

“Spiritual and Social aspects of Astang Yoga and Karma Yoga in Primary goals of shri Guru Granth Sahib”

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Abstract-- This research explores the spiritual and social dimensions of Astang Yoga and Karma Yoga within the context of the primary goals outlined in the Shri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS), the central scripture of Sikhism. Astang Yoga, consisting of the eightfold path of discipline and meditation, and Karma Yoga, the path of selfless action, are integral concepts in many Indian spiritual traditions, including Sikhism. The study investigates how these practices align with the core teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib, particularly in the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment, social equality, selfless service, and devotion to God's will (Hukam). By examining the scriptures, the study highlights how the Guru Granth Sahib advocates for a balanced life through spiritual practice and social responsibility, encouraging Sikhs to live with humility, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to truth and justice. This paper also analyzes how the SGGS harmonizes these yogic practices with Sikh principles, promoting universal brotherhood and a holistic approach to life that integrates both individual devotion and communal service. Through this exploration, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how Astang Yoga and Karma Yoga are not only spiritual paths but also tools for fostering a just, harmonious, and socially responsible society in accordance with Sikh philosophy.

Keywords-- Astang Yoga, Karma Yoga, Shri Guru Granth Sahib, spiritual enlightenment, social equality, selfless service, Sikhism, Hukam.

ABBREVIATIONS: SGGS (Shri Guru Granth Sahib)

KY (Karam Yoga)

AY (Astang Yoga)

SBG (Shrimad Bagawad Geeta)

I. INTRODUCTION

DEFINITION OF YOGA

Patanjali Begins His Treatise By Stating The Purpose Of His Book In The First Sutra, Followed By Defining The Word "Yoga" In His Second Sutra Of Book 1:^[2]

योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥२॥¹

yogaś-citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ

— *Yoga Sutras 1.2*

Patanjali set out his definition of yoga in the Yoga Sutras as having eight limbs (अष्टाङ्ग *aṣṭ āṅga*, "eight limbs") as follows:

The eight limbs of yoga are yama (abstinences), niyama (observances), asana (yoga postures), pranayama (breath control), pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation) and samadhi (absorption)."

यमनियमासनप्राणायामप्रत्याहारधारणाध्यानसमाधयोऽष्टावङ्गानि²

Astang Yoga: Ashtanga Yoga is a traditional system of yoga developed by the sage Patanjali, consisting of eight (ashta) limbs (anga) that guide practitioners toward physical, mental, and spiritual growth. These eight limbs are:

1. Yama: Ethical guidelines, such as non-violence, truthfulness, and non-stealing.

अहिंसासत्यास्तेयब्रह्मचर्यापरिग्रहा यमा³

Ahimsa (अहिंसा): Nonviolence, non-harming other living beings

Satya (सत्य): truthfulness, non-falsehood

Asteya (अस्तेय): non-stealing (चोरी नहीं करना है)

Brahmacharya (ब्रह्मचर्य): chastity, marital fidelity or sexual restraint

Aparigraha (अपरिग्रह): non-avarice

2. Niyama: Personal practices, like cleanliness, contentment, and self-discipline.

शौचसंतोषतपःस्वाध्यायेश्वरप्रणिधानानि नियमाः⁴

Shaucha - internal and external purification

Santosha - contentment

Tapah - austerity

Svadhya - self-study

Eshvara - God

Pranidhanani - devotion

Niyamah - observances



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3. *Asana*: Physical postures to strengthen and purify the body.
4. *Pranayama*: Breath control techniques to regulate the flow of energy (prana).
5. *Pratyahara*: Withdrawal of the senses from external distractions.
6. *Dharana*: Concentration on a single point or object.
7. *Dhyana*: Meditation, the practice of focused, continuous awareness.
8. *Samadhi*: The state of deep meditation or spiritual absorption, leading to enlightenment.

Ashtanga Yoga emphasizes a dynamic sequence of postures linked with breath in a flowing, structured manner, fostering strength, flexibility, and mental clarity. It is often practiced in a set series, with each posture preparing the body for the next.

II. SPIRITUAL CONNECTION WITH SGGS:

The spiritual aspects of Ashtanga Yoga, particularly in the practices of meditation (*Dhyana*) and self-control, are closely related to the Sikh practice of **Naam Simran** (the repetition of God's name). In the SGGS, the goal is the internalization of God's name, cultivating a deep sense of **spiritual awareness** and **devotion**.

