

POWER OF MEMORY IN YOGA

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Abstract

The increasing recognition of the practice of Yoga to improve memory, intelligence, and creativity demonstrates its ability to promote harmony on the physical, mental, and spiritual levels. Yoga is linked to better physical health, a peaceful mind, and spiritual upliftment, all of which lead to a more balanced and holistic existence. This study explores the significance of memory in yogic philosophy, moving historically through the views of ancient times, contemporary thought, and scientific research. Beginning with a study of Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras' core concepts and their interaction with consciousness, it advances to recent works that dive into the idea of 'Memory' (smṛti) and its impact on consciousness. This paper also focuses on the relationship between Yoga philosophy and cognitive science, emphasising Yoga's holistic approach to memory. Then, practical applications such as mindfulness, meditation, and breath control are discussed as strategies for improving cognitive functions. Subsequently, this article emphasises the importance of memory capability in promoting harmony in all aspects of life, including the physical, mental, psychological, and spiritual domains. By combining ancient wisdom with contemporary viewpoints, one can gain a better understanding of the role of memory in supporting total well-being and enlightenment. As a result, one's life becomes more balanced and harmonious. Furthermore, research shows that practising yoga improves memory function, supporting the link between yoga and cognitive benefits.

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Introduction

Yoga, recognised as a transformational practice for comprehensive well-being (addressing physical, mental, and spiritual components), has kept the human psyche under control for ages. Memory is known as 'smṛti' in the Sanskrit language. Smṛti is defined in Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra as "an experienced object that is not lost from the mind" (Goswami, 2009). Given the constant influx of information during the day, the mind naturally filters and stores only essential or helpful information. Thus, training the mind is critical for maintaining a healthy level of functioning. Yoga techniques such as Āsana, Prāṇāyāma, and Pratyāhāra aid in memory enhancement. Yogic practices sharpen brain processes such as attention, cognition, sensory information processing, and visual perception. Patañjali divides mental functions into five categories, with smṛti (memory) being the recalling of previously recorded events (Goswami, 2009). The subconscious mind, or Cittaḥ, is involved in the act of remembering, with the brain functioning as the vehicle for educating the mind. Yogic terminology distinguishes four separate capacities of the mind: Manas, Buddhi, Cittaḥ, and Ahaṁkāra. Manas represents rationalisation, Buddhi represents intellect, Cittaḥ represents impressions, and Ahaṁkāra represents the notion of Ego. Cittaḥ, in particular, is where knowledge impressions are stored as memory and experience (Banerjee, 2014).

Memory has transforming potential in yoga, going beyond physical postures and breath control to explore the mind's recesses. Memory is viewed as a path to self-discovery in yogic philosophy, helping humans to transcend ego limits. The mind unlocks higher awareness, revealing one's true essence, through attention, meditation, and practices that reveal stored impressions. This memory study is not a nostalgic excursion, but rather an active process of uncovering patterns that disguise innate wisdom. Pratyāhāra, dhāraṇā, and dhyāna practices enable yogis to navigate memory, extracting insights underneath conditioning layers. Memory liberation permits yogis to transcend mental limits and attain eternal consciousness. Yoga and memory investigation offers self-discovery, transformation, and a profound connection to the inner consciousness.

Memory is a key concept in cognitive psychology that refers to the ongoing process of knowledge retention across time (The Psychology

of Memory, 2014). Psychologists distinguish between several types of memory, such as sensory memory, working memory, and long-term memory. Memory is associated with changes in the neural networks of the brain, with storage considered to entail changes in the strength of connections in brain areas associated with memory (How Memory Works, 2023). Memory is aptly described as an affection by Ralph Waldo Emerson, who associates it with our ability to remember things we like or dislike. Memory is a distinguishing feature of humankind, allowing us to create, record experiences, develop self-conscious associations, practise language, and know, gather, narrate, and write about our pasts. Human intelligence, which is profoundly rooted in memory, makes it a pervasive and necessary component of life, as well as a source of curiosity and sometimes challenges (Blight, 2009).

