

SKM YOGA

Yoga Teacher Training Programme

SHAD DARSHAN

*Introduction to the Six Schools of Indian Philosophy
& Comparative Study with Yoga Darshan*

Compiled by

Dr. Shivam Mishra

SKM Yoga Institute

For Internal Educational Use -- Yoga Teacher Training Students

Foreword

This study guide has been compiled with deep reverence for the ancient wisdom traditions of India for the benefit of Yoga Teacher Training students at SKM Yoga. The exploration of Shad Darshan -- the six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy -- is not merely an academic exercise. It is a sacred journey into the very foundations upon which the magnificent structure of Yoga philosophy rests.

A yoga teacher who does not understand the philosophical roots of yoga is like a tree without roots - standing perhaps, but lacking depth and stability. When we study Shad Darshan and compare it with Yoga Darshan, we begin to see yoga not as isolated postures and breathing exercises, but as a comprehensive system of liberation embedded within one of the world's oldest living philosophical traditions.

This text is designed to be accessible to students at all levels of philosophical background. Whether you are encountering Sanskrit philosophical terminology for the first time or revisiting familiar concepts, this guide aims to present these profound teachings in a clear, structured, and practical manner that relates directly to your role as a yoga teacher.

Yogas chitta vritti nirodhah

"Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind." -- Patanjali, Yoga Sutras 1.2

-- Dr. Shivam Mishra

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Chapter 1: Introduction to Indian Philosophy

1.1 What is Philosophy?

The word 'philosophy' comes from the Greek *philos* (love) and *sophia* (wisdom) -- literally, the love of wisdom. Every civilization that has sought to understand the nature of existence, consciousness, and reality has developed its own philosophical tradition. Indian philosophy, known as *Darshana* (from the Sanskrit root *drish*, meaning 'to see' or 'to have vision'), is one of the oldest, richest, and most systematic philosophical traditions in the world.

Unlike Western philosophy, which often separates intellectual inquiry from personal transformation, Indian philosophy has always been intensely practical. Its ultimate goal is not merely to understand reality intellectually, but to achieve liberation -- called *Moksha*, *Mukti*, *Kaivalya*, or *Nirvana* depending on the tradition. Philosophy in India was never an armchair exercise: it was a path of lived experience.

1.2 The Meaning of Darshana

Darshana iti drishyate anena iti darshana

"That by which one sees (reality) is called Darshana."

The Sanskrit term *Darshana* carries profound significance. It means not just a philosophical system, but a direct vision or perception of truth. In the Indian tradition, a true philosopher (*Darshani*) is one who has not merely theorized about ultimate reality but has directly perceived it through sustained practice, inquiry, and meditation.

This integration of intellectual understanding and direct experiential insight is what distinguishes *Darshana* from merely academic philosophy. As yoga teachers, this distinction is crucial: we are not simply transmitting information but inviting students into a living tradition of inquiry and direct experience.

1.3 Categories of Indian Philosophy

Indian philosophical systems are broadly classified into two major categories based on their stance toward the authority of the Vedas:

| Astika (Orthodox) | Nastika (Heterodox) |
|--|--|
| Accept the authority of the Vedas as primary scriptural source | Do not accept the authority of the Vedas |

| | |
|--|---|
| The six schools: Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa, Vedanta | Include Buddhism, Jainism, Charvaka (Lokayata) |
| Goal: Liberation (Moksha) within the Vedic framework | Have their own scriptural authorities and paths |

As yoga teachers, we primarily engage with Astika (orthodox) philosophy, particularly with the Shad Darshan -- the six classical schools that provide the metaphysical, epistemological, and soteriological framework for yoga.

1.4 The Philosophical Quest: Questions All Schools Address

Despite their differences, all six schools of Shad Darshan grapple with the same fundamental questions:

- What is the nature of ultimate reality (Brahman, Purusha, Ishvara)?
- What is the nature of the individual self (Atman, Jiva, Purusha)?
- What is the relationship between the individual and ultimate reality?
- What is the cause of suffering (Dukkha) and bondage (Bandha)?
- What is the path to liberation (Moksha)?
- What are valid means of knowledge (Pramana)?
- What is the nature of the world (Jagat) -- real, illusory, or both?

