

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Yogic Elements in the *Brahma Mahāpurāṇa*: A Textual and Comparative StudySasmita Nayak<sup>1</sup>, Radha Madhav<sup>2</sup>, Santosh Kumar Shau<sup>3</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Abstract: The *Brahma Mahāpurāṇa* holds a significant place among the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas, while it offers valuable insights on yogic discipline, it does not present yoga in a systematic philosophical way like the *Yoga Sūtra* of Patañjali. Accordingly, this review undertakes a comparative examination of *Brahma Mahāpurāṇa*'s yogic teachings alongside Patañjali's *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga*. By exploring and contrasting the major strands of yoga, this study demonstrates that while the *Brahma Mahāpurāṇa* is structurally similar to Patañjali, it is essentially Puranic, emphasising (*bhakti*) devotion, *dharma*, and ethical behaviour, rather than the methodology of this body of knowledge. This paper illuminates the interrelation and the original devotional and ethical focus that are essential within the Puranic system of yoga, as seen from the respective perspectives of the *Yoga Sūtras*, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and *Haṭhayoga Pradīpikā*. The findings suggest that the *Brahma Mahāpurāṇa* advocate a holistic approach to attaining liberation, which synthesises philosophical understanding, ethical conduct, and *bhakti*.

## KEYWORDS

• *Brahma Mahāpurāṇa* • *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* • *Dharma* • *Bhakti* • *Mokṣa*

## INTRODUCTION

The *Brahma Mahāpurāṇa* (BMP) presents various aspects of spiritual life, including some of the most comprehensive, such as cosmology, ethics, and devotion-oriented content. Its

mentions of yoga are especially relevant to the perspective of the puranic reading of yogic discipline in Puranic discourses. The BMP does not consist of systematically and aphoristically following a style of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*.

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Still, comprehensively: on its own, it offers up a holistic view of yoga of doing virtue (ethical conduct), inner cleansing, devotion (devotional orientation) and meditative practice. Yoga is also closely interwoven with *dharma* and moral responsibility in the BMP, with its emphasis on righteous living as the key to spiritual progress. Part of this links the teaching of Purāṇa on liberation that is found in both the technical aspects of achieving freedom and in the integration of all three devotion, *dharma*, as well as self-control itself.<sup>7,8</sup>

This paper presents a review of the major yogic elements in the BMP, and considers how the components relate to the *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* system. It is meant to demonstrate the unique devotional-ethical orientation of the BMP's interpretation of yoga by comparing these teachings with Pātañjali's model and with other Puranic notions of spiritual discipline more generally. Accordingly, in the present study, we explore elements of yoga as expressed in the BMP, with particular regard to its textual structure, philosophical significance, and similarity to other classical yogic traditions.

## METHODOLOGY

This review adopts a textual and comparative approach, focusing on the Bhagavad Purana verses, which discuss *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga*, *yama*, *niyama*, and practices aimed at achieving liberation. Such verses are then recognised and analysed alongside classical references, including but not limited to the *Pātañjali Yoga Sūtra* (PYS), *Bhagavad Gītā* (BG) and *Hathayoga Pradīpikā* (HYP). This approach consists of three phases: the first phase involves the recognition and interpretation of yogic references in the BMP; the second phase compares these with sources in classical texts to highlight their similarities and differences. This integrated approach helps us understand how the BMP aligns yoga with its moral and devotional elements.

### *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga in the Brahma Mahāpurāṇa*

The BMP also provides a unique explanation of *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga*, which is based on the relationship between Pātañjali's systematisation and the Puranic influence on *dharma* (moral order) and *bhakti* (devotion). However, its yogic practice is not referred to as *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga*. Yoga consists of eight limbs, and the text mentions that it logically leads us towards liberation (*mokṣa*).

However, it places these within a broader model of Puranic religiosity, emphasising a blend of philosophical rigour and moral conduct, with a focus on a devotional approach. This approach offers many opportunities for comparison with Pātañjali's *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga*, which is described in similar terms but is more philosophically oriented than devotionally oriented.

