

Yoga Journalism: Historical Perspective

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Abstract

The present research paper aims at clarifying the historical perspective of yoga journalism. It goes without saying that yoga is a spiritual science which unveils and discovers the self of the individual. Therefore it's indeed the science of self-realization. The pious current of yoga has been ever flowing since time immemorial through self- enlightened yogis and their spiritual discourse, writings, magazines and other ways of communication. The word 'yoga' is very broad and comprehensive in itself. Yoga journalism has made a remarkable contribution in propagating the message of yoga worldwide. Thousands of books have been written on yoga. The current of yoga is ever flowing since ancient times and credit undoubtedly goes to several books, magazines, newspapers and TV channels for making the current of yoga ever flow for the betterment of humanity.

Key words: Yoga, Yoga journalism, Communication, Newspapers, News channels

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Yoga: at a glance

Before exploring “The historical perspective of yoga journalism in print media, it is of course, desirable to know what yoga is?, what is yoga journalism? Therefore let us first see what yoga is? This question can be answered well if we begin with the meaning and definitions of yoga. The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root ‘yuj’, which means to yoke or to unite. In later times, however, another technical meaning came to be associated with the term, and this is derived from “yujir samadhau”, which means “contemplation”, or “absorption” (1).

The oldest use of the word yoga, as found in the vedic literature (e.g. Rigveda 114.9, Atharvaveda VI, 91.1) indicates a union of various things (2).

The Kathopanishada states:

“The supreme path begins when the five senses and the mind are stilled and when the intellect is silent. This tranquility of the senses is yoga (3).

The Yoga Vashistha defines yoga “as a device by which one go across the ocean of suffering; i.e. yoga is a means of living the life of a jivanmukta (liberated soul) which is the ultimate end of human life” (4).

Agni Puran (183/1/3) states;

“When the light of knowledge dawns on chitta, it becomes concentrated and becomes like Brahama Himself; and thus occurs the communion of the individual soul with the supreme soul. Such a concentrated state of chitta is called yoga.

The Gita defines yoga thus:

Yoga is equanimity in success and failure (5).

Yoga is excellence in action (6).

Yoga is the dissociation of the association with suffering (7).

Maharshi Patanjali in his *Yoga-Sutra* says:

“Yoga is the inhibition (nirodha) of the modifications (vrtti) of the mind” (8).

Swami Vivekanand says:

“Yoga is restraining the mind stuff (chitta) from taking various forms (vrttis).

Maharshi Aurobindo says:

“Yoga is a methodological effort towards self-perfection by development of potentialities latent within the individual” (9).

Yugrishi Sri Ram Sharma Acharya says:

“The general meaning of the word yoga is to unite. In spiritual language, the communion of the individual soul with the supreme soul is called yoga and the activities which are adopted to begin this is called sadhana (spiritual disciplines) (10).

Thus after a careful observation of the meaning and definitions of yoga we can say that yoga is the union of the individual soul with the supreme soul. Just as camphor melts and becomes one with the fire; just as a drop of water when it is thrown into the ocean, becomes one with the ocean, the individual soul, when it is purified, when it is freed from lust, greed, hatred and egoism, when it becomes satvic, becomes one with the supreme soul. We can say that yoga is a practical path to self-realization, a means of attaining enlightenment by purifying the entire being, so that the mind-body can experience the absolute reality underlying the illusions of everyday life. Yoga can be said to constitute the very essence of the spirituality of India. Yoga, the art of right living has come down to us from our rishis from time immemorial. Thus yoga is the science that teaches us the method of uniting the individual soul with the Universal soul, of merging the individual will in the cosmic will; of experiencing our oneness with the divine consciousness.

What is Yoga journalism?

Yoga journalism can be defined as gathering, selecting, interpreting and disseminating yoga related news and views. In other words, the reporting of yoga related news in newspapers, magazines and TV Channels can be called yoga journalism. For example The Times of India has a column called speaking tree. The Hindu runs the same information under the column religion, Hindustan Times under the column inner voice, Economic Times, under the column ‘Cosmic

Uplinck', Hindustan under 'Manasa Vacha Karmana', Dainik Jagran under 'Urja', Amar Ujala, 'Antaryatra', Rashtriya Sahara under 'Satsang'.

The objective of these columns is to report on different aspects of yoga and spirituality as well. We often find yoga and spirituality appearing under these columns in some form or the other.

Historical Perspective:

India is the country of Rishis, Yogis, and philosophers. Therefore it is but natural that yoga and spirituality flows through our culture. Then how can the field of literature and journalism be exceptions? How can they be untouched? Or how can they remain aloof from it? While there has been separate publication of yoga and spiritual magazines, spirituality related material has of course been publishing or appearing in almost all the Hindi newspapers and some other magazines, as well in some form or the other.

