



# ROOTED IN DUALISM, BLOSSOMING IN PRACTICE: SĀṆKHYA'S PHILOSOPHICAL GROUND AND THE YOGIC PATH TO FREEDOM

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**Abstract:** The close interdependence between Sāṅkhya and Yoga as two of the oldest systems of Indian thought provides a unique insight into the metaphysical and soteriological unity of classical Indian philosophy. While Sāṅkhya offers a metaphysical and epistemological scaffold explaining the dualistic nature of existence through Puruṣa and Prakṛti, Yoga particularly as systematized in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* translates these abstract doctrines into a structured, psycho-spiritual praxis aimed at liberation (*mokṣa*). This paper traces the origin of Yoga from Sāṅkhya, highlighting their philosophical interdependence, doctrinal convergences, points of divergence, and their respective contributions to Indian darśana (viewpoints).

**Index Terms:** SĀṆKHYA'S Philosophy, Yoga from Sāṅkhya Ontology, Dualism

## I. Introduction

Yoga, today celebrated across the globe for its transformative potential, is often perceived narrowly as a regimen of physical postures and breath control. However, beneath this modern exterior lies a profound philosophical tradition rooted in ancient Indian metaphysics. At the heart of this tradition stands Sāṅkhya, one of the oldest of the six *āstika* (orthodox) systems of Indian philosophy, whose dualistic worldview forms the bedrock of classical Yoga. Emerging as a system of rational metaphysical analysis, Sāṅkhya postulates two eternal realities Puruṣa, the immutable, conscious self, and Prakṛti, the dynamic, unconscious matrix of all material and mental phenomena (Larson and Bhattacharya, 1987). It is this sharp distinction and the call for their disentanglement that sets the stage for Yoga.

Yoga, most systematically formulated by Patañjali in the *Yoga Sūtras*, may be rightly seen as Sāṅkhya in practice (Bryant, 2009; Feuerstein, 1996). While Sāṅkhya offers a map of reality and the cause of bondage, Yoga provides the method for transcendence. The famed Aṣṭāṅga Yoga, or eightfold path, becomes the staircase by which the yogin ascends from the turbulence of prakṛti to the stillness of puruṣa. Though Yoga adopts Sāṅkhya's ontology and epistemology, it departs from its non-theism by introducing Īśvara, a special puruṣa, as the object of meditative surrender.

This paper aims to trace the philosophical lineage and development of Yoga from Sāṅkhya, highlighting their shared metaphysical assumptions, structural coherence, and methodological complementarity. Through textual analysis of the *Sāṅkhyakārikā* and *Yoga Sūtras*, as well as engagement with classical commentaries and modern scholarship, this study seeks to reveal Yoga not as an isolated system, but as the living embodiment of Sāṅkhya's theoretical wisdom, transformed into a path of lived spiritual realization.

## II. Doctrinal Foundations of Sāṅkhya Philosophy

Sāṅkhya, traditionally attributed to the sage Kapila, is a dualistic pluralism distinguishing between:

- Puruṣa: The eternal, conscious, unchanging witness (*draṣṭā*), devoid of qualities (*nirguṇa*), and incapable of action.
- Prakṛti: The primal, unconscious matrix of the material universe, composed of three guṇas—sattva, rajas, and tamas.

The Sāṅkhya system outlines 25 tattvas (principles) that evolve from Prakṛti under the proximity of Puruṣa, culminating in the material and psychological world.

According to the *Sāṅkhyakārikā* (Kārikā 23–34), Prakṛti's transformation is catalyzed by the mere presence of Puruṣa, though Puruṣa itself remains inactive. The bondage of the soul arises from the mistaken identification of Puruṣa with the products of Prakṛti, a metaphysical confusion which liberation (*kaivalya*) seeks to dissolve.

“*Tattva-abhyāsāt ca viveka-khyātir avāptah*” - Knowledge of the tattvas brings discriminative insight. (*Sāṅkhyakārikā*, Kārikā 64)

## III. Emergence of Yoga from Sāṅkhya Ontology

Yoga inherits the epistemology, cosmology, and goal of Sāṅkhya, but differs in methodology and emphasis. While Sāṅkhya relies on jñāna (knowledge) as the path to liberation, Yoga emphasizes sādhana (spiritual practice).

### 3.1 Ontological Parallels

Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* (I.2–I.4) echo the Sāṅkhya idea that suffering results from the confusion between the seer (Puruṣa) and the seen (Prakṛti).

“*Yogah cittavṛttinirodhah*” – Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind (*Yoga Sūtra* I.2).

“*Tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe'vashānam*” – Then the seer abides in its true nature (I.3).

