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Yoga and *Salaah*: Some theoretical comparisons

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Abstract

Yoga is one of the most ancient cultural heritage of India, which focuses on bringing harmony among body, mind and spirit. It is an art and science of healthy living. '*Salaah*' or '*Namaz*', the second pillar of Islam, is one of the mandatory duty of a Muslim. Through '*Salaah*', Muslims can develop their body as well as soul regularly five times in a day. There are five *Asanas* in Yoga like Namaste '*Ardha Uttanasana*', '*Vajrasana*', '*Balasana*', Om (*Aum*) and Meditation which are very similar to '*Qiyam*', '*Ruk'u*', '*Julus*', '*Sajud*' or '*Sajdah*', '*Adhan*', Meditation, *Adhan* respectively practiced in '*Salaah*'. In this paper, it was aimed to relate the Yoga theoretically with '*Salaah*' through some basic practices of Islamic life and to present benedictory contributions of '*Salaah*' comparing with Yoga.

Keywords: Yoga, '*Salaah*', *Asanas*, Basic Practices in '*Salaah*'

Introduction

To survive in harmony with oneself and the environment is the wish of every human. However, in present times greater physical and emotional demands are constantly placed upon many areas of life. As a result, many people suffer from physical and mental tension such as stress, anxiety, insomnia, and there is an imbalance in physical activity and proper exercise. This is why methods and techniques for the attainment and improvement of health, as well as physical, mental and spiritual harmony, are of great importance, and it is obviously in this respect that '*Yoga in Daily Life*' comprehensively offers an aid to help one's self (Maheshwarananda) ^[1].

Modern Educational system also seems to fail in the integrated development of the body, mind and spirit. It was said by Gandhiji that Education means all round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit. According to Aurobindo all life is yoga. But in the modern world the erosion of human values of truth, cooperation, non-violence, peace, love, respect for parents, elders, authority and hard work is leading to the decay of moral and social fabric of society at a speed never witnessed in the history of civilization (Rao, 2014) ^[2].

The word Yoga has been derived from Sanskrit word '*Yuj*' which means joining (*Yujyate anenaiti Yogah*). Yoga is that which joins. What are the entities that are joined? In the traditional terminology, it is joining of the individual Self with the universal self. It is an expansion of the narrow constricted egoistic personality to an all pervasive, eternal and blissful state of reality (NCERT, 2015) ^[3].

What religion you belong to has nothing to do with your ability to make use of the yogic systems, because yoga is a technology. Technology does not make any distinction as to what you believe in and what you do not believe in. What you may believe in or not is purely a psychological process – it has got nothing to do with making use of a technology. It is meaningless to say that Yoga is Hindu just the way gravity is Christian. Just because the law of gravity was propounded by Isaac Newton, who lived in a Christian culture, does it make gravity Christian? Yoga is a technology. Anybody who is willing to make use of it can make use of it. It is ridiculous to even think that there could be a religious tinge to yoga. (*Sadhguru*)

As far as '*Salaah*' or '*Namaz*' is concerned, its spiritual and scientific benefits in releasing the stress and calming mind is mind boggling only if we understand it (Khan, 2015) ^[5]. '*Salaah*' or '*Namaz*' is the second pillar of Islam and is one of the obligatory act which has to perform five times in a day regularly. It is said in the religion of Islam that '*Salaah*' is the key to *Jannah* (Paradise) in the Afterlife and serves as a great reformer in Islamic daily lives

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(Khurram, 2015) [6]. The ‘*Salaah*’ is the most accessible form of exercise in Islamic life. There are five Asanas in Yoga like ‘*ArdhaUttanasana*’, ‘*Vajrasana*’, ‘*Balasana*’, ‘*Namaste*’ and Meditation which are very similar to ‘*Qiyam*’, ‘*Ruk’u*’, ‘*Julus*’, ‘*Sajud*’ or ‘*Sijdah*’ and Meditation respectively practiced in ‘*Salaah*’. Here, the Authors aim to relate the Yoga with ‘*Salaah*’ through some basic practices of Muslims in their life and to present benedictory contributions of ‘*Salaah*’ comparing with Yoga.

Objectives of the Study

- To compare between the Yoga and ‘*Salaah*’ through some basic practices in Islamic life.
- To present some benefits of ‘*Salaah*’ comparing with Yoga.
- To present some other aspect of ‘*Salaah*’ which are different from Yoga practices.