Udant Martand, the first Hindi newspapers, can be taken for example. Published in 1826 this newspapers had some spirituality related material, as well *Prabuddha Bharat* (or Awakened India), a monthly journal of the Ramkrishna order started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896 was, indeed, a good beginning in the field of yoga journalism. In 1909 Maharshi Aurobindo started the weekly magazine "*Karmayogini*". In *Karmayogi* as its name suggests, he would write articles on the practical form of karma yoga. His writing awakened the consciousness of the masses. Through his writings he provided a new spiritual vision to the masses. In his life he wrote several inspiring books depicting the real form of yoga and spirituality like *savitri*, *Divya Jivan*, *yoga samanvaya*, *Ved Rahasya*, *yoga ke adhar* etc (11). In 1909 he also initiated a weekly magazine 'Dharma' in Bengali. The monthly "*Yoga Pracharak*" started in 1924 from Kashi under the editorship of Sri Abhyananda Saraswati provided material on Yoga and Spirituality. Likewise "*Yoga Rahasya*" published in 1925 from very kashi under the editorship of Ramchandra Balbanta Dogre. In the same way, the publication of the

monthly '*samanvaya*' started in 1922 by Ramkrishna Mission. The editor of this journal was Swami Madhavandanda. This journal contributed a lot in providing authentic information on yoga and spirituality. In '*samanvaya*' there used to be the gospels of Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda. The life sketch of saints and yogis would publish in '*samanvaya*' (12).

No doubt, spirituality related material used to be published in almost all the literary, social and political papers and magazines in some form or the other under any columns, but till now there had been no publication of a purely spiritual magazine. The yogic or spiritual communication in its real term had begun with the publication of the monthly journal kalyan, in Aug, 1926, printed in venkateshwar steam press, published by satsang Bhawan Bombai. From Feb. 1927 the printing and publication of Kalyan started from Gita press Gorakhpur. Sri Hanuman Prasad Poddar had the mastery/command over many languages like Hindi, Bengali, Assamese, Odiya, Gujrati, Marathi, Sanskrit and English. Having translated the gospels and life sketches (of saints and yogis of different states) into Hindi and English Poddar ji began to publish them in kalyan. He would also invite articles on yoga and spirituality from scholars of different languages and states and translate them into Hindi to publish in kalyan.

The editorial department of "*Kalyan*" had the cooperation of many scholars like Sri Chimanlal Goswami, Pt. Lakshman Narayan Garde, Sri Gauri Shankar Dwivedi, Pt. Shivnath Dube, Pt. Jankinath Sharma, Sri Shantanu Dwivedi, Pt. Ramnarayan Dutta, Shasti Sahityacharya, Sri sudarshanChakra. The Gita Press was determined to make the Kalyan reach out to the common masses at lower cost. That is why very nominal price was fixed for Kalyan (13).

Every year *Kalyan* published its special annual issue of 600-700 pages. *Kalyan* provided material on spiritual secrets and on saints and sages of different religions and countries. From the very beginning *Kalyan* had been getting the cooperation of great sages, saints and philosophers. Scholars like St. prabhudutta

Brahmachari, Mahamahopadhyaya Pt. Giridhar Sharma Chaturvedi, Dr. Vasudev Sharan Agrawal; Dr. Sampurnananda used to be the primitive authors of *Kalyan*. Till now *Kalyan* have published about 84 special annual issues and have provided authentic material on yoga and spirituality. The circulation of *Kalyan* is about 3 lacks. Its annual issues like santvani, yoganka had to be reprinted twice due to their high demand. *Kalyan* is also subscribed by foreigners in thousand of numbers. In 1972 after the death of Poddar ji Sri Chimmanlal successfully kept editing *Kalyan* till 1974. After his death Swami Ram Sukhdas ji took this herculean task in his own hands.

In fact, *Kalyan* set a mile stone in the field of spiritual journalism. Thereafter, the spiritual journalism in India has evolved in many facets. Many journals kept appearing and disappearing with the passage of time.

In 1926 the publication of the monthly journal "*Bhakti*" started from Bhagvad Bhakti, Ashram, Rewari, Punjab. Krishnananda Bhumananda would edit it. Till 1940 this journal kept publishing.