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- Explore Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras for memory concepts and the intricacies and practical implications of the smṛiti notion.
- Explore the intersection of yoga philosophy and cognitive neuroscience, specifically delving into the neurological basis of memory in relation to yogic principles.
- Study practical applications such as mindfulness, meditation, and breath control to determine their efficacy in improving cognitive processes.
- Facilitate a deeper comprehension of memory's capacity for practical applications, and insights into personal development, spiritual improvement, and mental well-being.

Methodology

This study explores the power of memory within the practical realms of yoga philosophy and its potential applications. The exploration primarily relies on an extensive review of relevant and validated scientific literature, including systematic reviews and meta-analyses sourced from Google Scholar, specifically focusing on the yoga doctrine. The methodology, which is characterized by its interpretive and descriptive nature, employs both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are drawn from various yogic texts, such as the *Patañjali Yoga Sūtra*, texts of Indian Philosophy, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, etc. Concurrently, secondary sources are gleaned from scholarly articles that intersect modern psychology with yoga, as well as books, research papers, and internet resources. This study categorizes information into classical teachings, contemporary interpretations, neurobiological aspects, practical applications, and

the holistic approach of yoga. A comparative analysis was conducted to identify commonalities and discrepancies across different periods. A framework was developed to connect ancient yogic wisdom with modern scientific understanding. This study presents a cohesive narrative, tracing the evolution of ideas on memory in yoga philosophy and highlighting implications for academic discourse and practical applications. The conclusion summarizes key insights and contributions, and a comprehensive bibliography ensures accuracy and consistency. Overall, this methodology provides a thorough exploration and robust analysis of memory in yoga philosophy.

Significance of the Study

The study “Power of Memory in Yoga” is crucial for exploring memory’s profound impact on yoga and its philosophical aspects. Memory, known as “smṛti,” plays a pivotal role in shaping spiritual practices, cognitive processes, and overall well-being within yoga. Recognizing the intricate connections between memory and yoga philosophy is essential for practitioners, scholars, and those seeking holistic well-being. This research delves into classical yogic texts and contemporary scholarly works, unveiling ancient wisdom in yoga and its relevance today. Systematically organizing information thematically, the study covers classical teachings, contemporary interpretations, neurobiological aspects, practical applications, and the holistic approach of yoga concerning memory. This study’s significance extends to academic discourse, providing a cohesive narrative that traces the evolution of ideas on memory in yoga philosophy. It bridges the gap between ancient yogic principles and modern scientific understanding, establishing overarching principles that define memory’s role. The critical analysis and implications offer valuable insights for future research, fostering a deeper philosophical understanding and guiding practical applications in yoga. As an outcome, this study contributes to current understanding while serving as a guide for anyone seeking to tap into memory’s transforming power in their yogic path and daily life.

Literature Review

Because of its potential benefits in improving memory and focus, the integration of yoga philosophy and cognitive psychology has gained growing interest. Several studies have shown that various yoga techniques, such as meditation, Prāṇāyāma, and controlled

