

50 Years of Yoga Chakra

A quiet celebration

Swami Shankarananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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of Yoga Chakra

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Nivaran

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Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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Published by Yoga Publications Trust

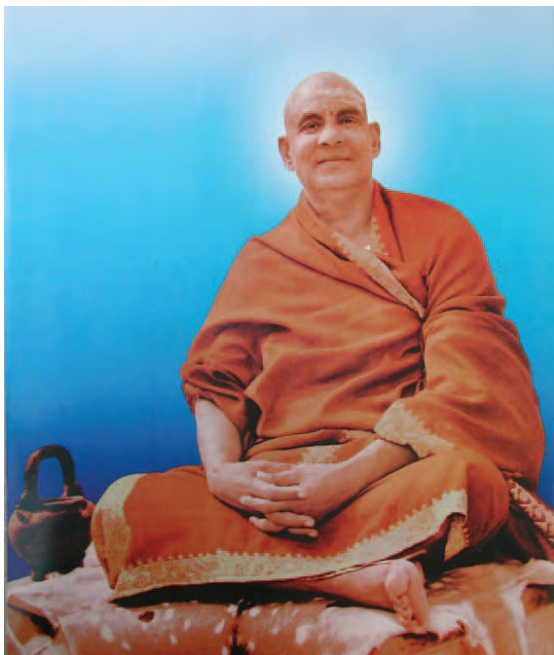
First published 2018

ISBN: 978-93-84753-48-1

Publisher and distributor: Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan,
Munger, Bihar, India.

Website: www.biharyoga.net

Printed at Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 110001



Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

The 2nd Chapter of Yoga

Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati established the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963, in order to fulfil the mandate of his guru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati. The mandate Swami Satyananda received was to propagate the science of yoga and take yoga from “shore to shore and door to door”. In the days of Swami Sivananda, yoga was far from the globally recognized and accepted word it is today. Yoga was considered a spiritual practice reserved for sannyasins and renunciates who had renounced society and were seeking enlightenment. It was not seen as something that could be incorporated into society and practised by the general public.



When the Bihar School of Yoga was established, the philosophy, practices, applications and lifestyle of yoga as practical and scientific systems were unknown, even in Indian society. From the beginning, yoga training and propagation by the Bihar School of Yoga took the form of intensive residential programs, in which yoga was taught as a way to qualitatively enhance physical health, mental peace, emotional harmony. A sequence of progression in yoga was defined fifty years ago by

Swami Satyananda, by giving systematic training first in hatha yoga, raja yoga and kriya yoga, as *bahiranga yoga*, external yoga. Simultaneously, training in *antaranga*, internal, aspect of karma yoga, bhakti and jnana yoga was provided through the lifestyle and inspiration of the ashram environment. A holistic or integral yoga system developed in which the yoga aspirant could awaken and integrate the faculties of head, heart and hands. The different *angas*, limbs, of yoga become the means of attaining this personal harmony and integrated expression.

In the early 1940s, the subject of yoga was propagated across the world by teachers and masters of different traditions, introducing the idea that through the practice of yoga one could explore the body, mind, emotions, and have a glimpse into one's spiritual nature. The first-generation teachers focused on bringing the knowledge of yoga to human society according to the need of the society at that time. In the 1960s, yoga was seen as a physical culture. In the 1970s, it was seen as a way to overcome stress, anxiety, tension and to improve the physical and mental functions. In the 1980s, research into the various possibilities and potentials of yoga to assist and promote physical and mental health took the forefront. By the 1990s, a rapid increase in the popularity of the practice of asana was evident across the globe. The asana component of yoga had been accepted worldwide and other components of yoga were relegated to the background and largely ignored by the mainstream practitioners and majority of yoga teachers. Today, 28 million people are practising yoga in the United States alone and statistics estimate 300 million practitioners worldwide.

In 2013, the World Yoga Convention was conducted in Munger to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga. Over 50,000 yoga practitioners, teachers, students and aspirants participated in this historic event either in person or through the internet. The Convention was a milestone that marked the completion of fifty years of yoga propagation. The mandate of taking yoga from shore to shore and door to door was fulfilled. Over a fifty-year period,



with the help of yoga aspirants and well-wishers all over the world, a yogic renaissance had taken place. The chapter of yoga propagation was complete and when one chapter closed, the next chapter opened.

Thus the World Yoga Convention also heralded the beginning of the second chapter of the Bihar School of Yoga. The hallmark of this second chapter is a new vision of yoga not as a practice but as a *vidya*, a wisdom to be understood, imbibed and expressed in life. This understanding of the fundamental need for integral development was the vision of Swami Satyananda, which he imparted and taught through the concept of the *yoga chakra*, or the wheel of yoga.

The second chapter of the Bihar School of Yoga and the teachings which are being presented are not concerned with propagation of the practices of yoga. Isolated practices of yoga do not bring about the qualitative change and spiritual evolution intended and envisaged by the seers. The transcendence of the negative and restricting conditions and the real evolution and growth of the personality takes place only when the *vidya* of yoga is comprehended, absorbed and realized.