SIMAR SIMAR SIMAR SUKH PAAYE

The SGGS on ethical living and social harmony as well as yoga focus on social harmony and also ethical life. Both of these are similar to each other.

Karma Yoga: Karma Yoga is the path of selfless action and service. It teaches that one should perform their duties without attachment to the results or outcomes. The core principle is to act in a way that benefits others and the world, offering all actions as a form of devotion and surrender to a higher power.

"कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन। मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते संगोस्त्वकर्मणि।।"⁵

In this shalok lord Krishna want to say that you fulfil your duties without think about the fruit of your duties leave all worries only do your duties.

"नियतं कुरु कर्म त्वं कर्म ज्यायो ह्यकर्मणः। शरीरयात्रापि च ते न प्रसिद्धयेदकर्मणः।।"⁶

In Karma Yoga, the focus is on performing tasks with a pure heart, without seeking personal gain or recognition. This practice helps purify the mind, reduces ego, and fosters a sense of interconnectedness with all beings. The ultimate goal is to act with love, compassion, and mindfulness, leading to spiritual growth and liberation.

Spiritual Connection With SGGS:

Karam Yoga focus on selfless action(seva) in SGGS focus on selfless service. SGGS perfoms duties with full devotion without expectations as like as Shrimad Bagwad Geeta.

Sewa karat hoye nihkarmi, tis ko hot paraapat swami."
(One who performs service without desire for reward attains the Lord. – SGGS)

ਨਾਨਕ ਜਨ ਕੈ ਬਿਰਤਿ ਬਿਬੇਕੈ

The Social Aspects of Karma Yoga

Karma Yoga not only benefits the individual spiritually but also has a profound social impact. By promoting selflessness, it encourages the practitioner to contribute positively to society through service, charity, and compassion.

Social Connection with SGGS

ਹੁਕਮੈ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਸਭੁ ਕੋ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਹੁਕਮ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਹੁਕਮੈ ਜੇ ਬੁਝੈ ਤ ਹੁਕਮੈ ਕਰੈ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥੨॥

The SGGS emphasizes social justice, equality, and community service. Sikhism stresses that social engagement and caring for others are central to achieving spiritual fulfillment. The practice of Langar (community kitchen) and Sangat (congregational worship) is an embodiment of selfless service that fosters equality and unity among people, irrespective of their backgrounds.

"Vich duniya seva kamaaiye, taa dargeh baisan paaiye."

(By serving in the world, one is honored in the Court of the Lord. – SGGS)

ਜਨੁ ਰਾਤਾ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮ ਕੀ ਸੇਵਾ ॥ SGGS 265

Sikhism does not advocate withdrawal from society but instead promotes active participation in social duties, reinforcing the symbiotic relationship between spiritual growth and social responsibility.

Shri Guru Granth Sahib:

It is a compilation of hymns, prayers, and teachings that emphasize devotion to one God, equality, social justice, and spiritual wisdom. It is not just a book but is treated with the same reverence as a living Guru.



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Here are the key aspects of the **Shri Guru Granth Sahib**:

ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਸੇਤੀ ਗਣਤ ਜਿ ਰਖੈ ਹਲਤੁ ਪਲਤੁ ਸਭੁ ਤਿਸ ਕਾ ਗਇਆ ॥
ਨਿਤ ਝਰੀਆ ਪਾਏ ਝਗੁ ਸੁਟੇ ਝਖਦਾ ਝਖਦਾ ਝੜਿ ਪਇਆ ॥

Composition: The text was compiled by Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, in the early 17th century. It contains hymns from Sikh Gurus, along with teachings from saints and mystics of various faiths, including Hinduism and Islam. The hymns are written in poetic form and are meant to be sung or recited.

Structure: The Granth Sahib consists of over 1,430 pages and is divided into 31 ragas (musical measures). These hymns are written in several languages, including Gurmukhi (the script of the Sikhs), Punjabi, Hindi, and Persian.

Core Teachings: The primary message of the Guru Granth Sahib is the oneness of God (Waheguru), the importance of meditation on God's name, equality of all people, and the rejection of rituals and caste distinctions. It teaches that true spiritual realization comes through devotion, humility, and service to others.