In 1928 the publication of the monthly '*Sudershan*' started from Sudarshan press Meerut with the objective of publicizing isvarbhakti etc. This was a pictorial journal in which articles of the great saints sand yogis like Udia Babaji Maharaj, Swami Shivananda Saraswati, Sri Madan Gopal Sinhal, Bhakta Ram Sharan Das etc of that time were given in '*Sudarshan*'. This paper remained publishing till 20 yrs. In 1932 the publication of *Sankirtan*, a magazine like the calibre of *Kalyan* started from Meerut by Sri Durga Prasad, a retired advocate of Meerut and a devotee and follower of sanatan Dharma. The objective of this journal was declared in its very first issue. That was to publicize and promote bhakti, vairagya, jnan etc. The name of Swami Shivananda Saraswati (of Rishikesh) published as the chief-editor of '*Sankirtan*' for five yrs. thereafter Sri Sudarshan Singh chakra and Pt. Ganga Sharan shil did the editing of *Sankirtan*. This journal published several beautiful and pictorial special issues of more than 250 pages. The articles of great saints were given in this

journal. This journal kept publishing for about 25 yrs.

In 1934 the publication of the weekly "*Vishwabandhu*" started from Lahore by Sanatan Dharma Pratinidhi Sabha, Punjab. The Sanatandharmi leader Goswami Ganesh Dutta was the patron and Sri V.P. Madhav was the editor of '*Vishwabandhu*' (14). In 1934 the publication of another monthly "*Svadhrama*" began from Meerut. In the beginning Sri Madan Gopal Sinhal started its editing. It continued the tradition of publishing a special issue every year. This was the paper of the Akhil Bharatvarshiya Sri Harinam Sankirtan Mahamandal later on in 1935 "*Svadhrama*" started publishing even as weekly; and Paramhansa Swami Shivananda Saraswati became its editor. In "*Svadhrama*" there used to be articles of saints and scholars on the principles of Sanatan dharma and spirituality.

In 1936 Mahamandaleshwar Swami Vidyananda started the publication of the monthly "*Gita Dharma*" from Kashi. This monthly which was pictorial and good in its calibre was edited by Swami Ramananda Sanyasi a great philosopher and grammarian. The objective of this paper was to publicize the ideal character of Lord Krishna and the message of the Gita, a classical text on Yoga. "*Gitadhama*" even published beautiful and important special issue every yr. Even in abroad this journal gained publicity (15).

In 1938 Divya Jivan Seva Sangh published "*Divya Jivan*" from Lahore. Swami Shivananda Saraswati was its editor.

In 1939 the monthly "*Sanmarga*" was started by Swami Karpatri Ji from Kashi. When its publication started from Sanmarga Press Benaras, Pt. Ganesh Shankar Mishra became the chief editor and Sri Durga Dutta Tripathi, became the editor of this monthly '*Sanmarga*'. Later on even Sri Govind Narhari Vaijapurkar was in the editorial department. Later on the publication of this monthly began even from Kashi, Kolkatta and Delhi. This monthly journal would provide good material on yoga and spirituality. The articles of Jagadguru Sankaracharyas of all the four peeths, and other great saints and philosophers appeared in *Sanmarga*.

In 1939 Sri Bhagwan Bhajanashrama of Vrindavan, started the monthly “*Nam Mahatma*” with the objective of publicizing the name and devotion to God. Primarily this monthly began under the editorship of Sri Gaur Gopal Mansinhaka. Later on the name of this magazine was changed and appeared with a new name “*Rishi Jivan*”. ‘*Rishi Jivan*’ remained publishing under the editorship of Sri Ganpat Roy Parik with a standard special issue every year.

In 1939, Pt. Sri Ram Sharma Acharya, the patron, founder of Gayatri Pariwar introduced the monthly “*Akhand Jyoti*” from Mahura with the objective of publicizing the true form of spirituality. As per its name this magazine proved as an incessantly lit lamp to spread the light of spirituality. Within a very short span of time this magazine gained enormous publicity and appreciation and began to be counted among the noted spiritual magazines like Kalyan with the enlargement of Gayatri Pariwar even the number of its readers began to increase day by day.

After ‘Kalyan’ it was of course ‘Akhand Jyoti’ which set a new milestone in the field of spiritual journalism or spiritual communication.

In 1940, Pt. Deenanath Bhargav Dinesh started the publication of the monthly “*Manavdharma*” from Delhi with the objective of publishing the message of the Gita and the Sanatan Dharma. Pt. Deenanath and Pt. Tilakdhar Sharma were its editors. “*Manav Dharma*’ published several beautiful and inspiring special issues on different aspects of spirituality.

In 1941 Sri Prem Mahamandal of Vrindavan started the publication of the monthly “*Prem Sandesh*”. Goswami Bindu ji was its founder and Sri Namra was its editor. This monthly would publish analytical articles, poems on the characters of devotees, Ramayan, Gita, Mahabharat, Puran etc. This magazine gained enormous popularity (16).