Understanding how Yoga Darshan specifically answers these questions -- and how its answers compare with the other five schools -- will deepen your capacity to teach yoga not just as physical practice but as a complete path of human transformation.

1.5 Historical Context

The Shad Darshan emerged and crystallized over a vast period of Indian history, roughly between 600 BCE and 400 CE. The Upanishadic period (800-200 BCE) provided the seed ideas. The period of sutra composition (200 BCE - 400 CE) saw each school codify its teachings in terse aphoristic sutras. Each school developed extensive commentary traditions that continued for over a millennium.

This was also a period of intense philosophical debate between schools, between orthodox and heterodox traditions, and between different sub-schools within each tradition. Yoga, as we shall see, occupied a unique position: deeply engaged with Samkhya metaphysics while adding its own distinctive emphasis on practice, devotion, and the reality of Ishvara (God).

Chapter 2: Overview of Shad Darshan

2.1 What is Shad Darshan?

Nyaya Vaisheshika Sankhya Yoga Purva-Mimamsa Vedanta iti Shad Darshani

"Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Purva-Mimamsa, and Vedanta -- these are the Six Philosophies."

Shad Darshan (Sanskrit) literally means 'Six Visions' or 'Six Philosophical Systems.' These are the six classical orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy, each offering a distinct but interrelated perspective on the nature of reality, the self, and the path to liberation.

Together, these six systems represent the most comprehensive philosophical achievement in Indian intellectual history. While each school has its own emphasis, foundational texts, and distinctive methods, they form a coherent whole: collectively mapping the terrain of ultimate reality, human bondage, and the path to freedom with extraordinary depth and precision.

2.2 The Six Schools at a Glance

| No. | Name | Founder/Sage | Scripture | Key Concept |
|-----|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---|
| 1 | Nyaya | Maharishi Gautama | Nyaya Sutras | Logic & Valid Knowledge (Pramana) |
| 2 | Vaisheshika | Maharishi Kanada | Vaisheshika Sutras | Atomic Theory & Categories (Padarthas) |
| 3 | Samkhya | Maharishi Kapila | Samkhya Karikas | Dualism of Purusha & Prakriti |
| 4 | Yoga | Maharishi Patanjali | Yoga Sutras | Practical Path to Liberation (Kaivalya) |
| 5 | Mimamsa | Maharishi Jaimini | Mimamsa Sutras | Vedic Ritual & Dharma |
| 6 | Vedanta | Maharishi Badarayana | Brahma Sutras | Non-dual / Nature of Brahman |

2.3 Paired Schools (Shad Darshan as Three Pairs)

An important feature of Shad Darshan is that the six schools are traditionally grouped into three natural pairs, each pair sharing significant conceptual and textual ties:

| Pair | Schools | Shared Focus |
|---------------|---------------------|---|
| Pair 1 | Nyaya & Vaisheshika | Logic, epistemology, and the categories of reality |
| Pair 2 | Samkhya & Yoga | Metaphysics of consciousness & practical path to liberation |
| Pair 3 | Mimamsa & Vedanta | Interpretation of Vedic scripture & ultimate reality |

This pairing is significant for yoga students: Yoga Darshan is the inseparable practical companion of Samkhya Darshan. Samkhya provides the theoretical metaphysical map; Yoga provides the practical path to navigate it. Understanding this relationship is fundamental to understanding Patanjali's Yoga Sutras.

2.4 Why Study Shad Darshan as a Yoga Teacher?

- Deepens understanding of the metaphysical foundations of Yoga -- why we practice what we practice.
- Enables intelligent comparison and dialogue with students who come from diverse philosophical backgrounds.
- Illuminates the unique contributions of Yoga Darshan -- what Patanjali added to Samkhya, and how it differs from other schools.
- Provides vocabulary and conceptual frameworks for discussing consciousness, mind, liberation, and suffering.
- Grounds yoga teaching in the authentic philosophical tradition from which yoga emerged.
- Helps yoga teachers answer the 'why' questions students ask about the nature of the self, suffering, and liberation.