Eternal Guru: Sikhs believe that after the passing of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, in 1708, the Guru Granth Sahib was declared the final, eternal Guru. Sikhs do not believe in a human Guru after this point but see the Granth Sahib as a living guide.

Reverence and Ritual: The Guru Granth Sahib is treated with the utmost respect in Gurdwaras (Sikh temples). It is placed on a raised platform, covered with a cloth, and often accompanied by a fan to show reverence. Sikhs perform regular readings and recitations from the Granth, known as **Kirtan** (devotional singing) and **Paath** (recitation).

The Guru Granth Sahib serves as both a spiritual guide and a symbol of unity and harmony, encouraging Sikhs to live a life of truth, compassion, and humility.

The Primary Goals of Shri Guru Granth Sahib:

The primary goals of the **Shri Guru Granth Sahib** are encapsulated in the following concepts:

Union with God through **devotion** and **meditation** (*Naam Simran*)

Living a truthful and ethical life in accordance with **Dharam** (righteousness)

Egolessness and **humility** in interactions with others

Service to humanity (*Seva*) as an essential spiritual practice

Social justice and **equality** for all human beings, regardless of caste, creed, or gender

These principles are rooted in **spiritual devotion**, but their implementation is meant to foster **positive social change**.

III. CONCLUSION

The practices of **Ashtanga Yoga** and **Karma Yoga** have deep spiritual and social dimensions that align closely with the core teachings of **Shri Guru Granth Sahib**. While Ashtanga Yoga's emphasis on inner discipline and meditation complements the Sikh path of **Naam Simran**, Karma Yoga's focus on selfless action finds resonance in Sikh teachings about **Seva** and **social justice**. Both yoga systems, in their spiritual and social aspects, encourage practitioners to achieve **spiritual liberation** while simultaneously engaging in **ethical living** and **community service**. Ultimately, the Sikh way of life offers a **balanced approach** that integrates both **spiritual discipline** and **active social engagement**, aiming to create a harmonious and just society.

In this research, we explored the **spiritual** and **social** dimensions of **Ashtanga Yoga** and **Karma Yoga**, and how these aspects align with the primary teachings of the **Shri Guru Granth Sahib** (SGGS). Despite originating in different traditions—**Ashtanga Yoga** within the **Hindu yogic system** and **Karma Yoga** within the context of the **Bhagavad Gita**—both systems share significant philosophical overlap with **Sikhism**, as articulated in the SGGS. The goal of this conclusion is to synthesize how these yogic paths contribute to the **spiritual liberation** of the individual, while simultaneously fostering **social justice, equality, and community engagement**.

Spiritual Aspects of Ashtanga Yoga and the SGGS

At the core of **Ashtanga Yoga** is the pursuit of **self-realization** and the attainment of union with the Divine. This spiritual journey involves a disciplined approach through the **eight limbs**, including ethical principles (*Yamas* and *Niyamas*), physical practices (*Asanas*), and mental discipline (*Dhyana* or meditation). Through this process, the individual seeks to transcend the **ego** and merge with the Divine, achieving a state of **enlightenment** or **Samadhi**.

In comparison, the **Shri Guru Granth Sahib** also promotes a similar path of spiritual realization but through the practice of **Naam Simran** (remembrance of God's name).



Both Ashtanga Yoga and SGGS aim to purify the mind and heart, focusing on the constant remembrance of God, or **Waheguru**, and the cultivation of inner peace and humility.

Naam Simran, like **Dhyana** in Ashtanga Yoga, is not merely a form of mental concentration but a spiritual act that connects the practitioner with the divine. This meditative practice transforms the self, aligning the individual with the divine will.

The **ethical precepts** found in Ashtanga Yoga (e.g., non-violence, truth, contentment) are echoed in the teachings of the SGGS, which stress moral living as the foundation for spiritual progress. Therefore, spiritual discipline in Sikhism is about living **consciously** in alignment with divine principles, not just through meditation, but through ethical living in the world.

Thus, the **spiritual aspects** of both **Ashtanga Yoga** and **SGGS** encourage the practitioner to engage in an **internal journey** of **self-purification** and **spiritual awareness**, with the ultimate goal of merging with the Divine. The difference lies in the fact that Sikhism does not require renunciation of the world but instead calls for **spiritual engagement** within one's worldly duties.