The profundity of yogic understanding must increase and the depths of yoga must be fathomed, if the *vidya* is to be realized and maintained for future generations. The experience and wisdom of accomplished yogis and spiritual scientists is recorded in the scriptural and classical texts detailing each *anga* of yoga. The second chapter teachings are a

progressive effort to discern and elucidate the experiences and realizations of the ancient seers, within the blueprint of the yoga chakra.

For individual aspirants, the challenge of the second chapter is to deepen the understanding and experience of yoga. Practice is merely an introduction to yoga, which is limited by personal motivation and constraints. The yoga vidya dimension is accessed only when one moves from practice to sadhana and makes a sincere effort to experience the aims defined by the different angas of yoga. Until that sincerity awakens, the commitment to adhere to the system and the vidya of yoga is lacking. With sincerity, seriousness and commitment, each aspirant has to accept responsibility for their own development and betterment in life.

Ultimately, yoga is a lifestyle. It is not a practice. For, once the yogic principles are imbibed and become part of life, the attitudes, perceptions, interactions, the mind, actions and behaviours will improve. To meet the challenge of the second chapter, the expressive and the behavioural components of yoga, the antaranga and the bahiranga aspects, have to come together. When head, heart and hands unite, an ordinary moment can become divine. An ordinary life can become a divine life.



50 Years of Yoga Chakra

A quiet celebration



Swami Niranjana likes to call me the ‘wise old man of Ganga Darshan’. Then he specifies, “Swami Shankarananda is old only in his body but his mind is crystal clear, sharp and younger than all the minds of the ashram residents.” That is such a kind thing for him to say. About the wisdom though, I am not always sure, yet experience I have, no doubt. I have seen a lot of water flow down Ganga Ma and a lot of people come and go. Over the more than 50 years of association I have been witness to change and to focused, dedicated, unwavering commitment to maintaining the purity, integrity and dignity of Sri Swami Satyananda’s teaching – the yoga



vidya. This is what I want to talk about, for few are left to tell the tale of the true greatness and vision of Sri Swamiji.

It started at the World Yoga Convention in October 2013 which celebrated the 50 years of the Bihar School of Yoga. What a grand event that was! Munger and the world had never seen anything like it. Swamiji was like a wonderful magician pulling one trick after the other out of his hat. Swamiji announced that the first chapter of yoga propagation was completed and that now the second chapter was to begin. This second chapter was about the experience of yoga, exploring the depth of yoga – it was about *yoga vidya*, the science of yoga. That was his statement, loud and clear. It was only when the delegates had gone home and Ganga Darshan resumed its day-to-day activities that I had this strange feeling, something like – it is all true, but . . .

The answer to the strange feeling came a year later, when in November 2014, Swamiji held the first program of what he called the ‘Yoga Chakra Series’. His satsangs introduced and explained the three periods of the history of yoga and the *yoga chakra*, the wheel of yoga. He said that the yoga chakra with its six branches of hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, karma yoga, bhakt yoga and jnana yoga was the real yoga vidya. Everyone was stunned at this master stroke of Swamiji – to invent a wheel of yoga, something so novel, unheard of, and yet so sound, coherent and compelling.

Laying the foundation: bahiranga yoga

As I listened to his satsang in Satyam Vatika, memories of the past appeared and I was partly transported back to my early years at the old Sivananda Ashram. Sri Swamiji was then the master and his Teacher Training courses were of an unparalleled quality and intensity. Can you imagine in 1968, just three years after an unknown swami founded an unknown yoga school in an unknown town in the north of India, aspirants from 21 countries came to Munger to be with Sri Swamiji and learn the real yoga. The citizens had never seen foreigners in such great numbers, their curiosity was stirred and many began their journey of association with the Bihar School of Yoga which lasts until today.

In that course, Sri Swamiji taught all the classes and he meant business. None of this modern yoga of 'stretch here and there and look in the mirror'. No, he made us hold every posture until he had checked and corrected every single person in the class. Sometimes we would be in bhujangasana for 30 minutes or try to keep our balance in eka pada pranamasana for 20 minutes. Then we would relax in shavasana and afterwards he would explain, guide, advise and make us laugh and understand.



Each yogasana became a world of its own: the various body parts, bones, joints, muscles and ligaments, breath versus prana, mental cause and effect, visualizations, chakras, mantras, the gunas and koshas – explored and experienced with each and every asana. That truly was vidya! The same was valid for pranayama, for which even the diet was adjusted to make the practices more effective, the understanding more focused and the experience clear and deep. For example, in nadi shodhana each ratio was practised for many weeks until purpose and outcome were a living experience and not bookish knowledge. Only then the next stage, the next ratio was taught and practised. Time was never an issue, it did not matter how long it would take – what mattered was the personal experience of every aspirant and the understanding of the practice of yoga.