Chapter 3: The Six Schools in Detail

3.1 Nyaya Darshan -- The School of Logic

Founder & Scripture

Founder: Maharishi Gautama (also known as Akshapada)

Primary Text: Nyaya Sutras (approximately 2nd century BCE -- 2nd century CE)

Commentary: Nyaya Bhashya by Vatsyayana; later developed by Uddyotakara, Vacaspati Mishra, and Udayana

Core Teaching

Nyaya, derived from the Sanskrit root *naya* meaning 'method' or 'analysis,' is the school of logical analysis and epistemology. Its primary contribution to Indian philosophy is the rigorous systematic analysis of the valid means of knowledge (Pramanas) and a sophisticated logic of argument (Tarka).

Pramanapramitisamskara visayah Nyaya

"Nyaya is the science concerned with the instruments and objects of valid cognition."

Nyaya philosophers believed that liberation from suffering could only be achieved through correct knowledge, and correct knowledge required correct means of obtaining that knowledge. Therefore, the rigorous analysis of how we know what we know became the central preoccupation of this school.

The Four Pramanas of Nyaya

- Pratyaksha (Direct Perception) -- Knowledge obtained through the sense organs in direct contact with an object
- Anumana (Inference) -- Knowledge through logical reasoning (e.g., seeing smoke and inferring fire)
- Upamana (Comparison/Analogy) -- Knowledge through similarity and analogy
- Shabda (Verbal Testimony) -- Knowledge obtained from reliable verbal testimony, especially the Vedas

Relevance for Yoga Teachers: Nyaya's four Pramanas help us understand how yogic knowledge is validated. In yoga, all four operate: pratyaksha in direct meditation experience, anumana in philosophical reasoning, upamana in teaching through metaphor and analogy, and shabda in the transmission of teaching from guru to student.

The Sixteen Padarthas of Nyaya

Nyaya philosophy organizes all knowable reality into sixteen categories (Padarthas), including: Pramana (means of valid knowledge), Prameya (objects of valid knowledge), Samsaya (doubt), Prayojana (purpose), Drishtanta (example), Siddhanta (established doctrine), Avayava (limbs of inference), Tarka (hypothetical argument), Nirnaya (ascertainment), Vada (discussion), Jalpa (wrangling), Vitanda (cavil), Hetvabhasa (fallacy), Chhala (quibbling), Jati (futile rejoinder), and Nigrahasthana (point of defeat).

Theory of God (Ishvara)

Unlike Samkhya, Nyaya explicitly argues for the existence of God (Ishvara) as the creator and sustainer of the universe. The Nyaya school developed sophisticated arguments for the existence of God based on causal reasoning -- the universe requires an intelligent creator. This is historically important as Patanjali also includes Ishvara in Yoga Darshan.

Liberation in Nyaya

Liberation (Apavarga) in Nyaya is defined as the complete cessation of all pain and suffering through the removal of misapprehension (Mithya Jnana). When correct knowledge arises and false knowledge is destroyed, the misery that is caused by false identification ceases. Liberation is thus primarily an epistemic achievement -- the fruit of correct knowing.

3.2 Vaisheshika Darshan -- The School of Particulars

Founder & Scripture

Founder: Maharishi Kanada (also called Kanabhuk or Kanabhaksha -- 'eater of atoms')

Primary Text: Vaisheshika Sutras (approximately 2nd century BCE)

Commentary: Padarthaprakasha by Prashastapada

Core Teaching

Vaisheshika (from Vishesha, meaning 'particular' or 'specificity') is the school of naturalistic philosophy that analyzes the ultimate constituents of reality. It is famous for its proto-atomic theory, proposing that all material reality is ultimately composed of indivisible, eternal atoms (Paramanus).

Vaisheshika is deeply concerned with metaphysical ontology -- what actually exists in the universe, and how things relate to each other. It developed an elaborate system of categories to classify all of existence.