breathing, have a good influence on human memory. Yoga practices, according to research, can improve perfusion in the sensory system and hippocampus while decreasing perfusion in the executive system. Yoga has also been found to successfully lower stress and enhance relaxation, both of which are associated with cognitive function (Saoji & Raghavendra, 2019). Yoga provides psychological benefits in addition to physical health benefits through breathing methods and Āsana, such as the ability to retain cognitive control, notably in the areas of attention, focus, and memory. Meditation has been shown to improve physical fitness, mood, anxiety levels, and cognitive performance (Abadi & Venkatesan, 2008; Berger & Owen 1992; Subrahmanya & Telles, 2009). Yoga, as a holistic discipline including physical, mental, and spiritual components, seeks to endow a sound body and mind (Mohan et al., 2002). Prānāyāma (breathing techniques) and Āsana (postures) are physical goals, whereas cognitive control over attention, memory, and arousal is a mental goal. It is claimed that yoga has the ability to cleanse the mind which is thought to improve the capacity to attend to important stimuli and then recall information (Heriza et al., 2004). The practice of Prānāyāma improves the processing of sensory information at the thalamic level (Telles et al., 1992). Specific yoga breathing techniques have been linked to improved spatial memory (Naveen et al., 1997), and “OM” meditation has been linked to greater mental alertness (Telles et al., 1995). The effect of meditation on the pre-frontal lobes energises the brain, resulting in behavioural changes such as increased ego, integrity, reduced psychological difficulties, depression, anxiety, and improved social skills (Houten, 2003). Memory has an important part in supporting progressive activities, psychological development, and skill enhancement through mental images, according to modern psychology studies. Cognitive scientists today believe that human cognition goes beyond the brain, highlighting the interplay between the brain, body, and environment as an important component of cognition (Clark & Chalmers, 1998; Clark, 2008; Zlotnik & Vansintjan, 2019). Memory, an essential element in mental health concerns, can either contribute to or correspond with underlying diseases. Forgetfulness is linked to depression, and memory connections are essential in anxiety and substance use disorders. Post-traumatic symptoms are inextricably linked to painful memories. Memories, as powerful as they are, can be a burden for people suffering from mental illnesses, retaining a record of painful or disturbing memories (Memory, 2023).

Unveiling the power of memory

In yogic texts, the power of memory is explored within the broader context of the mind, consciousness, and the journey toward self-realization. Here are some key aspects of the power of memory in yoga philosophy:

Smṛti (Memory) as a Mental Function

Memory is recognised as one of the mind's functions in yoga philosophy, referred to as "smṛti." Perception, thinking, judgement, and remembering are all cognitive faculties of the mind (Blomberg, 2011). It is also recognised as an agitated state of consciousness that operates through four Upakaraṇa instruments: Manas (the current state of Mind), Cittaḥ (memory), Buddhi (intellect), and Ahaṃkāra (the 'I' component of a living person). According to Maharṣi Patañjali, the mind is constantly changing, which he refers to as Vṛtti (mental change) (Taimini, 2007). Patañjali's Yoga Sutras mention five vṛttis: Pramāṇa (right knowledge), Viparyaya (incorrect information), Vikalpa (imagination or fantasy), Nidrā (sleep), and Smṛti (memory). These changes may result in ailments such as Avidyā (wrong knowledge), Asmita (wrong concept), Abhiniveśa (fear of death), Rāga (attachment), and Dveśa (disinclination). Maharṣi also defines five states of mind functioning, known as Cittaḥ bhūmi. These states are Kṣipta (distraction), Vikṣipta (sometimes steady), Ekāgra (one-pointed state), Niruddha (restrained mind), and Mūḍha (infatuated mind). Among these states, Vikṣipta, Ekāgra, and Niruddha are inspired and propelled by Sattvā (purity), Mūḍha by Tāmas (lethargy), and Kṣipta by Rājas (activity) (Radhakrishnan, 2011). Patañjali's yoga practices have been shown to improve cognitive performance and mental wellness, creating mental clarity and emotional stability. Concentration (dhāraṇā), the science of breath control (Prāṇāyāma), and meditation (dhyāna) assist individuals to quiet their mind fluctuations, establishing sustained focus, greater attention, and improved memory. Yoga Nidrā, a profound relaxation method, has implications for psychological well-being by helping individuals to traverse and cure the subconscious layers of the mind. Scientific research has demonstrated anatomical and functional changes in the brain as a result of frequent meditation, showing its potential for boosting mental well-being.

Role in Self-Realization

Memory is a powerful self-realization tool, allowing people to obtain insights about their thought patterns, behaviours, and the essence of the self by reflecting on prior experiences. It serves as a link between the past, present, and future on the path to self-awareness. Patañjali Yoga offers an eight-limbed route that leads practitioners away from kleśa (afflictions) and towards spiritual awakening and self-realization. Concentration, meditation, and absorption (samādhi) practices provide for a direct experience of one's actual essence. Individuals can transcend the limitations of the ego and achieve oneness with the divine or higher awareness through dedicated practice. Patañjali's teachings serve as a road map for those searching for the spiritual, leading them to freedom, self-transcendence, and the realisation of their inherent spiritual potential. Patañjali explains the liberated state (kaivalya) and how ignorance, ego, and identification cause separation. Practitioners awaken to their true essence and experience union through meditation, self-inquiry, and the breakdown of the egoic self. The goal of yoga is to achieve escape from suffering and eternal happiness.