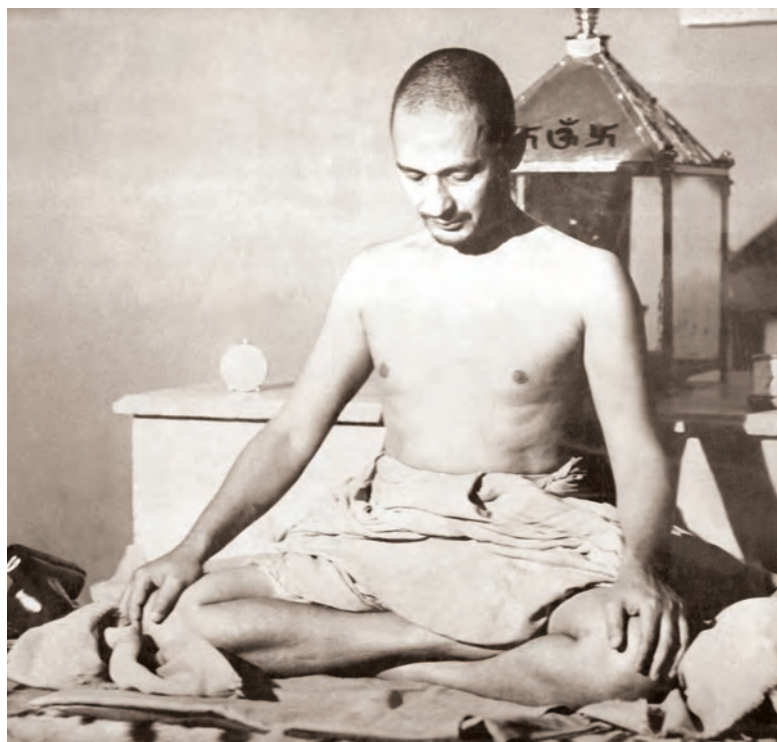
This went on for nine months, from 1st July 1967 to 31st March 1968. And we loved every moment of it. We deeply appreciated Sri Swamiji's method of teaching and the unique content which he developed with us and right there in front of us. Nothing was whimsical or personal, everything was done to represent the aim of each practice in the most lucid and unequivocal manner. Quantity was not an issue, instead a system was established which would allow aspirants to progress slowly, steadily and safely.





Asanas were no longer random practices but categorized into beginners, intermediate and advanced, into backward, forward, twisting and inverted. It sounds logical and commonsensical now, but it had to be done, and he did it. His aim was to give every practitioner an experience, a personal experience. His aim was not to make us into yoga teachers. If we decided to become yoga teachers it was our decision and ambition, not his.

I do not remember how many times we did a modified shankaprakshalana and the laghoo version, yet every time it was different, and gave us some new experience and insight into the practice and the human body.



When it came to meditation, Sri Swamiji said, “No!” Seeing the disappointment on our faces, he continued, “Why tire yourself with something you cannot do. I will give you four practices of pratyahara. If you master them then you will not have to worry about meditation, for it will happen on its own.” He gave us yoga nidra (levels 1 to 3), antar mouna, ajapa japa, and chidakasha dharana. I don’t know if any of us mastered, but we practised and practised, and learnt to distinguish the process and benefit of each practice.

Swamiji had two mud huts side by side where he would initiate the aspirants into kriya yoga and teach the kriyas in a systematic and practical way, starting with preparations, pratyahara kriyas, dharana and dhyana kriyas. He also initiated a three-year correspondence course for advanced sadhakas who could not make frequent journeys to Munger.

The three-year correspondence course was later compiled, edited and presented in one volume which today stands out as the most authentic text – *A Systematic Course in the Ancient Tantric Techniques of Yoga and Kriya*. In the past kriya yoga was a private and personal training between master and disciple. Sri Swamiji made it available to every sincere aspirant keen and committed to discover unknown potential and exploring untapped creativity.

Laying the foundation: antaranga yoga

This all happened in the hall in the old Sivananda Ashram, but don't think we spent the whole day like that. The classroom taught us only half of the yoga chakra, the other half happened in the garden, the kitchen, the offices while chopping vegetables, mopping the building, hammering away on the typewriter, arguing and laughing, observing and reflecting, drumming and singing kirtan from the bottom of our happy hearts. Daily life and Sri Swamiji's satsangs were the learning of antaranga yoga, the other half of the wheel, karma, bhakti and jnana yoga.





Laying the foundation: publications

After the nine-month course, a three-month Teacher Training Course started in 1968. This was followed by the three-year sannyasa training from 1970 to 1972, and many other courses of short duration, including the practical yoga sadhana course in 1972.

Even before Sri Swamiji settled in Munger and established the Bihar School of Yoga, his disciples published the instructions and guidance they received. Then along with teaching, Sri Swamiji made sure that whatever he taught would not be lost in the hazy memory of students. He published his class notes and satsangs.

To help us deepen our understanding and to offer people the chance to develop their own skills, Sri Swamiji gave people opportunities to contribute. If he saw that a particular person had some skills which could be encouraged, he used to assign small tasks which would utilize those skills and he helped us all develop in that way. Someone was able to make simple drawings in pencil, so they were able to help with illustrations and graphics for booklets. Someone else could paint and was interested in the chakras, so under the guidance of Sri Swamiji they painted the first version of the chakra illustrations which are used in the books you see today.