The Seven Padarthas (Categories of Existence)

- Dravya (Substance) -- Earth, water, fire, air, ether, time, space, mind, self

- Guna (Quality) -- 24 qualities including color, taste, smell, touch, number, size, etc.
- Karma (Action) -- Upward, downward, lateral, expressive, and moving motion
- Samanya (Universal) -- Generality or class nature shared by members of a class
- Vishesha (Particular) -- The unique individuality of eternal atoms
- Samavaya (Inherence) -- The eternal inseparable relation between a substance and its qualities
- Abhava (Non-existence) -- Later added: the reality of negation and absence

Relevance for Yoga: Vaisheshika's analysis of the material world as composed of atomic substances governed by qualities and actions provides the physical basis for understanding how the human body and the material universe operate. Its categories help yoga teachers articulate the relationship between the physical body, mind, and consciousness.

The Atomic Theory

Vaisheshika's atomic theory posited that the physical universe is made of four types of atoms -- earth (prithvi), water (jala), fire (tejas/agni), and air (vayu) -- which are eternal, unchanging, and invisible. These atoms combine under the influence of God's will to form increasingly complex structures. Ether (Akasha), time (Kala), and space (Disha) are non-atomic but equally real.

Liberation in Vaisheshika

Liberation in Vaisheshika is called Apavarga -- the complete cessation of all qualities including pleasure and pain. In the liberated state, the self is free from all association with the body and mind, existing in a state of pure, attribute-less consciousness. This is achieved through correct knowledge of the seven categories.

3.3 Samkhya Darshan -- The School of Enumeration

Founder & Scripture

Founder: Maharishi Kapila (one of the earliest systematic philosophers in India)

Primary Text: Samkhya Karikas of Ishvarakrishna (approximately 4th-5th century CE)

Commentary: Samkhya Tattva Kaumudi by Vacaspati Mishra; Samkhya Pravachana Sutras

Core Teaching

Samkhya (from the Sanskrit sankhya, meaning 'number' or 'enumeration') is the oldest systematic philosophy of India. It presents a rigorous dualistic metaphysics: the universe consists of two fundamentally distinct and irreducible realities -- Purusha (pure consciousness) and Prakriti (primal matter/nature).

Purushasya darshanarthe kaivalyartham tatha pradhane ca

"For the sake of the liberation of Purusha and for its becoming a witness to Prakriti, union with Prakriti takes place." -- Samkhya Karika

This is the most important school for yoga students to understand in depth, as Yoga Darshan is explicitly built upon the Samkhya metaphysical framework. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras presuppose Samkhya categories and concepts throughout.

The Fundamental Dualism: Purusha and Prakriti

| PURUSHA (Pure Consciousness) | PRAKRITI (Primal Matter/Nature) |
|--|---|
| Pure consciousness, awareness | Unconscious, insentient matter |
| Eternal, uncreated, unchanging | Eternal but dynamic, ever-changing |
| Witness only -- never acts | Active principle -- ever creating |
| Infinite Purushas (individual souls) | Single, universal Prakriti |
| Beyond the three Gunas | Constituted by three Gunas (Tamas, Rajas, Sattva) |
| Never bound, never liberated -- appears so | The seat of bondage and liberation |

The Three Gunas

Prakriti is constituted by three fundamental qualities (Gunas) that are in constant interplay:

- Sattva (Luminosity/Clarity) -- The principle of light, clarity, intelligence, and harmony
- Rajas (Activity/Passion) -- The principle of movement, activity, energy, and restlessness
- Tamas (Inertia/Darkness) -- The principle of heaviness, resistance, dullness, and stability

All phenomena in Prakriti -- including the body, mind (Manas), ego (Ahamkara), and intellect (Buddhi) -- are combinations of these three Gunas in varying proportions. Liberation occurs when Prakriti's three-guna constitution is seen clearly for what it is, and Purusha recognizes itself as distinct from all Prakriti-based phenomena.