### *Yamas and Niyamas*

एतस्य भूत-भूतस्य दृसत्तं स्थावर जङ्गमम्/

ध्वानमध्ययनं, दानं सत्यं धैर्यं कृष्मा तथा// [BMP 128.45]

सौचं चैवात्मनःशुद्धिर् इन्द्रवाणाम् च नगिरहः

एतैर् वविरधाते तेजः दवरिमङ्गि चापकर्षति// [BMP 128.46]

Meaning: All entities, whether animate or inanimate, should engage in practices such as (*dhyānam*) meditation, (*adhyayanam*) the study of sacred texts, (*dānam*) charity, (*satyam*) truthfulness, (*dhairyam*) courage, and (*kṣamā*) forgiveness. These are the virtues upon which righteous action is founded. *śauca* (Purity of body), (*ātmaśuddh*) inner cleanliness (*indriyanigraha*) control of the senses are such works that enhance a person's (*teja*) spiritual radiance and drive away sin.

The BMP pays special attention to the first two limbs, *yama* and *niyama*. These are not seen as limitations or initial observances but as virtues essential to purifying the individual and society. *Yama* is characterised by qualities like (*dhyānam*) meditation, (*adhyayanam*) the study of sacred texts, (*dāna*) charity, (*satya*) truthfulness, (*dhairya*) courage, and (*kṣamā*) forgiveness. These virtues transcend personal morality to serve as the ethical backbone of society. Similarly, *niyama* attaches great importance to disciplines such as (*śauca*) purity, (*ātma-śuddhi*) inner cleanliness, (*indriya-nigraha*) control over the senses, which collectively guide the aspirant toward higher self-mastery. Unlike the psychological framing found in the PYS, here moral and devotional orientation is highly stressed, and yoga practice is rooted in a *dharmic* worldview.<sup>8,5</sup>

### *Āsana and Prānāyāma*

नाभौ नधाय हस्तौ द्वौ शान्तःपदमासने स्थितिः/

संस्थाप्य दृष्टिनासाग्रे प्राणायाम्य वाग्यतः// [BMP 127.17]

समहृत्येन्द्रियग्रामं, मनसा हृदये मुनिः/

प्रणवं दीर्घमुददशिय संवृतास्यः सुनश्चिलः// [BMP 127.18]

Meaning: Seated calmly in the *padmāsana* (posture), placing both hands upon the navel, fixing the gaze steadily at the tip of the nose, restraining the breath and controlling speech, thus should one remain. The sage withdraws all the senses into the mind, fixing it firmly in the heart. With closed mouth and unwavering steadiness, he concentrates upon the prolonged intonation of the sacred syllable *praṇava* (Om)<sup>5,4</sup>

The BMP describes how the Yogī withdraws all the senses into the mind, fixing it firmly in the heart, and with unwavering steadiness, concentrates on the prolonged intonation of the sacred syllable *praṇava* (Om). This practice illustrates a synthesis of *pratyāhāra* (withdrawal of senses), *dhāraṇā* (fixing the mind within), and *japa* or *dhyāna* (meditation on Om). *Āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* appear in the BMP account primarily as supportive disciplines rather than as technical postures or breathing practices. The BMP further says that a Yogī who remains ever composed (*samāhita-manāḥ*), fully devoted to yoga, and constantly meditates upon *praṇava* (Om), undoubtedly attains the supreme goal.<sup>8,7,5</sup>

This teaching resonates with PYS:

तस्य वाचकःप्राणवः// [YSP 1.27]

तत् जपःतत् अर्थ भावनम्// [YSP 1.28]

This defines Om as the symbol of Īśvara. Therefore, the chanting of Om and meditation are the two main practices emphasised in both scriptures, practices rooted in ongoing discipline and steadfast devotion. Unlike Patañjali, which provides the philosophical and psychological framework, the BMP offers a devotional view, treating Om as the representation of divinity.<sup>3</sup>

*Pratyāhāra*

ततोऽस्य सर्वात्प्रज्जा गरिःपादादविदकम् ।  
मनसः पूर्वमाददयात् कूर्माणामवि मत्स्यहा ॥  
[BMP 128.50]

इन्द्रियाणि सेवेत वैराग्येन च योगवत्ति ।  
सदा चाभ्यासयोगेन मुच्यते नात्र संशयः ॥ [BMP 127.28]

Meaning: *Prajñā* (wisdom) flows effortlessly

through disciplinary practice, like water flowing from the foot of a mountain. But to reach this state, one must first master the mind, like a Fishermans' catching a fish hidden among tortoises. The *yogavit* (knower of yoga) is instructed to refrain from sensory indulgence (*indriyāni na seveta*). By cultivating *vairāgya* (dispassion) and *abhyāsa yoga* (adhering to yoga), for such an individual, liberation is certain beyond question.