I remember an Australian person was given the job of compiling the transcripts of Sri Swamiji's lectures and classes on yoga nidra. This was the beginning of the classic *Yoga Nidra* which is now available across the globe and has been translated into over 10 languages. Someone else compiled the class transcripts on surya namaskara and eventually a small booklet was made.

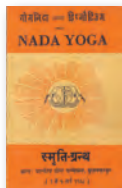
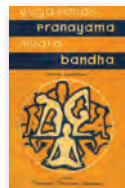
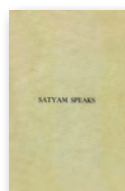
Other people helped type and compile the instructions on asanas which were given by Sri Swamiji during class. Then many people helped to structure and edit all the asana practices and compile them under the different headings of forward bends, backward bends, twisting and inverted postures. This eventually became the seminal textbook *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* which has been translated into over 15 languages. Many people from different countries like United States, England and Ireland helped to edit the publications and also people from countries such as Germany and The Netherlands who spoke good English.

Even practical classes, satsangs and lectures from Sri Swamiji's programs that he gave overseas were transcribed and compiled by the overseas hosts and program organizers.

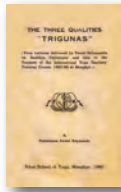


Nothing was missed, and every effort was made to keep and distribute all Sri Swamiji's teachings for the benefit of yoga aspirants in the future. The teachings from programs in places like Vienna, London, Manchester and so many other places were published in book form. Many decades later the same lectures were made available on CD and DVD and released during the World Yoga Convention in 2013.

I give you the list of the early publications – some were small booklets worth five or ten rupees, some were large books:



- 1961 – *Satyam Speaks*
- 1962 – *Words of Satyam*
- 1963 – *Satyam Speaks Part Two*
- 1965 – *Mechanics of Meditation*
- *Lectures on the Gita*
- 1966 – *The Science of Yoga*
- 1967 – *Taming the Kundalini*
- *Yogasanas Pranayama*
- *Mudra Bandha*
- *Nada Yoga*
- *Japa Yoga*
- *The Liberated Man*



- 1968 – *Antar Mouna*
 – *Wisdom of Gita*
 – *The Three Qualities 'Trigunas'*
- 1969 – *An Introduction to Tantra Shastra*
- 1971 – *Teachers's Manual for Teaching Yoga to Children*
 – *Surya Namaskara*
 – *Tantra Yoga Panorama*
- 1973 – *Health Benefits of Inverted Asanas*
 – *Blood Pressure Management through Yoga*
 – *Ajapa Japa, Chidakasha Dharana*

And as you know, the publishing never stopped, and with the blessings of Saraswati Ma it will continue, it will grow and evolve to inspire and encourage seekers to tread the path of yoga and live a life infused with yoga vidya.

Not re-inventing but turning the wheel

As all these publications saw the light of day, another masterpiece was being compiled and prepared. The book *A Systematic Course in the Ancient Tantric Techniques of Yoga and Kriya* is the beautiful fruit of many years of teaching, practising, understanding and experiencing yoga vidya. Published in 1981, it remains until today unparalleled in the clarity of content and composition.



Therefore, the old saying is true once more: if you have ears to hear and eyes to see you will know, for Sri Swamiji offered yoga, his gift of peace, most generously and to all. Yet only few had the ears and eyes.

As I travelled down memory lane and back to the old ashram, I understood what I had felt during the 2013 World Yoga Convention. Swami Niranjanji did not pull a magician's trick nor did he conjure up a yogic novelty. No, Swami Niranjanji did not re-invent the wheel of yoga – he started turning the wheel. It had been conceived, developed almost fifty years prior to the convention, when in the first Teacher Training courses yoga vidya was brought alive and made accessible for all sincere aspirants. Yet the time had not been ready.

Yoga had not become a household word; the flag of yoga had not been hoisted in every country of the world. Sri Swamiji had not yet fulfilled his guru's mandate; he still had to spread 'yoga from door to door and shore to shore'. He knew what he wanted to pass on to future generations, the true yoga vidya, but first yoga had to be made known, and thus Sri Swamiji set out to propagate yoga around the world, become an emperor of hearts and bring yoga into every strata of society. The yoga chakra was lying dormant, bidding its time which came after the World Yoga Convention, but I saw the birth of it.





Clarity of mind, vision and purpose

In the 1960s when we came to the ashram, we came for the ashram and Sri Swamiji. We did not know the word yoga and neither did society. Nobody in the town of Munger, nobody in the country knew what yoga was. The only idea people had was that yoga was something which sannyasins and recluses would practise for their enlightenment and self-realization by leaving society and staying in isolation. Yoga practices were not meant for the general public as they might encourage householders to renounce their homes and society. This was the prevalent idea and therefore you would hardly find any yoga teachers.

In fact, in the early days people would say, “Why are you leaving your home?” “Why are you becoming a social parasite?” “Why don’t you study, have a profession and live life?” There was really little understanding of anything spiritual. You have to remember that it was only two decades after India had achieved independence. So in society too there was a lot of imbalance. More and more people were struggling to eke out a living. The major drive was to find

jobs, to find security in life. The mindset of people was not spiritual, it was more material.