Yoga adopts Sāṅkhya's 25 principles verbatim and builds its practice on controlling the subtle evolutes of Prakṛti, particularly *citta* (mind), *manas*, *buddhi*, and *ahankāra*.

## IV. Key Commonalities

Category	Sāṅkhya	Yoga
Metaphysics	Dualism: Puruṣa & Prakṛti	Same
Number of Tattvas	25	25 (adopts Sāṅkhya model)
Liberation	Discriminative knowledge ( <i>viveka</i> )	Discriminative absorption ( <i>samādhi-viveka</i> )
Cosmology	Evolution of Prakṛti	Evolution of Prakṛti with meditative control
Goal	Kaivalya (isolation of Puruṣa)	Kaivalya

## V. Divergences and Innovations in Yoga

Despite deep similarities, Yoga introduces theism and a systematic ethical-meditative discipline, which sets it apart from classical Sāṅkhya:

### V.I Theistic Element (Īśvaravāda)

Yoga introduces Īśvara as a special Puruṣa (*puruṣaviśeṣa*) untouched by karma, affliction, or latent impressions (*Yoga Sūtra* I.24). This addition makes Yoga palatable to the devotional theism (*bhakti*) that was influential in the post-Vedic period.

“*Kleśa-karma-vipāka-āśayair aparāmrṣṭaḥ puruṣaviśeṣa īśvaraḥ*” – God is a special self, untouched by suffering, karma, and impressions. (*Yoga Sūtra* I.24)

### V.II Emphasis on Aṣṭāṅga Yoga: The Practical Fulfillment of Sāṅkhya Metaphysics

The *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali crystallize the practical dimension of Sāṅkhya philosophy through the doctrine of Aṣṭāṅga Yoga, the eightfold path designed to control the modifications (*vṛttis*) of the mind (*citta*), enabling the practitioner to experience the pure witnessing self (*puruṣa*) untainted by the evolutes of *prakṛti*. Each limb of Aṣṭāṅga Yoga correlates with the gradual refinement of the mind and body, mirroring the Sāṅkhya model of psycho-physical evolution.

### a) Yama (Ethical Restraints)

Definition: Yama represents moral disciplines or universal ethical commandments regulating behavior in society.

Key Components (Yoga Sūtra II.30):

- Ahimsā – Non-violence
- Satya – Truthfulness
- Asteya – Non-stealing
- Brahmacharya – Celibacy or moderation
- Aparigraha – Non-possession or non-greed

Sāṅkhya Link: Ethical restraint controls the rajas and tamas guṇas and stabilizes the sattva necessary for introspection and discriminative knowledge (*viveka*).

### b) Niyama (Personal Disciplines)

Definition: Niyama consists of personal duties and spiritual observances that purify the inner faculties (*antaḥkaraṇa*).

Key Components (Yoga Sūtra II.32):

- Śauca – Cleanliness (external and internal)
- Santoṣa – Contentment
- Tapas – Austerity
- Svādhyāya – Study of sacred texts
- Īśvarapraṇidhāna – Surrender to God

Sāṅkhya Link: Niyama cultivates sattva by reducing tamas and rajas, aligning with Sāṅkhya's goal of transcending guṇas through inner balance.

### c) Āsana (Posture)

Definition: Āsana refers to seated postures that enable meditative absorption.

Textual Basis: “*Sthira-sukham āsanam*” – Posture should be steady and comfortable (*Yoga Sūtra* II.46).

Purpose: Āsana stabilizes the body to facilitate long periods of concentration without distraction.

Sāṅkhya Link: Control over the physical body—an evolute of *prakṛti*—is a necessary step toward detaching from material identity.

### d) Prāṇāyāma (Breath Regulation)

Definition: Prāṇāyāma is the control of vital energy (*prāṇa*) through regulated inhalation (*pūraka*), retention (*kumbhaka*), and exhalation (*recaka*).

Textual Basis: “*Tasmin sati śvāsa-prāśvāsayor gati-vicchedaḥ prāṇāyāmaḥ*” (*Yoga Sūtra* II.49)

Philosophical Function: Regulation of breath calms the mind and prāṇic energy, aiding in withdrawal from sensory experience.

Sāṅkhya Link: Aligns with *tattva viveka* by reducing the rajasic activity of the mind, making subtle discrimination possible.

### e) Pratyāhāra (Withdrawal of Senses)

Definition: Pratyāhāra is the retraction of the senses from their external objects.

Textual Basis: “*Sva-viṣaya-asamprayoge cittasya svarūpānukāra iva indriyāṇām pratyāhārah*” (*Yoga Sūtra* II.54)

Purpose: Essential for developing internal focus and preparing for concentration.