Salaah or Namaz

The word ‘*Salaah*’ is derived from an Arabic word ‘*Silah*’ (صلو) which means ‘to pray’, ‘to establish contact’ or connection i.e. connection with The God. Some translate ‘*Salaah*’ as ‘contact prayer’ which is correct but awkward in English. The Islamic definition of ‘*Salaah*’ is the name given to the formal ‘*Ibaadat*’ or prayer of Islam. ‘*Salaah*’ is a fundamental principle of Islamic life and is an important practice which must be performed at organised times and conditions. As the second pillar of Islamic faith, ‘*Salaah*’ is performed by all Muslims across the globe in exactly the same manner and measure, at least the mandatory five prayers. It is a form of worship towards God. Muslims were ordered to perform ‘*Salaah*’ five times a day (Ibrahim & Wan Ahmed) [7]. ‘*Salaah*’ consists not only of prayer recitation and meditation, but also of body movements and positions. The main body positions involved in ‘*Salaah*’ are standing (*qiyam*), bowing (*ruk’u*), prostration (*sujud*) and sitting (*julus*) positions. The movements are performed repeatedly, in accordance to the ordained prayer regulations (Reza, Urakami & Mano) [8].

‘*Salaah*’ consists of ‘*rakaats*’, each ‘*rakaat*’ being a series of 7 postures. For example, before sunrise, 2 ‘*rakaats*’ or 14 postures must be performed. Thus, each Muslim is under obligation to perform 119 postures per day, that is 3750 postures per month and 42,840 postures per year. Suppose, if we live up to an average of 50 years, ‘*Salaah*’ being obligatory from the age of 10 years, we would have performed 1,713,600 postures compulsorily in this lifetime (Ashrad & Nizami) [9]. Thus, if a Muslim practises ‘*Namaz*’ strictly and properly, he will be automatically fit and sound physically, mentally and spiritually. Though there are some religious distinction between ‘*Salaah*’ and Yoga, some medical or health benefits of ‘*Salaah*’ is almost similar to Yoga.

Salaah Positions and Yoga Asanas

There are some positions in ‘*Salaah*’ which are similar to some *Asanas* in Yoga. (Ibrahim-Issa) [10] Here, these will be illustrated in details along with their health and physical benefits. In the following, these are mentioned:

Qiyam Standing for Salaah vs Namaste

By performing *Qiyam* and *Namaste*, there is an even distribution to both feet, relaxation of legs and back, generates feelings of humility, modesty, and piety. This will ease the

nervous system and balance the body. The body is charged with positive energy. This position straightens the back and improves posture.



Qiyam

Namaste

In the *Qiyam*, a verse of the Qur’an is recited: ‘And guide us to the straight path.’ Some have interpreted this to mean the alignment of our Chakras. While reciting more verses from the Qur’an, the sound vibrations of the long vowels ā, ī, and ū stimulate the heart, thyroid, pineal gland, pituitary, adrenal glands, and lungs, purifying and uplifting them all. When rising from this position, the fresh blood moved up into torso in previous posture returns to its original state, carrying away toxins. Body regains relaxation and releases tension.

Ruku Bending at the waist/Bowing vs Ardha Uttanasana

By performing ‘*Ruk’u*’ and ‘*Ardha Uttanasana*’ fully stretch the muscles of the lower back, front torso, thighs, and calves. Blood is pumped into the upper torso. This position tones muscles of the stomach, abdomen, and kidneys.



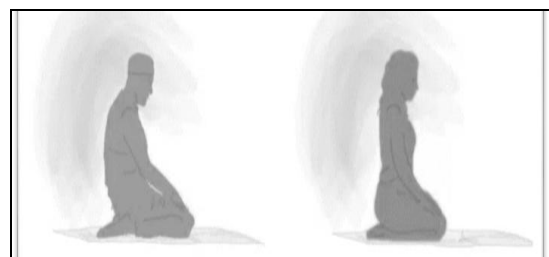
Ruk’u

Ardha Uttanasana

Over time, this posture improves the personality, generating sweet kindness and inner harmony.

Julus Sitting vs Vajarasana

‘*Julus*’ and ‘*Vajrasana*’, aid the detoxication of the liver and stimulate peristaltic action of the large intestine. This position assists digestion by forcing the contents of the stomach downward. It helps in curing varicose veins and joint pains, increases flexibility, and strengthens the pelvic muscles.