In 1944 Sri Bhaktivedant started the monthly Bhavaddarshan from iscon, Vrindavan with the objective of spreading the yoga of devotion among the masses.

In 1945 Akhil Bhartiya Yogi Mahamandal started the publication of the monthly “*Yogendra*” from Prayag. This magazine provided

inspiring and investigative articles on yoga and spirituality (17).

In 1946 Gita Mandir Agra initiated the publication of the monthly “*Karmayoga*” under the editorship of Sri Harishankar Sharma. This magazine provided scholarly articles on Karmayoga and the Gita. In its very first issue “Karmayoga” published articles on the Gita, Yoga of action and other aspects of spirituality written by noted scholars like Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, Swami Van Maharaj, Sri K.M. Munshi, Babu Gulabrai, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, Kailashnath katzu, Pt. Krishnadutta Paliwal, and Acharya Nardev Sastri Vedtirtha.

In 1947 Sri Keshvdas sastru introduced the monthly “*Santvani*” from Jaipur. This magazine would publish the gospels of great saints and yogis like Swami Ramteertha, Swami Vivekananda Samarthguru Ramdas etc.

In 1948 Sri Ram Krishna Sankirtan Mandal started the publication of “*Bhakta Bharat*” from Vrindavan. Sri Ramdas sastru was its editor.

In 1948 another magazine named “*Isvar Prapti*” (God realization) was started by Harinam Sankirtan Mahamandal, Amritsar under the editorship of Sri Ram Kumar Sehgal and occupied important place among other magazines depicting yoga and spirituality.

In 1949 Mumukshu Ashram Shahjehanpur introduced the monthly magazines “*Parmarth*” with the objective of publicizing the yoga of devotion, the yoga of knowledge and other aspects of yoga. This was published under the editorship of Swami Sadananda Saraswati, Sri Ram Svarup Gupta and Manjul Ji etc (18).

In 1956 sant Mahamandaleshwar Swami Vedvyasananda Ji started the publication of “*Gita Sandesh*” from Svargashrama, Rishikesh. This magazine contained different aspects of yoga described by Lord Krishna in the Gita. Sri Somprakash shandilya was its editor.

In 1959, Tulsi Manas prakashan (Bombai) started the monthly “*Manan*” inspired by Swami Nirmal Ji. Sri Harikishan Das was its editor. The articles of scholars like Swami Akhandananda Saraswati, Swami Sharananand Ji, Acharya Rajnish etc. would publish regularly in this magazine. This magazine earned a good

reputation among spiritual magazines because of the quality of its contents.

In 1959, Sri Swami Sitaramdas Omkarnath, the famous spiritual saint of Bengal started the publication of the monthly "*Parmananda*" from Kolkatta, with the objective of publicizing the yoga of devotion isvar-bhakti among the masses. Sri Rajkumar mansingh was its editor (19).

In 1960 Sri Gurudutta started the publication of "*Shashvat Vani*" under the editorship of Sri Ashok Kaushik. This magazine had qualitative and authentic articles on different aspects of spirituality described in Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas etc.

In 1966, the federation of the theosophical society of UP, MP Rajasthan, Bihar and Delhi started the publication of the monthly "*Adhyatma Jyoti*" from Kanpur under the editorship of Sri Gopalbihari Verma. This magazine would contain the articles, views, poems of scholars like Dr. Annie Beseant, Sri J. Krishnamurti and even of foreign scholars on spirituality.

In 1962 Bihar School of Yoga, Monger introduced the publication of "Yoga Vidya" and provided important information on different aspects of yoga. Due to the scholarly and scientific articles on yoga, Yoga Vidya gained enormous publicity and appreciation (20).

The publication of yogic literature and text books by Bihar School of Yoga contributed a lot in the field of Yoga Journalism.

Conclusion:

Thus these were only the brief description of some magazines which prepared the ground for yogic and spiritual communication.

After 90's this stream of spiritual communication began to flow through main stream journalism when newspapers started giving some space to spiritual coverage; with different spiritual columns in newspapers. During this era of magazine boom even a lot of

spiritual magazines appeared which gave a new dimension and integral form to spiritual communication.

A number of spiritual magazines introduced in this era, no doubt impressed and motivated the news magazines of main steam journalism in some form of the other to take notice of spiritual coverage as well.

It is another thing that the news magazines like India Today, Lokayat, Frontline, The Week, Shukrawar, Uday India etc. carry no regular column on yoga and spirituality as we have in most of the newspapers. Any specific news story, controversy etc, of course appear in these news magazines.

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