

An Analytical Study of the Pratyahara Concept in the Yoga Upanishads

Ashok S¹, Research Scholar, Dept. of Yoga & Consciousness, Andhra University,
Visakhapatnam, Email: ashoks4yoga@gmail.com

Chollangi Sri Sai Ratna² Research scholar, Dept. Yoga & Management, SVYASA
University Bangalore, Email: drratnamamsphd@gmail.com

Venkata Gangadhar K³ Yoga Teacher, Visakha Valley School, Visakhapatnam,
Email: venkata32@gmail.com

Abstract:

One of the most important of the eight limbs of yoga is pati, or the withdrawal of the senses from outside stimuli. It connects the mental and physical dimensions of yoga practice. An outline of an analytical study of the profound idea of Pratyahara as explained in the Yoga Upanishads is given in this abstract. This study investigates the historical and philosophical foundations of Pratyahara, reveals its methods, and considers its significance in the modern era, all while drawing on a variety of ancient sources. This research provides a thorough knowledge of Pratyahara's history and relevance within the yogic tradition by utilizing a holistic approach that includes textual analysis, historical context, and practical application. Consequently, this study advances our understanding and assimilation of awareness and consciousness.

Keywords: Pratyahara, Yoga Upanishads, Mindfulness, Yoga Philosophy, Sensory Control.

1.Introduction:

The Sanskrit terms prati and ahara combine to form the phrase praktyahara. "Ahara" translates to "food" or "anything we consume from the outside world." The preposition "prati" means "away" or "against." The term pratyahara literally translates to "control of ahara" or "mastery over external influences." It alludes to the drawing in of senses, much to a turtle pulling its limbs inside its shell. Although "withdrawal from the senses" is the typical translation of the word, much more is suggested. There are three stages of ahara, or food, in yogic philosophy. The first is actual food, which contains the five elements (Mahabhutas) required for the body to be nourished. 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 distancing oneself from the objects of one's senses. Pratyahara can take many forms. Objects are always a part of one's sensory experience, as described by the Upanishads. To pry them away from, or withdraw from, objects is called pratyahara^[2]. Shirmad-Bhagvad Gita describes this act of giving one's entire life over to God as Pratyahara. That is, to bring senses from external objects to

internal objects or introversion is called Pratyahara. Senses are designed to get a kick out of the things they encounter [3]. The happiness you feel now will help you through the pain of illness, old age, and death. It's about reorienting your sense of self toward something greater than the pleasures of the material world. That is, if the pursuit of worldly pleasure is truly desired, then yoga can help. Pratyahara has practical applications as well.^[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].

2. 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.

3.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.

4.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.

5. Discussion

5.1 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.

5.2 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.

5.3 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.

5.4 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.

5.5 Dhyana Bindu 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.

5.6 Yogatattva Upanishad

This Upanishad describes two types of Pratyahara in the fifth anga of Astanga. 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.

5.7 Trishiki Brahmana Upanishad

Pratyahara is the fifth anga of Astanga Yoga, according to this Upanishad. Pratyahara is defined as the withholding of Prana at eighteen Marman seats 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, Anus, Genitals, Trunk, Navel, Heart, Throat, Root of Hands, Elbows, Anus, Genitals, Tr The palate root, the nose root, the eyes, and the root of the forehead and upper part.

5.8 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.

5.9 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.

5.10 Shandilya Upanishad

According to the Upanishad being referenced, Pratyahara is identified as the fifth anga among the eight angas. The text provided an explanation of the five distinct categories of Pratyahara. Pratyahara refers to the deliberate and forceful withdrawal of the organs of perception from indulging in sensual pleasures. Pratyahara refers to the practice of perceiving all that one observes as the Atman. Pratyahara refers to the act of renouncing the benefits derived

from the daily observances. Pratyahara refers to the act of redirecting one's attention away from sensory indulgences. The act of directing the vital air into the eighteen Marmans in the prescribed sequence is referred to as Pratyahara. The human body comprises eighteen essential anatomical components, namely the feet, big toes, ankles, shanks, knees, thighs, anus, genitals, navel, heart, throat, throat cavity, palate, nostrils, eyes, middle of the eyebrows, forehead, and crest. The practitioner should engage in the practice of Pratyahara in a sequential manner, first projecting their attention upwards and then withdrawing it back from external stimuli.

5.11 Darsana Upanishad

The Upanishad elucidates the eight limbs of Yoga, wherein Pratyahara is identified as the fifth limb among the eight. The text elucidated the five distinct classifications of Pratyahara, in addition to discussing two alternative methodologies of Pratyahara, namely Pratyahara with breath retention and Pratyahara with Vedanta. There are five distinct types. Pratyahara refers to the act of forcefully redirecting the senses, which by their inherent nature tend to wander towards sensory pleasures. Pratyahara can be defined as the state of perceiving the Brahman in all that one sees, achieved through the attainment of complete mental control. Pratyahara refers to the act of engaging in actions, whether they are pure or impure, until the point of one's demise, with the intention of dedicating all such actions to the Brahman. Pratyahara refers to the act of engaging in daily ceremonial observances and other rituals with the mindset that they are intended to appease the Brahman, thereby fulfilling one's duties. The process of Pratyahara involves sequentially confining the flow of air from one anatomical region to another. It begins by directing the air from the root of the teeth to the throat, followed by the chest, the navel region, and ultimately the Kundalini. The air is then confined at the Muladhara, and subsequently directed towards the two hips, the middle of the thighs, the two knees, the shanks, and finally the big toes of the feet. This systematic confinement of air is referred to as Pratyahara. The practice of five specific methods has the potential to eliminate both the sins and diseases associated with worldly existence.

6. 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.

References:

1. Pradeep K S, Ajit K B. The Concept of Pratyahara in practice of Yoga. IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science. November 2019; 24(11):01-03.
2. Joshi, Hemlata. (2017). Yoga and Jeevan Vigyan, Jain Visva Bharati Sansthan Ladanu, Rajasthan. page no -13
3. Swami Krupalvanand. (2014). Asan and Mudra, Krupalu Muni Mandal Ashram, Malav, Gujarat.
4. Girishchandra T, Chandratre V. Pratyahara Regarding to Swami Kripalvanandji: A Study. Gap Bodhi Taru: A Global Journal of Humanities. September 2021; 4(3):17-24.
5. Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati. (2002). Yoga Darshan: Vision of the Yoga Upanishads. Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar.
6. Sumana P, Ramesh Babu K. Existence of Yogopanishads and their essence. Journal of Critical Reviews. October 2020; 7(16):3810-3813.
7. Valerie J R. The Upanishads. Penguin Group, London, England, 2003.
8. Saibaba CH, Ramesh Babu K. A Comparative Study of yoga-angas in Yoga Upanishads. Yoga Sastra Sangam (Conference Proceedings). February 2022: 121-129.
9. Upanishad Brahma Yogin. (1920). The Yoga Upanishads. The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Madras.
10. Srinivasa Ayyangar T R. (1952). The Yoga Upanishads. The Theosophical Society, Adyar, Madras.