Samnskāras (Imprints)

The Taittiriya Upaniṣad, a yogic philosophical text, defines the human body as having five sheaths or planes of being, with the third sheath described as Manomaya Kośa, which contains diverse mental processes. Manaḥ, or the mind, is the active portion that receives experiences and impressions obtained by the five cognitive senses. Cittaḥ, another component, acts as a storage system for sensory perceptions, storing them as impressions or memories. Cittaḥ then becomes the storehouse of an individual's karma and saṃskāras (impressions). Ahaṃkāra, the sense of 'I' ness or the faculty of identity, appropriates these impressions and stores them as personal knowledge. This identification often results in associating ourselves with the outer world, including the body, a concept challenged by yoga philosophy. Saṃskāras, or mental imprints or impressions, are formed by past deeds and experiences and have a profound impact on an individual's thoughts, emotions, and attitudes. Yoga philosophy emphasises the need of recognising and transforming these saṃskāras, which are said to be necessary for spiritual evolution. Understanding the subtle interplay between the mind, senses, and sense of identity, as revealed in the Taittiriya Upaniṣad

(Gambhirananda, 2001), is fundamental to this transforming process.

Purification of Memory

Within the framework of yoga philosophy, the narrative of reality unfolds elegantly through the fundamental distinction of two aspects: Puruṣa and Prakṛti. Puruṣa represents the ethereal concept of “consciousness,” a magnificent energy that illuminates our inner self. In contrast, prakṛti reflects the essence of “matter,” the tangible substance that shapes the world around us. In the *Patañjali Yoga Sūtra*, the defining verse (YS I-2) proclaims, “Yogaś-citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ.” (“Yoga is the restriction of the fluctuations of mind stuff”). The stilling of the mind reveals the seer or true Self. Patañjali explores further into the deepest aspects of yoga philosophy, classifying the mind’s change in Nirvitarka Samādhi as smṛti or memory (YS I-43). As the mind loses its essential essence in this condition, actual understanding of the object arises, resulting in Nirvitarka Samādhi. Furthermore, Patañjali defines four qualities enhance mental calm with the appropriate attitude: cultivating friendliness, compassion, gladness, and indifference towards happiness, sorrow, virtue, and vice (YS I-33). Moreover, the mind is purified through strong expiration, breath retention, or regulated inhalation (YS I-34), which contributes to the partial control of the mind and cleanses it from distracting thoughts over time (Taimini, 2007). Yoga practices, which include meditation and mindfulness, attempt to purify the mind and memory. By calming the fluctuations of the mind (Citta, h), practitioners improve perception and memory, ultimately leading to a profound comprehension of reality. In the sphere of yoga philosophy, existence evolves through the graceful division of two essential aspects: puruṣa and prakṛti. Puruṣa reflects the majestic concept of “consciousness,” an ethereal power that illuminates our inner being. Prakṛti reflects the essence of “matter,” the tangible stuff that shapes the world around us.

Memory in Yogic Psychology

Sri Aurobindo defined three types of memory in his writings:

Conscious Memory: This refers to organised memory, which may be recalled at any time. It is under our control and can be summoned at any time.

Subliminal Memory: This type of memory is capable of retaining knowledge that is inexplicable to the conscious mind. Hearing someone speak Hebrew, for example, can be preserved in subliminal memory and reliably recovered in abnormal states such as hypnosis. The extent of our waking or surface consciousness is exceeded by subliminal consciousness, which retains specific memories. It is not to be confused with the subconscious. In layman's terms, subliminal memory stores the entire, uninterpreted film of daily happenings.

