

An Analytical Investigation Of The Concept Of Pratyahara In The Yoga Upanishads.

Ashok S^{*1}, Dr. Ramesh Babu K²

Abstract:

Pratyahara, a pivotal component of the eight limbs of yoga, represents the withdrawal of the senses from external distractions, creating a bridge between the physical and mental aspects of yoga practice. This abstract provides an overview of an analytical investigation into the profound concept of Pratyahara as elucidated in the Yoga Upanishads. Drawing on a range of ancient texts, this research delves into the historical and philosophical underpinnings of Pratyahara, unveils its techniques, and explores its contemporary relevance. By employing a multifaceted approach, including textual analysis, historical context, and practical application, this study unveils the multifaceted dimensions of Pratyahara, offering a comprehensive understanding of its evolution and significance within the yogic tradition. As a result, this research contributes to the deeper comprehension and integration of Pratyahara into modern yoga and mindfulness practices, fostering a bridge between ancient wisdom and present-day well-being.

Keywords: Pratyahara, Yoga Upanishads, mindfulness, yoga philosophy, sensory control.

Introduction:

The term “Pratyahara” is composed of two Sanskrit words, prati and ahara. “Ahara” means “food,” or “anything we take into ourselves from the outside.” “Prati” is a preposition meaning “against” or “away.” “Pratyahara” means literally “control of ahara,” or “gaining mastery over external influences.” It means the withdrawal of senses like a turtle withdraw its limbs into the shell. The term is usually translated as “withdrawal from the senses,” but much more is implied. In yogic thought there are three levels of ahara, or food. The first is physical food that brings in the five elements (Mahabhutas) necessary to nourish the body. The second is impressions, which bring in the subtle substances necessary to nourish the mind. The third level of ahara is our associations, the people we hold at heart level who serve to nourish the soul and affect us with the gunas of sattva, rajas, and tamas^[1].

Pratyahara is to take the senses away from their objects. There are different types of Pratyahara. According to Upanishads, the senses are always involved with objects. Pratyahara is to force them away or withdrawal from the objects^[2]. It is said in Shrimad-Bhagavad Gita that to surrender all, one's actions to God is Pratyahara. That is, to bring senses from external objects to internal objects or introversion is called Pratyahara. The nature of the senses is to derive material pleasure from their objects^[3]. This momentary pleasure gives pleasure in the end of life, sorrow, disease, old age, death. It is to attain transcendental bliss from material bliss, to self-orient the senses. That is, only if worldly pleasure is missed, it can be achieved through yoga. We can also use Pratyahara in daily life^[4].

The Upanishads that deal with yoga are Yoga Upanishads. The primary subject of these Upanishads is yoga, unlike other Upanishads which talk about the yogic techniques very rare. The basic Philosophy of the Upanishad to know the self or Brahman or realization of supreme reality^[5]. The root cause of the all evil and suffering is the limited manifestation of the self with the Ignorance or Avidya. Upanishad insists upon the Jnana and Yoga both for the highest attainment or eradication of the root cause of sufferings. In this connection Yoga Upanishads insist upon the efficacy of Jnana and Yoga equal in the path of Yoga siddhi^[6]. The Yoga Upanishads unfolds this Pratyahara technique in various Yoga-Angas. Concepts of Pratyahara described in the Yoga Upanishads were distinct to each other^[7]. Among the twenty Upanishads, only eleven Upanishads explained the concept of Pratyahara. Of the eleven Upanishads, the concept of Pratyahara interpreted is different to each other and it is the Integral component of the Yoga-angas, which are different to each Upanishad. According to the ten Yoga Upanishads, Pratyahara should practice over the mastery of Pranayama and before the Practice of Dharana^[8].

