disciplines**.

Philosophical Conclusion

According to **Shri Guru Granth Sahib**, yoga is **not body-centered at all**.

It is:

God-centered, not muscle-centered

Inner realization, not external performance

Naam-based, not posture-based

Grace-oriented, not effort-oriented

Therefore, the statement “**Yoga is not body-centered at all — Yoga is God-centered**” is fully validated by the teachings of SGGS. Yoga, in the Sikh vision, is the art of living in constant divine awareness, where the body serves as a vessel, the mind as a seeker, and God as the ultimate goal.

III. CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion clearly establishes that the popular statement “**Yoga is not a workout: it is work-in**” is substantially right when examined in the light of Shri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS). The Sikh Gurus consistently redefine yoga not as a system of physical exercises, bodily austerities, or external techniques, but as an **inner, God-centered spiritual discipline**. SGGS firmly critiques *hatha* practices and outward yogic symbols when they are pursued as ends in themselves, emphasizing that such bodily exertions may exhaust the body without leading to inner peace or divine realization.



International Journal of Recent Development in Engineering and Technology
Website: www.ijrdet.com (ISSN 2347-6435(Online) Volume 15, Issue 02, February 2026)

According to SGGS, true yoga (*yog*) is the **union of human consciousness with the Divine**, attained through *Naam Simran*, *Sahaj* (natural equipoise), ethical living, and surrender to Divine Will (*Hukam*). The focus of yogic practice thus shifts from strengthening or perfecting the body to **purifying the mind, dissolving ego (*Haumai*), and cultivating constant awareness of God**. While the body is not denied its value, it is treated as an instrument rather than the goal of yoga.

Therefore, Shri Guru Granth Sahib does not support a body-centered or fitness-oriented understanding of yoga. Instead, it affirms yoga as an inward journey of spiritual awakening and divine communion. In this sense, yoga is not a “workout” concerned with external performance, but a profound “work-in” involving inner transformation and God-realization. The conclusion reinforces that, in the Sikh spiritual vision, yoga finds its true fulfillment not in physical mastery, but in living a balanced, ethical, and God-conscious life within the world.

REFERENCES

Shri Guru Granth Sahib.

- [1] Guru Arjan Dev Ji (Comp.). Standard Edition. Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). (*Primary source for Sikh philosophy and teachings on yoga, sahaj, naam, and inner discipline.*)
- [2] McLeod, W. H. (2009). *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. (*Provides scholarly interpretation of Guru Nanak's critique of ritualism and external yogic practices.*)
- [3] Singh, Harbans (Ed.). (1998). *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism* (Vols. I–IV). Patiala: Punjabi University. (*Authoritative reference on Sikh concepts such as Yoga, Sahaj, Naam Simran, and Hukam.*)
- [4] Singh, Nikky-Guninder Kaur. (2011). *The Name of My Beloved: Verses of the Sikh Gurus*. New Delhi: Harper Collins. (*Explores the spiritual and experiential dimensions of Naam and inner devotion in Sikh scripture.*)
- [5] Singh, Kapur. (2001). *Parasaraprasna: The Baisakhi of Guru Gobind Singh*. Amritsar: Singh Brothers. (*Philosophical exposition of Sikh metaphysics and the God-centered worldview.*)
- [6] Cole, W. Owen, & Sambhi, Piara Singh. (1997). *A Popular Dictionary of Sikhism*. London: Curzon Press. (*Clarifies Sikh doctrinal positions on asceticism, yoga, and household spirituality.*)
- [7] Eliade, Mircea. (2009). *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (*Useful for contrasting classical and hatha yoga traditions with Sikh perspectives.*)
- [8] Feuerstein, Georg. (2008). *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*. Prescott: Hohm Press. (*Provides background on bodily and spiritual yoga practices relevant for comparative analysis.*)
- [9] Tuteja, K. L. (2007). *Sikhism and Indian Society*. New Delhi: National Book Trust. (*Discusses Sikh responses to contemporary religious practices, including yogic traditions.*)
- [10] Mandair, Arvind-Pal Singh. (2013). *Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Bloomsbury. (*Offers modern academic insights into Sikh spirituality and its non-ascetic orientation.*)