Sub-conscious Memory includes the recall of impressions, habits, and impulses. It is further classified as having mental, vital, and physical components. The mental sub-conscience is home to recurring thought patterns, the vital sub-conscience is home to desires and impulses, and the physical sub-conscience is home to memories of involuntary physiological responses (Aurobindo, 1970). According to K. Ramakrishna Rao's alternative yogic approach, three sorts of impressions (Saṁskāras) are identified in memory (Cittaḥ):

Cognition and Knowledge (Jñānaja): Memory formed by mental oscillations (Cittaḥ -Vritti).

Emotional (Kleśaja): Emotional and instinctual memory.

Volitional (Karmaja): Memory as a result of volitional behaviour (Rao, 2002).

In yogic psychology, comprehending and working through these layers of memory is essential for spiritual development. These memories exist in the subconscious and unconscious mind, and by developing an awareness of and transcending these layers, a person can attain higher states of consciousness and, ultimately, freedom (Mokṣa). This process requires intense self-reflection, meditation, and deliberate practice in order to purify the mind and eliminate the impressions which connect it to external experiences.

Removal of Mental Impurities

Yoga practice, encompassing ethical principles (yamas and niyamas), physical postures (āsanas), breath control techniques (prāṇāyāma), and meditation, aims to purify the mind and enhance memory. Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras define the yamas and niyamas, which serve as moral and ethical rules for personal and social behaviour, promoting mental clarity and emotional stability (Satchidananda, 2012). Āsanas, or physical postures, help prepare the body for meditation by fostering physical health, flexibility, and balance. Performing

āsanas on a regular basis can reduce physical strain and stress, hence improving mental health and cognitive abilities (Iyengar, 1979). Prāṇāyāma, or breath control, regulates the flow of prāṇa (life energy) throughout the body. Nāḍi Śodhana (alternate nostril breathing) and Kapālabhāti (shining forehead) are techniques that are intended to cleanse the nāḍis (energy channels) and calm the mind, which leads to enhanced attention and mental clarity. Meditation, the ultimate goal of the aforementioned disciplines, is concerned with training the mind to achieve a state of deep consciousness and inner tranquility. Practitioners of mindfulness and mantra meditation learn to let go of unpleasant emotions like anger, fear, and resentment while also building beneficial mental attributes like compassion, patience, and serenity (Goleman, 1988). This mental transforming process not only strengthens emotional resilience, but also improves memory and cognitive performance, resulting in a more balanced and peaceful life.

Mind-Body Connection

Patañjali Yoga recognises the intricate relationship between the mind and body, which is consistent with modern scientific findings. The practice of yoga, which includes āsanas (physical postures), Prāṇāyāma (breath control), and meditation, has been demonstrated to improve symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Patañjali Yoga actively promotes total mental well-being and cultivates a happy mindset by fostering self-reflection, emotional management, and self-care. Yoga is thought to have a positive effect on the mind by improving mental clarity and memory.

Present-Moment Awareness

Yoga, an ancient and broad practice, derives from early yogic scriptures that emphasise the ageless directive to “be in the present moment.” This essential instruction is threaded throughout different core yogic teachings. Patañjali defines yoga in his Yoga Sūtra as “the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind,” and attaining this state takes the practitioner into the immediacy of the present moment (Taimini, 2007). Patañjali’s contribution goes beyond individual awareness by providing a thorough analysis of the universe’s cosmic order, the human position within that order, and the structure of the mind. The goal of yoga, according to Patañjali, is to peel back the layers of the ego and abide purely in the essence of the Puruṣa

– cosmic consciousness or, in other terms, God. As a result, Patañjali yoga practice not only seeks to be present, but also develops the realisation that the present moment is the Divine’s dwelling place. Prāṇāyāma is an excellent method to restore Prāṇa and train the mind to be present and aware. This practice cleanses and strengthens the physical body while also soothing and clarifying the mind (Gore, 1991). Yoga encourages fostering mindfulness in the present moment and reducing mental oscillations caused by remorse for the past or fear for the future. Individuals can improve their ability to recall and engage with experiences by orienting their attention to the present.