The 25 Tattvas (Principles of Existence)

Samkhya enumerates 25 Tattvas (fundamental principles or categories of existence) that constitute all of reality. From the union of Purusha and Prakriti emerge: Mahat/Buddhi (cosmic intellect), Ahamkara (ego-principle), Manas (mind), the five Jnanendriyas (sense organs), five Karmendriyas (motor organs), five Tanmatras (subtle elements), and five Mahabhutas (gross elements). Purusha stands as the 25th -- pure consciousness beyond the evolutes of Prakriti.

Bondage and Liberation in Samkhya

The root of bondage is the false identification (Aviveka) of Purusha with Prakriti -- consciousness mistaking itself to be material. Liberation (Kaivalya) occurs through discriminative wisdom (Viveka Khyati) -- the direct, sustained recognition that Purusha is completely distinct from all that Prakriti produces. When this discrimination is complete, Prakriti ceases to create for that Purusha, and liberation is achieved.

3.4 Yoga Darshan -- The School of Practice & Liberation

Founder & Scripture

Founder: Maharishi Patanjali (approximately 2nd century BCE to 4th century CE -- dates debated)

Primary Text: Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (196 sutras in 4 chapters/padas)

Commentary: Yoga Bhashya by Vyasa; Tattva Vaisharadi by Vacaspati Mishra; Yoga Varttika by Vijnana Bhikshu

Core Teaching

Yoga Darshan is the most practically oriented of all six schools. Building upon the metaphysical foundation of Samkhya, Patanjali constructs a comprehensive, eight-limbed path (Ashtanga Yoga) that systematically leads the practitioner from outward ethical conduct to the innermost experience of samadhi and liberation.

Atha yoganushasanam. Yogas chitta vritti nirodhah. Tada drashtuh svarupe avasthanam.

"Now, the exposition of yoga. Yoga is the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind. Then, the Seer abides in its own nature." -- Yoga Sutras 1.1-1.3

These three opening sutras encapsulate the entire teaching of Yoga Darshan. The first sutra establishes the teaching context, the second defines yoga (as the cessation of mental fluctuations), and the third describes the result of yoga (the Seer -- Purusha/Atman -- abides in its true nature).

The Four Padas (Chapters) of the Yoga Sutras

- Samadhi Pada (Chapter on Absorption) -- 51 sutras: Definition of yoga, the nature of samadhi, types of chitta vrittis, practice and non-attachment
- Sadhana Pada (Chapter on Practice) -- 55 sutras: Kriya Yoga, the five Kleshas (afflictions), Ashtanga Yoga (eight limbs)
- Vibhuti Pada (Chapter on Powers) -- 55 sutras: Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi, the supernormal powers (Siddhis)
- Kaivalya Pada (Chapter on Liberation) -- 34 sutras: The nature of liberation, the dharma cloud samadhi, Kaivalya

The Eight Limbs of Yoga (Ashtanga Yoga)

| Limb | Sanskrit | Description |
|------|-------------------|---|
| 1 | Yama | Five ethical restraints: Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya, Aparigraha |
| 2 | Niyama | Five personal observances: Saucha, Santosha, Tapas, Svadhyaya, Ishvara Pranidhana |
| 3 | Asana | Steady and comfortable posture -- foundation for meditation |
| 4 | Pranayama | Expansion and regulation of vital life force (Prana) through breath |
| 5 | Pratyahara | Withdrawal of the senses from their external objects |
| 6 | Dharana | Concentration -- fixing the mind on a single point or object |
| 7 | Dhyana | Meditation -- uninterrupted flow of awareness toward the object |
| 8 | Samadhi | Complete absorption -- the culmination of yoga practice; union of seer and seen |

Ishvara in Yoga Darshan

One of the most significant differences between Yoga and Samkhya is Yoga's inclusion of Ishvara (God). In Yoga Darshan, Ishvara is defined as a special Purusha -- a pure consciousness that is eternally untouched by the Kleshas, Karmas, and their results. Ishvara is the teacher of the ancient teachers (Guru of gurus), and devotion to Ishvara (Ishvara Pranidhana) is given as both a means of practice and a path to liberation in itself.