The BMP elucidate *pratyahara* through its opening lines, which describe a dual yogic Path: *avhyāsa* (effortful discipline) and *prajñā* (spontaneous wisdom). Here, the mind is like a fish lurking among tortoises: restless, elusive, and difficult to control. Just as a Fishermans' patiently and skilfully catches fish, the Yogī remain attentive and persistent in mastering the mind. Once the mind is fully restrained, higher wisdom arises effortlessly, like water continuously flowing down a mountain slope. This signifies that genuine knowledge is not artificial but manifests when internal obstructions are removed. Patañjali describes it as *ṛtambharā prajñā* (YSP 1.48), a special truth-bearer obtained in deep meditation. The BMP parallels this idea by stating that once the mind is steadied, *prajñā* flows smoothly. In YSP, Patañjali emphasises that yoga is *citta vṛtti nirodhaḥ* (YSP 1.2). The fish symbolises the attempt to stabilise a wandering mind before it is carried away. The skill and patience of the Fishermans' relate to Patañjali's Twin Disciplines (*abhyāsa*: disciplined effort, and *vairāgya*: detachment, *abhyāsa-vairāgyābhyām tat nirodhaḥ*// [YSP 1.12-13]. *Vairāgya* acts as a barrier against the regression of attachment to the world. *Abhyāsa* builds stability and continuity in yoga. Without one, the other is pointless. There is no doubt that the verse concludes emphatically. This demonstrates that the Puranic understanding of yoga guarantees *mokṣa* for anyone who lives authentically in accordance with it.<sup>8,5,1,3</sup>

*Dhāraṇā*

सारथश्चि यथा वपिराःसदश्वान् सुसमाहतिः।

देशमषिटं नयत्याशु धन्वनिं पुरुषर्षभम् ॥ ३६ ॥ [BMP 131.36]

तथैव च द्वजि योगी धाराणासु समाहतिः।

प्राप्तोत्थाशु परं स्थानं लक्ष्यं उक्त इवाशुगः ॥ [BMP 131.37]

**Meaning:** O Brahmins, like a skilled charioteer who, with unwavering focus, quickly and expertly leads fine horses to deliver a valiant warrior to his intended destination, a Yogī, absorbed in (*dhāraṇā*) mental fixations, rapidly attains the supreme state, the ultimate goal, like an archer striking the (*param sthānam*) intended target.

These verses use a simile to explain (*dhāraṇā*) concentration in yoga: Here, the (*sārathi*) charioteer is the Yogī. The well-trained (*sadaśvān*) horses are the senses/mind. The (*deśam iṣṭam*) warrior/archer's destination is the Yogī's supreme goal, liberation. Proper control and focus mastery in (*dhāraṇā*) concentration. The term (*susamāhitah*) in BMP parallels (*dhāraṇā*) concentration in Patañjali.<sup>5,7</sup>

## Dhyāna

वालाग्रशतधा-गलक्ष्णं परमं पदम् ।

मनोदीपेन पश्यन्ति योगिनी ध्यानतत्पराः ॥ [BMP 127.22]

**Meaning:** The Yogī, who are completely dedicated to meditative practices, perceive a (*paramam padam*) higher state that is (*galakṣaṇam*) subtler than the (*vālāgraśatadhā*) hundredth part of the tip of a hair, using (*manodīpa*) the lamp of the mind (inner illumination).

It is said that ultimate reality, whether it is liberation, Brahman, or the absolute yogic state, is extremely subtle. This (*manodīpa*) lamp of the mind refers to (*dhyāna*) meditative awareness, where an unspoiled, unclouded mind serves as an illuminating tool to perceive what cannot be seen. These ideas align with Patañjali's teachings on meditation: (*etayaiva savicāra nirvicāra sūkṣma-visayā vyākhyātā*// YSP (1.44). Only in a focused mind can some subtle reality be articulated, which gradually leads to *Samādhi*.<sup>5,8,1</sup>

## Samādhi

यदा नखिष्यं चित्तं परे ब्रह्मणिलीयते ।

समाधौ योगयुक्तस्य तदाभ्येति परं पदम् ॥ [BMP 127.24]

**Meaning:** If the (*citta*) mind is freed of (*nirviṣayam*) all objects and is absorbed into

the Supreme Brahman, the yogī has reached (*param padam*) the highest condition.