If somebody walked down the street with an English magazine, they would be called modern and forward, and if somebody walked down the street with the *Bhagavad Gita* or *Ramacharitmanas* they would be called backward. That was the mindset which had developed due to the British: speaking English, reading English – you are a gentleman; not speaking English – you are a native.

When Swami Sivananda gave the mandate to propagate yoga, he did teach yogasanas, pranayamas, he gave training in all aspects of yoga but it was still to a selected group, to those people who were willing to learn the yoga vidya. Remember at that time the general understanding was that anybody doing yoga was going to eventually retire from society and become a recluse.

Swami Sivananda trained his disciples in hatha yoga, in raja yoga; his books on hatha yoga and raja yoga are outstanding books with simple, clear instructions and guidelines. He spoke on karma yoga, bhakti yoga and other yogas, as well as on yamas and niyamas. He gave people a blueprint to connect with the positive qualities in life and to become aware of their internal and external involvement.

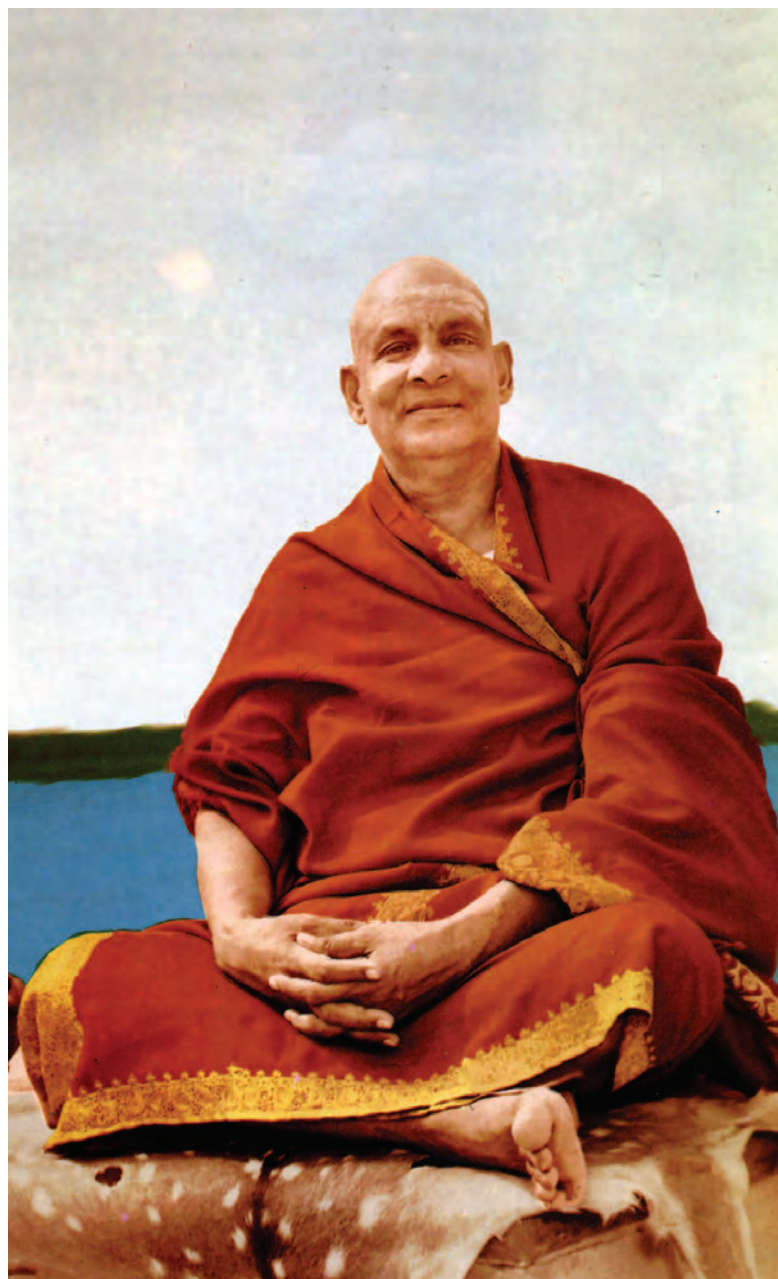




When Sri Swamiji left Swami Sivananda's ashram, he travelled throughout the Indian subcontinent covering the regions of Burma, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan. He wanted to see what the need of people was and how this spiritual subject, yoga, could help them. On his journeys he learnt about human life, people's requirement and what could be done to improve the quality of life.

When he came to Munger in 1963 and established the Bihar School of Yoga, it was not a planned project. Sannyasins are governed by certain rules which they have to follow after the departure of the master. One of the rules is that we establish ourselves wherever we are in the world, whether it be a town, city or village, somewhere beside a river or on a mountain and that place becomes our fixed place after the departure of the guru. Sri Swamiji was in Munger when Swami Sivananda left his body on 14th July 1963. So following the sannyasa tradition, he made his sankalpa: 'This is where I have to be'.