Julus

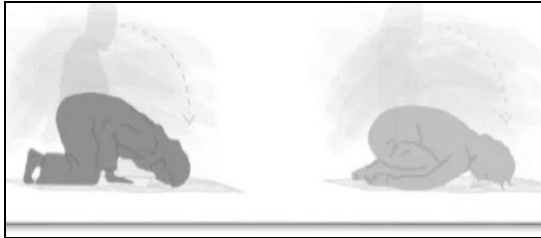
Vajarasana

After standing and bowing and proceeding to prostration, sitting is done on the left leg knee flexed with the inverted *dorsi* flexed ankle and flexed right knee and metatarsophalangeals joint for two minutes. After that,

‘Salaah’ is concluded by looking over one’s right and left shoulder wishing peace for mankind.

Sujud or Sijdah (Prostration) vs Balasana

One of the most important position in ‘Salaah’ or ‘Namaz’ is ‘Sujud’ or ‘Sijdah’ which quite similar to the Yoga ‘Balasana’. This position stimulates the brain’s frontal cortex. It leaves the heart in a higher position than the brain, which increases flow of blood into upper regions of the body, especially the head and lungs.



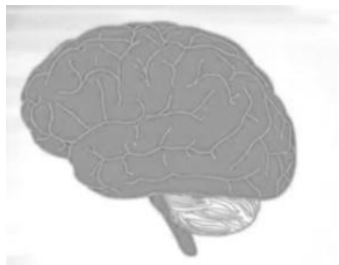
Sijdah

Balasana

This allows mental toxins to be cleansed. This position allows stomach muscles to develop and prevents growth of flabbiness in the midsection. It maintains proper position of fetus in pregnant women, reduces high blood pressure, increases elasticity of joints and alleviates stress, anxiety, dizziness and fatigue.

Meditation in Salaah and Yoga

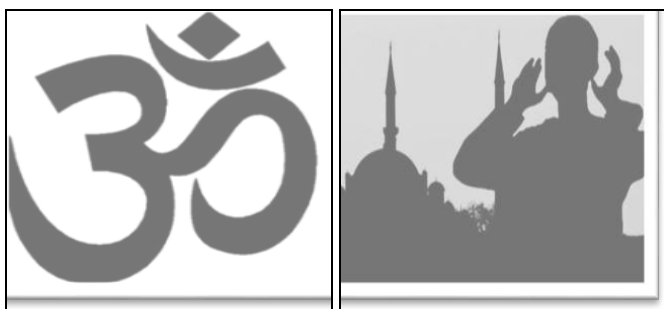
People perform Yoga with soothing instructions to help them meditate. In a soft voice, a man or woman would describe how to breathe, what to imagine, and what to feel. Recitation of the Qur’an serves similarly as guidance to the individual



Meditation

However, it serves not only to guide you during ‘Salaah’ but also to guide your life. Many describe meditation as a source of enlightenment as it leaves them at peace and eases their daily activities. ‘Salaah’ serves this exact purpose. Guidance and peace are core values in Islam to the point that prayer is needed five times a day.

Om’ (Aum) Vs. ‘Adhan’ Or ‘Azaan’



‘Om’

‘Adhan’

Om is a mantra, or vibration, that is traditionally chanted at the beginning and end of yoga sessions. The mantra is considered to have high spiritual sound and creative power. It’s both a sound and symbol rich in meaning and depth and when pronounced correctly it is actually *AUM*. *Aum* actually consist of four syllables – *A*, *U*, *M* and the silent syllable, in which *A* (*Awe*) sound starts at the back of throat and stretch it out. It starts the solar plexus and chest vibrating. The *U* (*oo*) sound gradually rolling forward the upper plate of the body and feels throat vibrating. The *M* (*mmmm*) sound touches the front teeth and feels the top vibrate. The silent syllable is the deep silence of the infinite. The symbolic three letters have characterized by i) creation, ii) preservation & iii) liberation respectively. (Saunders, 2013) ^[11], (Alpert) ^[12]