Corresponding Author: Ashok S

1. Research Scholar, Dept. of Yoga & Consciousness, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, Email: ashoks4yoga@gmail.com

2. Associate Professor, Dept. of Yoga & Consciousness, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, Email: rbyoga6@gmail.com

Aim:

1. To elucidate the historical context and evolution of Pratyahara in Yoga Upanishads.
2. To analyse and extract key passages and techniques related to Pratyahara from these ancient texts.
3. To compare and contrast the treatment of Pratyahara in Yoga Upanishads with other classical yoga texts.
4. To explore the philosophical foundations of Pratyahara and its role in yoga philosophy.
5. To assess the contemporary relevance and practical applications of Pratyahara in modern yoga and mindfulness practices.

Objectives:

1. To establish the historical context and evolution of Pratyahara within the Yoga Upanishads.
2. To dissect and analyse relevant passages from the Yoga Upanishads pertaining to Pratyahara.
3. To identify and elucidate the specific techniques and practices associated with Pratyahara in the Yoga Upanishads.
4. To compare Pratyahara's treatment in the Yoga Upanishads with its presentation in other classical yoga texts.
5. To assess the contemporary applicability and benefits of Pratyahara based on insights gleaned from the Yoga Upanishads.

Methods:

The Twenty Yoga Upanishads, which are list the Muktika Upanishad were included in this study and collected from the Andhra University Library. Though there are lot of English translated books on the Upanishads with the commentaries, but only the original meaning of Sanskrit slokas of the Yoga Upanishad were considered.

Discussion

7.1 Concept of Pratyahara in Yoga Upanishads

The Amritanada, Kshurika, Tejobindu, DhyanaBindu, Yogatattva, Trishiki Brahmana, Yoga Chudamani, Mandala Brahmana, Shandilya, Darsana, and the Varaha Upanishads explained the Pratyahara as one of the Anga of Astanga, Shadanga and panchadasnga Yoga. The concept of Pratyahara in this Upanishads was illustrated according to the Upanishad perspective.

7.2 Amritanada Upanishad

The Amrita-Nada unfolds Sadanga Yoga. In which Pratyahara is the first limb of six limbs. According to this Upanishad, Pratyahara is when one merely thinks of the five objects of sense, such as sound, etc., as also the very unsteady mind as the reins of Atman and through the Practice of Pratyahara can burnt the bad associations.

7.3 Kshurika Upanishad

This Upanishad unfolds eight limbs of Yoga, in which Pratyahara is the fifth limb of eight limbs. According to this, Pratyahara is bringing the senses under control and made his Atman, firm and strong in the heart, Breath in and mentally chant om of four mantras and hold in the air slightly lifting your chest, hip and neck and breathe out gradually, the two ankles and the two shanks, the two knees, similarly in the two thighs and the anus, the genital organ and other marman.

7.4 Tejobindu Upanishad

This Upanishad explains the Panchadasnga Yoga to know the Transcendental Brahman. According to this, Pratyahara is the twelfth of fifteen limbs of Yoga and it defines, the pleasant experience of the Chitta through Manas, when it finds the Atman (the Brahman) in the objects of senses, should be known as Pratyahara and practised often and often.

7.5 DhyanaBindu Upanishad

This Upanishad unfolds the sadanga yoga, in which Pratyahara is the third limb of the six limbs. According to this Upanishad, Pratyahara is the withdrawal of the 'I'-ness from the body and other non-Atmic things into the innermost Atman.

7.6 Yogatattva Upanishad

This Upanishads describes two types of Pratyahara in the fifth anga of Astangas. According to this Upanishad, Pratyahara is the withdrawal of the organs of perception and action from the objects of pleasure is first type. The other type of Pratyahara is withdrawal by the Yogin through the performance of Kumbhaka.

7.7 Trishiki Brahmana Upanishad

According to this Upanishad, Pratyahara is the fifth anga of Astangas Yoga. It defines Pratyahara as the with-holding of the Prana at eighteen seats of Marman of the body and changing the seat from one to another. The eighteen Marma Sthana are the big toes of the feet, Ankles, Shanks, Knees, Thighs, Roots of thighs, Anus, Genitals, Trunk, Navel, Heart, Throat, Root of hands, Elbows, The root of the palate, The root of the nose, Eyes, and the root of the forehead and upper part.