The work started in a small room in the old Sivananda Ashram. It had one kitchen, one hall and one room, and four small 10' x 10' storage rooms near the gate. That was the original land which was gifted by Sri Kedarnath Goenka to Sri Swamiji to start the Bihar School of Yoga.









No compiled book on asanas existed at that time. Everything was *smriti*, memory. For the first time, as Sri Swamiji taught the classes, we were given notebooks in which we could draw the asanas, as stick figures, and write down the benefits, precautions, breath, chakra and mantra awareness, the whole procedure for each asana. That format eventually became the format for the book *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*. In the book section where I have listed all the early publications, is the name *Science of Yoga* published in 1965. You know what that *Science of Yoga* book is? It is the translation of the original *Gheranda Samhita* guided by Sri Swamiji on hatha yoga. That was the book that we were learning from.

In yoga there are two currents. One is for civilians and one is for recluses, sannyasins. Swatmarama's book, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* is meant for civilians, not for sannyasins. *Gheranda Samhita* is the book written for sannyasins, not for householders. Our first training was in *Gheranda Samhita*'s tradition, the sannyasin tradition of hatha yoga.



Similarly, in raja yoga. Patanjali's raja yoga is for civilians and the raja yoga of Shukracharya is for sadhus. There have always been two clear paths. Sri Swamiji taught us first to experience the yoga vidya, the traditional, the classical, the sadhu path for we had no expectation. Being with him was our life. At that time asanas were compiled, practised and perfected. In our early, young days, we could do so many things that today I wonder, 'How was that all possible?' Yes, at that time we lived with a different body and in a different environment.

Let me tell you a bit more about the yoga of the early days. It was a time of exploration and innovation. The first book on asana and pranayama came out as a result of the nine-month teacher training course in 1969. By 1971 a second edition came out with 238 pages and it is in our library at Ganga Darshan. Sri Swamiji worked on pranayama which was unknown at that time, it was not a common practice. In fact, people used to think that while practising pranayama, they could lose their minds. That is true even today for if you don't follow the rules and regulations of pranayama, you can definitely lose your mental balance. Sri Swamiji categorized pranayama, which is the way we teach now: hot, cold and balancing pranayamas.

Pranayama was another thing that Sri Swamiji taught us and, as a result, Bihar School of Yoga became one of the first ashrams in India to teach pranayama. In India only Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh, Bihar School of Yoga in Munger and Kaivalyadham in western India were teaching pranayama at that time, and there were only a few, maybe three or four, centres and a few sannyasins teachers who were teaching yoga in the whole of India.

Similarly, with the practice of mudras and bandhas. Although they exist in the tradition as practices, their applicability in people's day-to-day environment was never considered. They were seen as part of the higher yogic practices.

So the first book on these practices was called *Yogasana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*. In addition, it also contains a chapter on the psychic personality and chakras, the content of which was published for the first time ever. Sri Swamiji used to teach us from the classical, traditional perspective, explaining the theories and concepts of Vedanta, Samkhya, yoga and tantra. While going through the scriptures and discovering the traditional teaching, Swamiji used to experiment with the ancient techniques and apply them in modern situations. Nobody knew what meditation was. People usually think that closing the eyes and following a train of thought as abstract meditation is the real meditation.



Sri Swamiji brought out the book *Mechanics of Meditation*, the topic being: how to reach where you want to go through meditation. In it he speaks about the mind, about the process and about the stages of meditation. He inspired the compilation of the book *Sure Ways to Self-Realization* in which meditative techniques from many cultures and traditions are presented in order to show the universal nature of human effort. Later *Meditations from the Tantras* became a popular book which for the first time describes a sequential and progressive style for concentration techniques leading to deep meditation. You know, people wanted to learn meditation, they were eager and keen but did not know how to go about it. Sri Swamiji answered them, “Only four practices for you,” and he gave people only the four practices of yoga nidra, antar mouna, ajapa japā and chidakasha dharana, three pratyahara practices and one practice of dharana. He taught only these four techniques in class, and did not go beyond this.

We had the opportunity to learn so much of the yoga vidya from Sri Swamiji. Initially, he taught only us, the sannyasins. Later, he taught yoga to civilians once he was convinced that we ‘as the first group of sannyasins’ had learnt the classical and the traditional, the ancient and the modern aspects of hatha yoga, raja yoga, chakras, kundalini, kriya, karma, jnana, bhakti, laya, mantra, nada.





After the first nine-month course and other courses that followed, many tours and seminars were conducted by him. Sometimes we went along with him or he travelled alone. In the early days Sri Swamiji used to conduct all classes himself despite having 30 to 40 stalwarts with him who were trained in yoga.

For the general public

We noticed something very different in his style of teaching to the public. He gave a limited number of practices but with a good combination of yogas. He said in his lectures, “When I am teaching yoga to you I remember that I am not teaching yoga to sannyasins but to householders. For you the practice of yoga is limited. It is for your health, it is for your mental peace and it is to cultivate spiritual awareness. That’s all.” From all the practices of yoga, he chose a few simple practices which the young, middle aged and old could do: Pawanmuktasana part 1, part 2, shakti bandhas, standing, stretching, forward and backward bending, lateral stretches and surya namaskara.