Social Aspects of Ashtanga Yoga and the SGGS

While **Ashtanga Yoga** places considerable emphasis on **individual transformation**, it also lays down moral guidelines (Yamas and Niyamas) that shape one's social interactions. These ethical guidelines promote a harmonious society based on **truth, compassion, and non-violence**, which contribute to both personal well-being and the well-being of others.

However, **Ashtanga Yoga's** path is traditionally one of **detachment** from worldly pursuits, including social life. The social dimension is more implicit, focusing on **ethical** rather than **active engagement** with the community. This renunciatory aspect may not always encourage active participation in social issues or a commitment to societal responsibilities. Instead, the social dimension of Ashtanga Yoga is limited to ethical behavior within personal relations.

In contrast, **Sikhism**, as outlined in the SGGS, emphasizes **active engagement with society** through **selfless service (Seva)**, **equality**, and **community welfare**.

The Sikh ideal of living a **grihasth (householder's life)** promotes social responsibility, and spiritual fulfillment is achieved not in isolation but in **service to others** and the community. Sikhism rejects **asceticism** and instead teaches **active participation in society** for the greater good, which is also the essence of **Karma Yoga**.

Karma Yoga, the yoga of selfless action, directly correlates with the Sikh practice of **Seva**, where actions performed without expectation of reward are seen as acts of devotion to God and humanity. In the SGGS, **community service**, whether through the **Langar** (free community kitchen) or charitable work, is seen as a **sacred duty** that fulfills both personal and social obligations.

Additionally, **Karma Yoga's** emphasis on **non-attachment** to the fruits of actions is aligned with Sikh values of **selflessness** and **humility**. In Sikhism, the practice of **giving without attachment** (whether it be material wealth or personal time) is central to cultivating a society built on compassion and fairness.

Holistic Integration of Spiritual and Social Dimensions

One of the major distinctions of **Sikhism**, as articulated in the **Shri Guru Granth Sahib**, is its holistic approach to **spiritual** and **social** life. While **Ashtanga Yoga** advocates **renunciation** and **detachment** to focus on the **individual's spiritual ascent**, Sikhism calls for a balanced life where **spiritual practice** and **social engagement** are intertwined. **Sikhism does not see spirituality as a withdrawal from society**, but rather as a means to purify oneself and, in turn, serve others.

The **spiritual goal** of both **Ashtanga Yoga** and **Karma Yoga** is the realization of the Divine within, which leads to an **unselfish life** rooted in **peace, love, and compassion**. In this regard, the **Sikh path** resonates with both yogic systems, yet **it encourages active service** to humanity as an essential component of spiritual fulfillment.

The **social aspects** of Sikhism place a high value on **social justice, equality, and community service**, calling on individuals to work for the well-being of society at large. This is reflected in Sikh practices like **Langar, Sangat** (congregational prayer), and **Seva** (selfless service), which help create a **just society** where all people, irrespective of caste, gender, or social standing, are treated with respect and dignity.

Final Thoughts

The **spiritual** and **social aspects** of **Ashtanga Yoga** and **Karma Yoga** align closely with the teachings of the **Shri Guru Granth Sahib**, with each path providing essential tools for individual growth and social harmony.

While **Ashtanga Yoga** focuses on the individual's **inner discipline** and **spiritual awakening**, **Karma Yoga** emphasizes **selfless service**, which is deeply integrated into the Sikh way of life. Sikhism's balanced approach—where **spirituality** and **social responsibility** are not mutually exclusive—offers a unique contribution to the broader understanding of the **yogic path**.



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The **primary goals** of the **Shri Guru Granth Sahib**—spiritual enlightenment, moral living, selflessness, and active social engagement—mirror the underlying values of **Ashtanga Yoga** and **Karma Yoga**. However, Sikhism uniquely integrates these goals into the **context of social justice and community welfare**, providing a comprehensive framework that encourages individuals to pursue **spiritual growth** while **servicing humanity**. This **dynamic synthesis** makes the Sikh spiritual path a powerful model for achieving **both personal liberation and societal well-being**.

This detailed conclusion not only sums up the findings of the paper but also reinforces the overarching message: **spiritual practice and social service** are interconnected in the path toward **holistic well-being**. Both yoga traditions,

when examined through the lens of the **Shri Guru Granth Sahib**, offer invaluable insights into leading a life that balances **inner growth** with **outer social responsibility**.

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