In Adhan have more benefits than OM sound because it has more syllable than OM. The Adhan in Arabic is the Islamic call to worship, recited by the *muezzins* (Who gives Adhan) prescribed five times of the day. The meaning of the word is ‘to listen, to hear, and be informed about’. Azan sounds highly meaningful as it contains the language of glorifying the Lord and His Messenger (*pbuh*). It starts with ‘Allah is the Greatest’ (four times) which is to testify the ultimate power of the Creator of the universe. The next phrase, ‘There is none worthy of worship except Allah’ justifies the very first criterion of a Muslim’s faith to believe in One Allah’s Supremacy and comparing none to Him. This follows up with bearing witness that the Prophet (*pbuh*) is the Messenger of Allah. Next the azan says, ‘Come to Salaah’ and ‘Come towards Success’ which are meant to inspire the Muslims about the prayers as being the key source of one’s success in this world and Hereafter. (Hedayat, 2017) ^[13]

Others Aspect of Salaah

There is some other aspect of performing ‘Salaah’ which are different from Yoga exercise. Here, some of them are presented:

Wudu (Ablution) The purification and preparation

Any act of worship in Islam requires the devotee to make an intention and perform physical cleansing and ready himself spiritually. The term *Wudu* broadly translates to ablution which Muslims perform before the ‘Salaah’ by washing their hands, face and feet in a specific order. This in itself is an act of worship since it preconditions the person to perform a serious and sacred duty. The Prophet (SAW) has said that Wudu does not only clean the person physically but also washes off his sins committed by the washed parts through the dripping water as evident from this *Hadith*, A Muslim who purifies (himself) and completes purification as enjoined upon him by *Allah* and then offers the ‘Salaah’, that will be expiatory (of his sins he committed) between these (‘Salaah’). (*Sahih Muslim Book 2, Book of Purification, Hadith: 0444*). Before every mandatory ‘Salaah’ or when one intends to recite the Holy Qur’an the Muslim performs ‘Wudu’ and thereby maintains a high level of physical cleanliness and spiritual purity. The mind is put to rest from worldly distractions and stress as the act of ablution conditions the psyche to focus singularly on the act of obedience and submission to His will. By commencing the ‘Salaah’ with clean body and clear intention the worshiper enters into a state of mind appropriate to communicate with Allah. This is an exclusive act performed at least five times by the Muslims and has scientifically been noted to relax the mind and reduce stress levels as the spirituality overtakes any worldly concern.

Niyyah The intention towards Salaah

Expression of intention called *Niyyah* in Arabic to perform the ‘*Salaah*’ is an essential precondition and is usually done within one's heart appropriately for the ‘*Salaah*’ of the time. With the intention, the worshiper is committed to complete the action as prescribed and to obey all the rules therein in order that his prayer is accepted and rewarded.

Benefits of Salaah comparing with Yoga

There is great correlation between ‘*Salaah*’ and Yoga. Yoga rejuvenates the mechanism of body and mind. Yoga Therapy is a refreshing process as well as a cost-effective solution; tries to find out the very root cause of diseases. It helps to restore harmony among various components of lifestyle-physical, social, emotional, spiritual, mental and psychological. The basic concept of Yoga is to relish and cherish the life with exhilarating excitement. The system provides psychological and emotional well-being. Being drugless therapies, it enhances sustainable and functional ability of the body. The same case is also with ‘*Salaah*’. Yoga and ‘*Salaah*’ is certainly a substitute of stress and disease free personality. There are many benefits by performing ‘*Salaah*’ like physical health benefits, Spiritual benefits and all other medical benefits which can be considered as benedictory contribution in Islamic life.

Conclusions

A number of attempts in the study have been made to relate ‘*Salaah*’ to a popular ancient heritage for exercise. Yoga has been known for its scientific basis as a healthy lifestyle practice for thousands of years (Sayeed & Prakash, 2013) [14]. Today, Yoga, regardless of its religious affiliation, has become one of the most popular fitness practices all over the world. In India, it has been consistently applied for centuries for its curative powers of movement. Several ‘*Asanas*’ (physical postures) of Yoga may not be possible to follow in healthcare practices in the absence of the professional supervision for desirable advantage, Muslims have had the blessing of ‘*Salaah*’ that has since fourteen hundred years become an integral part of their daily activities with physical, psychological, social and spiritual benefits. The absence of Yoga in Islamic life, ‘*Salaah*’ will fulfil the needs of Yoga. Here, the authors would suggest to every Muslim individual to perform ‘*Salaah*’ regularly five times in a day for their better human life. It can reduce every type of physical and medical problems as well as psychological problems of the individual.

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