So up to surya namaskara was the training, the beginners and intermediate practices. He also selected a few simple pranayama practices from each of the categories that he had created, including nadi shodhana, bhasrika, kapalbhati, ujjayi (which he called the throat breathing). These were the four practices that he used to teach continuously. As meditation practices he taught yoga nidra, antar mouna, ajapa and chidakasha to the public. This collection of practices was taught across the board throughout the world. Even today in many centres this is what teachers teach and they don't go beyond it, yet this is only partial yoga.

The credit goes to Sri Swamiji for codifying the asana, pranayama, mudras, bandhas, shatkarmas, the pratyahara series, the dharana series. All this was done by him with a clear understanding that yoga vidya or the knowledge and tradition of yoga, the lifestyle and culture of yoga is a process and subject which involves becoming selfless and more connected to other people.

Sri Swamiji was invited to give shivirs throughout India. The nine-month teacher trainees were taken along to accompany him, to learn and discover Sri Swamiji's teaching for the general public. Of course, out there in society, he could not make anyone do mayurasana (which, by the way, we had mastered quite well) or remain half an hour in dhanurasana (which we could do, almost effortlessly). No, he had to adjust, adapt and accommodate, to the needs, limitations and possibilities of people who came in search of answers and solutions to their problems.

It was obvious that the yoga vidya training which students had received earlier was not fit for the general public who were dealing with physical, psychological problems and imbalances. For them, for the masses, Sri Swamiji introduced asana, pranayama, yoga nidra, three practices of pratyahara and the shatkarmas. Future training to would-be aspiring teachers was given only in few asanas, few pranayama practices and yoga nidra. That was what people could do and needed to improve the quality of their lives.

Not only throughout India and overseas, but also in Munger, Sri Swamiji introduced courses for 'every man and woman'. Most popular were the fifteen-day health management courses and the thirty-day teacher training courses.



A science for all

At that time, many people considered Sri Swamiji to be an atheist, for his teaching was one hundred percent secular. His only focus was yoga, the science of yoga, the yoga vidya. Without any difficulty he was therefore able to attract students and aspirants of all religions and beliefs: Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and those of the Jewish faith found what they were looking for and had no conflict with their faith. On the contrary, yoga enhanced the experience of their religious practices. We were all living together in a small world community with tolerance and acceptance of each other.

There were no pictures or *murtis*, statues, of any gods or goddesses anywhere in the ashram. The only photos in the sadhana hall and offices were of Swami Sivananda, reminding us that we were living the inspiration of Sri Swamiji's guru as we were learning and living the integral yoga he had developed.





The buildings too were a constant reminder of yoga and yoga concepts for they bore the names of all the chakras, of ida, pingala and sushumna, of chitta and ahamkara. There was the Trikuti, Gokul, Panchawati, Annapoorna and the *Bhumigat Dhyana Sthal*, the underground meditation room, and of course, there was the Jyoti Mandir. To anyone who came to the ashram the message was clear: yoga is a science and a lifestyle, open, available, accessible to all. Sri Swamiji said it again and again to make sure there would be no confusion or misunderstanding. Here are a few of his statements that are still alive in my mind:

Yoga has gone around the world crossing frontiers, breaking through the barriers of religion and political and philosophical ideology. Yoga is the oneword, the one system of thought that has brought different communities together. Scientists and spiritual seekers have been brought together.

What has yoga given to mankind? A religion? An occult sect? No, yoga has given a science, an experience of transformation of the quality of mind.



Yoga is a discipline to improve the quality of life; a philosophy to attain peace. If you want to experience health, if you want to experience peace and if you want to evolve, make yoga a part of your lifestyle.

Yoga is a science by which the individual becomes powerful enough to be able to put ideas into practice.

Yoga is a science of consciousness, a science of personality and a science of creativity. Yoga gives people hope and optimism and expands the horizons of their lives.

Initiation with a purpose

Let me say something about initiations. Sri Swamiji had a very clear idea about why he initiated people into mantra diksha, karma or poorna sannyasa. Whichever initiation was given, the purpose was to deepen the connection and strengthen the continuation of association and commitment. That was the base of discipleship.

Yoga was the means, the medium through which sannyasa could be experienced. The aspirants receiving mantra and karma sannyasa diksha lived their normal life in society as aspirants with this input of yoga and connection to a tradition. They practised according to their possibilities, determination and aspiration.

Some of us stayed on, we did not return to society but dedicated our lives to preserving the yoga vidya of our lineage. We gave our lives as a contribution to this vidya in whatever capacity we could: as teachers, press workers, researchers, administrators, editors, cooks and gardeners. Often we had a few duties at the same time, or were responsible for one department and then change to another. We participated in every activity wholeheartedly, without question and with anticipation.

The actual sannyasa as per the tradition was given to few only while many wore the robes. Swamiji says that the growth of vidya depends on good people, who are selfless and willing to experience and live yoga. Selfish people are sour, critical, negative and not willing to change. They learn yoga, they may teach yoga but they will not experience or live it.