It says: The mind with no (*nirviṣayam cittam*) external or internal object, no thought, no content. This is the state beyond *sa vicāra* and *nirvicāra samādhi* (YSP 1.44-1.46). The mind becomes part of Supreme Brahman, revealing the Puranic tendency to equate Yogic absorption with the consummation of Brahman (ultimate reality). For a Yogī who dwells in *samādhi*, the highest state (*mokṣa* or *kaivalya*). (*tasyāpi nirodhe sarvanirodhāt nirbījah samādhih*// YSP 1.51) Patañjali describes an ultimate state when the mind is cleansed of all impressions and seeds, transcending objects.<sup>8,5,1,3</sup>

## Comparative study with classical Texts

From its onset, the idea of Yoga in the BMP is indeed clearly close to the existing Yogic traditions of India, though it is richly blended with Puranic dimensions based on *dharma* and *Bhakti*. Comparison with three seminal texts, PYS, BG, and HYP, shows a combination of close integration of the philosophical roots, practical approach and final purpose.

## Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras (PYS)

Similar to the Patañjala system of the *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga*, the BMP shows strong parallels. The Purāṇa, for example, elaborates on ethics such as compassion, charity, and truth (BMP 128.45-46), which align with *yama* and *niyama* in PYS (2.29). Additionally, the text elaborates on the practice of withdrawing the senses, or *pratyāhāra* (BMP 128.50), which is likened to a tortoise withdrawing its limbs, as echoed in PYS (2.54), and describes this process in detail. In much the same way, (*dhāraṇā*) concentration, (*dhyāna*) meditation, and *samādhi* can be classified as the first three advanced stages to liberation (BMP 131.36-37). At the same time, the structure of Patañjali's *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* fits well with this description.

Additionally, the Purāṇa articulates *abhyāsa* (constant practice) and *vairāgya* (detachment) as prerequisite conditions for Yoga (BMP 127.28), which is echoed in PYS (1.12-16), where these are explicitly stated as the two foundational principles of yogic discipline. The concept of mindhood as uniting together without the coalescence of objects into the Brahman (BMP 127.24) resembles seedless *samādhi* in PYS (1.51). Thus, the structural and

methodological bases of yoga in the Purāṇa are deeply connected with the Pātañjala framework.<sup>1,3</sup>

However, there is some contrast as well. Patañjali emphasises the psychological and metaphysical dualism of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, with the goal of *kaivalya* (isolation of pure consciousness) in mind. The BMP repositions *samādhi* not as separation, but as union or oneness with the supreme Brahman or attainment of the highest state (BMP 127.22, 127.24). The language is very devotional, refraining from metaphysical isolation to divine realisation. Similarly, the Purāṇa adopts the Pātañjala construction of *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga* and reinterprets it in terms of the Puranic theistic perspective.<sup>8,5</sup>

### **Bhagavad Gītā (BG)**

The BG also provides a rich comparative framework. The BMP and the BG all maintain that Yoga cannot be extricated from *dharma*. In the BG, Kṛṣṇa holds that the Yogī should not waver in equanimity (*samatvam yoga ucyate*, BG 2.48) whilst also fulfilling duties selflessly (*niyatam kuru karma*, BG 3.8). Likewise, the BMP connects yoga to moral virtues of truthfulness, compassion, and charity (BMP 128.45–46), positing that liberation is based not only on meditation but also on morally appropriate acting.<sup>8,5</sup>

An equally similar principle is the linking of devotional and inward restraint. The BG (6.47) considers the supreme Yogī like a devotee, and BMP interprets Yoga as closely related to *bhakti*, stressing the point that *samādhi* becomes meaningful only when the attention is on the supreme divine. Both also stress *sama-darśana*: equanimity and equality of vision (BG 5.18), as signs of Yogic enlightenment. Yet differences remain. The BG emphasises *karma-yoga*, where action is required without attachment (BG 2.47), whereas the BMP is less concerned with syncretising action and detachment. Instead, it places Yoga as a ritual form of devotion that preoccupies the body with meditation and abstinence directed toward Brahman. On the one hand, the BG links Yoga with duty; the BMP emphasises devotional detachment to realise our spiritual nature.<sup>6</sup>

### **Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā (HYP)**

The HYP is more technical in nature, focusing on posture, breath-control and physical techniques as the necessary practices of meditation and

*samādhi*. Instead, the BMP is less technical and does not concentrate on postures, gestures, or breath control as such. Still, a few concepts that share the same conceptual similarities can be detected. Both these texts emphasise (*avyāsa*) keeping up with the practices and (*vairāgya*) detachment for Yogic progress as being so important. They also prescribe dietary regimes as an essential discipline. The HYP places great significance on decent food too, cautions that one unwholesome diet would be an obstacle to Yoga by stating, (1.57) The YogīdñāĀśSŪūhṢṣrRṇNmMṭ should eat moderate and suitable food. HYP begins with the idea that if you want to succeed in Yoga, what helps you out is effort and renunciation. Also, in the BMP, it is recommended that it is a constant practice, renunciation of sensory indulgence, which results in a liberation (BMP 127.28).