7.8 Yoga Chudamani Upanishad

This Upanishad unfolds the Sadanga Yoga, in which Pratyahara is the third limb of the six limbs. Pratyahara is said to be the withdrawal of the eye and other sense organs are roaming at large in the gratification of sensual pleasures to each of the organ respectively. It also defines that, by practising the twelve Pranayama is said to be Pratyahara and twelve Pratyahara is said to be Dharana.

7.9 Mandala Brahmana Upanishad

This Upanishad unfolds eight limbs of Yoga, in which Pratyahara is the fifth limb of eight limbs. According to this, Pratyahara is the withholding of the mind from the objects wherein the senses indulge in functioning or the attraction to the sensual pleasure.

7.10 Shandilya Upanishad

According to this Upanishad, Pratyahara is the fifth anga of the eight angas. It explained the five types of Pratyahara. 1. The forcible withdrawal of the organs of perception, from the sensual pleasures is Pratyahara. 2. Whatever one sees, looking upon all that as the Atman, is Pratyahara. 3. The giving up of the fruits of the observances prescribed for every day is Pratyahara. 4. Turning one's face away from all sensual pleasures is Pratyahara. 5. The projecting of the vital air in to the eighteen Marmans in the prescribed order, is the Pratyahara. The eighteen vital parts are in the feet, the big-toes of the feet, ankles, shanks, knees, thighs, anus, genitals, navel, heart, throat, cavity of the throat, palate, nostrils, eyes, middle of the eyebrows, forehead, and crest. In them should the practitioner perform Pratyahara in order, by projecting upwards into and withdrawing back from them respectively.

7.11 Darsana Upanishad

This Upanishad unfolds eight limbs of Yoga, in which Pratyahara is the fifth limb of eight limbs. It explained the five types of Pratyahara, two other techniques of Pratyahara (Pratyahara with the retention of breath and Pratyahara with Vedanta). The five types are: 1. The forcible bringing back of the senses, which, in virtue of their very nature, roam about among the objects of sensual pleasure is Pratyahara. 2. Whatever one sees, seeing in all that the Brahman, with perfect control of the mind is Pratyahara. 3. Whatever one does, whether pure or impure, till the moment of his death, all that, he should do unto the Brahman is Pratyahara. 4. By performing his daily ceremonial observances and other rites intended for the accomplishment of his duties with the mental attitude that they are for the propitiation of the Brahman known as Pratyahara. 5. By confining the air from one place after the another place, from the root of the teeth thence at the throat should he confine the air; from the throat thence at the chest; from the chest thence the navel region; from the navel region the Kundalini; from the region of the Kundalini thence confine it at the Muladhara; then out of the Apana he should confine at the two hips; thence similarly at the middle of the thighs; thence at the two knees, at the shanks and the big toes of the feet should he confine it, this has been said to be Pratyahara. All the sins as well as the diseases of worldly existence can be perished by the practice of five kinds.

Conclusion:

The Tri-Shiki-Brahmana, Kshurika, Sandila and Darsana Upanishads elaborates Pratyahara as the holding of the vital air in the eighteen Marmans and withdrawal of it from one seat to another. The Amritanada, Yoga-Chudamani and Mandala-Brahmana Upanishads describes it as, the withhold of the mind from sensual objects. The Sandilya and Darsana Upanishads describe five types of Pratyahara. In the Varaha Upanishad, Pratyahara is mentioned in the eight limbs, but it does not explain the technique. The Sandilya and Darsana Upanishads describes five types of Pratyahara. The Darsana Upanishad only describes the outcomes of Pratyahara. Thus the eleven Upanishads only described the Pratyahara in the Yoga-Angas.

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