The connection to a tradition is the thread which relates your personal experience to the experiences of masters, sages and saints of all times. Your experience and life become part of the diversity inherent in unity. Initiation allows you to hold on to the thread.

It is good to see yoga being practised around the world, by millions of people of all ages, nations and cultures. Yet, the yoga they have learned is a fractured yoga, a yoga brand, like a fashion brand. It is not yoga vidya, the science of yoga. Fashions come and go but vidya stays and is eternal.

Even though many foreigners came, they too were taught the classical system of yoga. This included using the Sanskrit names for asanas, pranayama, and for all practices. Sri Swamiji's style of teaching was faithful to the vidya and tradition of yoga.

Swami Sivananda, Sri Swamiji and Swamiji are dedicated to maintaining the purity and integrity of this vidya along with the participation of serious, sincere and committed aspirants.

Let me sum up

Remember that my starting point was the funny feeling I had during the World Yoga Convention in 2013, when Swamiji announced the Second Chapter of Yoga. 50 years of propagation had come to an end; and propagation meant presenting a selection of yoga practices required for the people of the time.



The Yoga Chakra is complete, like the circle or the wheel. It takes the aspirant into the depth of yoga vidya. Founded in 1965 by Sri Swamiji, it continues the teaching of Sri Swami Sivananda. For we live according to a solid tradition and do not follow any whimsical fancy. Now Swamiji is giving the wheel a big push and invites us along on the journey. And if you don't believe me – just read on:



For Quick Success

Hatha yoga is rooted in asana and pranayama,
blossoms as restfulness and bears the fruit of perfect
health, long life and awakening of kundalini.

Raja yoga is rooted in yama, and niyama,
blossoms as one-pointedness of mind
and bears the fruit of samadhi.

Kriya yoga is rooted in truth and brahmacharya,
blossoms as the grace of the Divine Mother
and bears the fruit of union with Lord Shiva.

Karma yoga is rooted in self-sacrifice,
blossoms as purity and expansion of heart
and bears the fruit of knowledge of the imperishable.

Bhakti yoga is rooted in faith and self-surrender,
blossoms as intense love and bears the fruit
of communion with the Lord in ecstasy.

Jnana yoga is rooted in discrimination and self-denial,
blossoms as knowledge of Brahma
and bears the fruit of moksha.

Therefore, for quick success,
the various methods should be combined.

—*Swami Sivananda Saraswati*

And here is what was said about the Yoga Chakra. In the *YOGA* magazine issue of October 1965, Swami Prarthanananda, one of the earliest disciples of Sri Swamiji, wrote in his article *The Hub of the Wheel* how Sri Swamiji came to settle in Munger in 1963.

. . . we were shown the land where the *Yoga Chakra Kala Nidhi Paramahansa Swami Satyanandaji* was embarked to reside, guide, lead, elevate and conduct classes for the regeneration of our lost heritage and the revival of the ancient yogic culture.

We know what happened; it is the beautiful history of a man and his mission. And you know what the long title means? Paramahansa Swami Satyananda was called ‘the Repository of the Art and Science of the Wheel of Yoga’. So you see, from the beginning, the yoga taught by Sri Swamiji in Munger was known as the yoga chakra.

I hope I was able to explain the true origin of the yoga chakra. With this understanding I am sure you will appreciate and respect its beauty and wisdom even more as you live it with sincerity, seriousness and commitment.

Thank you all for listening.











Swami Shankarananda Saraswati

Born in 1928 in Chapra (Bihar), Swami Shankarananda served the Department of Secondary Education, Government of Bihar, until retirement. He met Swami Satyananda in 1966, took mantra diksha in 1967 and has been a tireless worker for the Bihar School of Yoga. In 1987 he organized a yoga course in Munger for 3000 school teachers from Bihar. He came to live at Ganga Darshan in 1990 and was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in 1992 when he completed the one-year sannyasa training course. Since 1994 he has been actively involved in the development of Bihar Yoga Bharati as its Chief Director.

Swami Shankarananda is a constant inspiration to residents, students and guests at Ganga Darshan. He encourages seekers and guides them with his extensive knowledge and playful wisdom. Above all it is his interactions with everyone and every situation that shine as an example of selfless dedication and tireless commitment to the vision and mission of Bihar School of Yoga.



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

The story of the yoga chakra is told in *50 Years of Yoga Chakra*. The reminiscences of a wise man take the reader back to the 1960s when in Munger, a small town in Bihar, the ancient science of yoga, the *yoga vidya*, was presented to spiritual seekers, aspirants and sadhakas who had come from all corners of the globe.

Swami Shankarananda Saraswati, one of the first associates and dedicated supporters of the Bihar School of Yoga, saw the birth of the yoga chakra, the hallmark of Satyananda Yoga. He was part of the first teaching, the first courses and the first publications. To make yoga the culture of tomorrow for the welfare of humankind – that was the intention, purpose and vision of Sri Swami Satyananda. After 50 years, the tomorrow is now here and Bihar School of Yoga is ready to turn the wheel of yoga.



ISBN : 978-93-84753-48-1