Yogic Techniques for Memory Enhancement

Certain yoga techniques are thought to improve memory and cognitive function, purifying the mind and increasing concentration. Among these practices are the following:

- Engaging in daily Dhāraṇā practices reduces the mind’s wavering character, resulting in a distinct sensation of calm throughout the day (Riyaz et al., 2007). This programme improves memory by exerting control over thought fluctuations.
- Dhyāna denotes a mental state free of sensuous ideas or distracting content. Moving beyond Dhāraṇā necessitates even more mental focus and concentration. Dhyāna’s practise expertly manages the mind, increasing awareness to focus on a certain issue. This increased consciousness helps to boost smṛti strength by decreasing Cittaḥ Vṛtti.

Karma and Memory

Karma, a Sanskrit term for action, includes both present and previous actions. It is regarded as more than just deeds in yogic philosophy; it is the repository of memory, where past actions persist as imprints impacting the current moment. This implies that karma is a dynamic force that has a long-term impact on our system, changing our memory and chemistry. Beyond a simple assessment of good or evil, karma embodies the essence of life – a memory that spans existence, crossing various realms and births. It promotes the notion of natural justice, holding people accountable for their own happiness and suffering. Every aspect of life shapes an individual, from birth circumstances to relationships and behaviours. Past impressions

shape thoughts, emotions, and actions. The collection of these impressions constitutes one's karma, which influences how the mind, emotions, and body function. To be free of the consequences of prior actions, one must first break free from the grip of karma. Actively interrupting the karmic cycle is one real way to begin this freedom (Mulla, & Krishnan, 2008). While karma appears to be deterministic, Yogic philosophy questions this view, arguing that one has the potential to change memories and positively impact one's life. Yoga practices such as Saṁyama allow for memory remodelling. Modern brain research backs up this adaptation, finding that deep thought can lead to memory sublimation. Focusing on good ideas on a regular basis actively erases negative memories and promotes a more fulfilled life. Patañjali emphasises the connection between karma and kleśa (afflictions), claiming that karmas based in kleśa bring about a variety of experiences in one's present and future lifetimes. As long as the kleśa exist, the vehicle of karma is fed, maintaining the cycle of lives filled with unavoidable pain. Patañjali defines saṁyoga as the source of pain in Verse II.17, emphasising the importance of dissolving the conjunction of the Seer and the Seen. Saṁyama is an integrated practise of dhāraṇā, dhyāna, and samādhi that stabilises the mind, nurtures intelligence, and extends consciousness. (Taimini, 2007). The relationship between karma and memory is emphasised in yogic philosophy, emphasising the significance of understanding and transcending the karmic cycle for spiritual growth. Individuals can modify memories and enjoy lasting satisfaction by focusing on happy events and eliminating bad memories, which is consistent with nature's evolutionary process.

Conclusion

Memory is important in self-realization, according to yoga philosophy, because it is interwoven with perception, reasoning, judgement, and consciousness. Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras examine mental issues through the Sattvā, Rājas, and Tāmas perspectives. Through practices such as attention and meditation, the eight-fold path leads away from afflictions and towards spiritual awakening. Yoga emphasises memory cleansing through meditation, which relaxes the mind and allows for more clarity. Through ethics, postures, and meditation, yoga's comprehensive approach purifies the mind and releases unwanted imprints. Patañjali's goal of increasing memory and engagement is aligned with yoga's emphasis on present-moment mindfulness. Dhāraṇā and Dhyāna practices help moderate mental oscillations,

while Samyama and constructive focus handle karma, or the long-term effects of past acts. Yoga philosophy combines traditional practices with modern ideas to reach profound self-awareness and oneness with the divine. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that merging yoga philosophy with cognitive psychology helps boost memory and focus. Meditation and prāṇāyāma are yoga techniques that improve memory by changing brain perfusion, lowering stress, and increasing cognitive performance. Yoga, in addition to physical benefits, provides cognitive control in attention, concentration, and memory.

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