Sāṅkhya Link: Reflects the movement away from identification with *indriyas* (sense organs), considered evolutes of *prakṛti* in Sāṅkhya.

**f) Dhāraṇā (Concentration)**

Definition: Dhāraṇā is focused concentration on a single point or object.

Textual Basis: “*Deśa-bandhaś cittasya dhāraṇā*” (*Yoga Sūtra* III.1)

Function: Dhāraṇā arrests mental fluctuations (*vṛttis*), enabling deeper meditative absorption.

Sāṅkhya Link: Enables the intellect (*buddhi*), a subtle evolute of prakṛti, to discriminate between itself and puruṣa.

**g) Dhyāna (Meditation)**

Definition: Dhyāna is uninterrupted flow of awareness toward the object of meditation.

Textual Basis: “*Tatra pratyaya-eka-tānatā dhyānam*” (*Yoga Sūtra* III.2)

Function: A deeper level of awareness than dhāraṇā, where mental fluctuations cease and sattva dominates.

Sāṅkhya Link: Aids in *viveka-khyāti* (discriminative insight), which leads to detachment from prakṛti.

**h) Samādhi (Absorption)**

Definition: Samādhi is the culmination where the meditator and the object of meditation merge.

Types (*Yoga Sūtras* I.17–18):

- Savikalpa Samādhi – With seed (object-based)
- Nirvikalpa Samādhi – Seedless, absolute absorption

Textual Reference: “*Tadeva arthamātranirbhāsaṃ svarūpaśūnyam iva samādhiḥ*” (*Yoga Sūtra* III.3)

Sāṅkhya Link: Samādhi prepares the mind for the ultimate *viveka-khyāti*, leading to *kaivalya* (isolation of puruṣa), the shared goal of both systems.

**Conclusion: Aṣṭāṅga Yoga as a Psycho-Physical Ladder to Puruṣa**

Each limb of Aṣṭāṅga Yoga serves as a progressive purification of the psycho-physical apparatus (*prakṛti*) to reveal the pure awareness of puruṣa, in alignment with Sāṅkhya’s metaphysical vision. Where Sāṅkhya describes the problem (bondage through misidentification), Yoga provides the practical remedy (stillness through discipline and meditation).

In this sense, Aṣṭāṅga Yoga is the soteriological ladder rooted in the ontological soil of Sāṅkhya. As Swami Vivekananda said, “Sāṅkhya is the dry philosophy; Yoga is the watered garden.”

**VI. Philosophical and Historical Context****VI.I Shared Intellectual Environment**

Both Sāṅkhya and Yoga emerged in response to the existential questions posed in the Upaniṣads, especially regarding the nature of the self (*ātman*), the reality of suffering, and the means to liberation. Works such as the *Katha Upaniṣad* and *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* allude to the discipline of Yoga and the separation of self from matter, prefiguring the ideas later developed in Sāṅkhya-Yoga.

**VI.II Interaction with Other Schools**

- Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika criticized Sāṅkhya’s denial of a creator god.
- Vedānta, while accepting some Sāṅkhya categories, refuted its dualism.
- Buddhism borrowed psychological categories (like *vṛttis*) but rejected the eternal self.

Yet, the Sāṅkhya-Yoga pairing remained influential, especially in *Bhagavad Gītā*, which identifies Sāṅkhya as *jñānayoga* and Yoga as *karmayoga* (see *Gītā* Ch. 2.39; Dasgupta, 1922).

## VII. Conclusion

Aṣṭāṅga Yoga, the eight-limbed path, is not merely a sequence of disciplines it is a sacred ascent from the turbulence of matter to the serenity of spirit. Rooted deeply in the metaphysical soil of Sāṅkhya, each limb is a rung on the ladder from bondage to bliss. Where Sāṅkhya illumines the architecture of the cosmos through intellectual discernment, Yoga breathes life into that architecture with practice, devotion, and stillness.

From the ethical soil of yama and niyama, the yogin builds a foundation of virtue. With āsana and prāṇāyāma, the body becomes a temple, breath a hymn. Through pratyāhāra, the senses retreat like rivers reversing course. In dhāraṇā, dhyāna, and ultimately samādhi, the mind melts into the infinite, and the self-awakens to its true, luminous essence.

In the silence of samādhi, the last veil falls revealing puruṣa, the witness, the eternal. Thus, Aṣṭāṅga Yoga becomes the embodied poetry of Sāṅkhya's philosophical prose, translating abstract dualism into a lived, liberating experience. It is the soul's pilgrimage from multiplicity to solitude, from motion to stillness, from illusion to truth. Yoga, then, is Sāṅkhya set to rhythm the rhythm of breath, stillness, and sacred realization.

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