The other common factor is that of a strong emphasis on sensory and mental regulation. Breath control as a balm for the mind and a modality for the body is prescribed by the HYP. In sharp contrast, the Purāṇa applies the analogy of the tortoise's limbs being drawn away from the body to illustrate this sensory limitation. Both agree that mastery of the body and senses is fundamental to higher realisation. But the differences are equally important. HYP is an organised manual, with details including postures, breath control, gestures, locks, and cleansing not contained in the BMP. In contrast, the Purāṇa emphasises *dharma* (the higher moral values) and *bhakti* (devotion), which are rooted in Yoga. In other words, HYP refers to the more physiologically pure vitality of Yoga; BMP means its morality, philosophy and ethics.<sup>5,2</sup>

## **DISCUSSION**

The BMP articulates a unique and exclusive interpretation of yoga, which synthesises tradition-based yogic structure with Puranic ideals of devotional integrity and ethical guidance. Although similar to the *Aṣṭāṅga* framework of Patañjali, insofar as the BMP has given priority to *dayā*, *dāna*, *satya* (BMP 128.45–46), *pratyāhāra* in BMP (128.50), *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi* in BMP (131.36–37), the BMP restates these practices with a theistic/Vedāntic perspective. The text stresses *abhyāsa* (constant practice) and *vairāgya* (detachment) as preconditions for achieving success in

yoga, by BMP (127.28), which echoes the base precepts of the *Yoga Sūtras*.<sup>8,5</sup>

Nevertheless, the BMP departs from the classic metaphysical goal of *kaivalya* and presents *samādhi* not as consciousness isolation but as Brahman congruence, attainment of the *parama-pada* in BMP (127.22, 127.24). It is a transition far more far-reaching than this, from psychological dualism to spiritual enlightenment. In contrast to the BG and HYP, the BMP is concerned with moral discipline and devotion for the individual, inner restraint, instead of more technical yogic techniques. The BMP thus offers a distinctively Puranic vision of yoga that fuses ethical living, devotion and contemplative practice as a single path to liberation.

The BMP similarly presents yoga as the original yogic doctrine with the Puranic devotion and ethical ideology. Although it is consistent with the *Aṣṭāṅga* model of Patañjali relating to virtues, most notably compassion, charity and truth, BMP (128.45–46), the practice of withdrawal of the senses, BMP (128.50), and the stepwise phases of concentration, meditation and absorption, BMP (131.36–37), theistic interpretations are offered. Because the text suggests that constant practice and detachment are necessarily part of the process, BMP (127.28), this speaks back to the foundational principles that underpin the *Yoga Sūtras*. By contrast, it is the classical metaphysical aim of isolation that the BMP rejects by not perceiving absorption as the solitude of consciousness, and only as the connexion to Brahman and then attainment of the highest state, BMP (127.22, 127.24). This is a fundamental transformation, in the spirit of psychological dualism, toward devotion. Rather than using technical yogic exercises, as is the case with the BG and HYP, the BMP focuses more on moral conduct, devotion, and inner restraint. Hence, the BMP projects a unique vision of yoga as a Puranic activity with a balance between ethical living, devotion and contemplative practice through which the yoga philosophy of liberation unfolds.<sup>2,5,7</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The BMP presents yoga as an integrated synthesis of classical yogic principles and the Puranic worldview. Although it adopts the structural framework of *Aṣṭāṅga Yoga*, it extends beyond a purely technical exposition by situating yogic practice within the broader ethical, devotional, and dharmic context. The BMP thus conceptualises yoga as a holistic spiritual discipline that unites moral conduct, devotional meditation, and social responsibility, rather than as a narrowly defined system of technique.

This reflects the Puranic effort to integrate classical yoga philosophy into a wider cultural and religious framework, thereby making it more accessible and universally applicable. The BMP connects the technical precision of Patañjali yoga with the devotional and dharmic dimensions of the Puranic tradition. In doing so, it presents yoga not only as a path to individual liberation but also as a constructive and ethically grounded practice shaping personal and social life.

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