Klesha karma vipakashayair aparamrishtah purusha-vishesha Ishvarah

"Ishvara is a special Purusha, untouched by afflictions, actions, the results of actions, and subconscious impressions." -- Yoga Sutras 1.24

The Kleshas -- Root Causes of Suffering

Yoga Darshan identifies five Kleshas (afflictions) as the fundamental causes of human suffering:

- Avidya (Ignorance) -- Misperception of the impermanent as permanent, the impure as pure, the painful as pleasurable, the non-self as Self
- Asmita (Ego) -- False identification of Purusha with Buddhi (intellect)
- Raga (Attachment) -- Craving that accompanies pleasure
- Dvesha (Aversion) -- Repulsion that accompanies pain
- Abhinivesha (Fear of Death) -- The instinctive clinging to existence

Avidya is described as the field (kshetra) from which all other Kleshas arise. The entire practice of yoga is ultimately directed at removing Avidya -- the root misapprehension -- through the cultivation of Viveka Khyati (discriminative discernment), which is the fruit of sustained meditation and samadhi.

Liberation in Yoga Darshan

Liberation in Yoga Darshan is called Kaivalya -- 'aloneness' or 'absolute independence.' It is the state in which Purusha abides in its own nature, completely free from entanglement with Prakriti and its evolutes. The Gunas -- having fulfilled their purpose of providing experience and ultimately the opportunity for liberation -- return to their un-manifested state (Prakriti). Kaivalya is not annihilation but the highest possible state of consciousness.

3.5 Mimamsa Darshan -- The School of Vedic Interpretation

Founder & Scripture

Founder: Maharishi Jaimini

Primary Text: Mimamsa Sutras (also called Purva Mimamsa Sutras) -- approximately 3rd century BCE

Commentary: Shabara Bhashya by Shabarasvami; elaborated by Kumarila Bhatta and Prabhakara

Core Teaching

Mimamsa (from the Sanskrit root 'man' -- to think, to investigate) is the school of Vedic hermeneutics and ritual philosophy. Its primary concern is the correct interpretation and performance of Vedic rituals (Yajnas) as the means to dharma and liberation.

Mimamsa asserts the absolute and eternal authority of the Vedas, arguing that the Vedas are self-evident, unauthored (Apaurusheya -- not composed by any person), and eternally valid. Its elaborate rules of textual interpretation influenced not only later Indian philosophy but also Indian jurisprudence and linguistic theory.

Key Contributions

- Development of sophisticated principles of Vedic textual interpretation (Mimamsa Nyayas)
- Defense of the eternal, unauthored nature of the Vedas and Sanskrit language
- Theory of the eternal validity of dharma as revealed in Vedic injunctions (Vidhi)
- Early Mimamsa rejected the existence of God (Ishvara), arguing the Vedas are self-sufficient
- Later Mimamsa (Prabhakara school) engaged with questions of knowledge and error

Relevance for Yoga: Though Mimamsa is less directly relevant to yoga practice than Samkhya or Vedanta, its influence is felt in the seriousness with which yoga tradition regards scriptural transmission (Shabda Pramana) and in the emphasis on ritual correctness that influenced early Tantra and Hatha Yoga traditions.

Liberation in Mimamsa

The concept of liberation in Mimamsa underwent significant evolution. Early Mimamsa focused primarily on the heavenly rewards (Svarga) of correct ritual performance rather than moksha. Later Mimamsa thinkers engaged with the concept of liberation as the cessation of connection between self and body through correct performance of prescribed duties and the removal of impurities.

3.6 Vedanta Darshan -- The School of Ultimate Knowledge

Founder & Scripture

Founder: Maharishi Badarayana (also called Vyasa)

Primary Text: Brahma Sutras (also called Vedanta Sutras or Uttara Mimamsa) -- approximately 2nd century BCE to 2nd century CE

Commentary: Three principal sub-schools developed commentaries: Shankaracharya (Advaita), Ramanujacharya (Vishishtadvaita), Madhvacharya (Dvaita)

Core Teaching

Vedanta (from Veda + anta, meaning 'end/culmination of the Vedas') is considered the crown of Indian philosophy. It seeks to systematize the teachings of the Upanishads -- the final portions of the Vedas -- into a coherent philosophical system centered on the nature of Brahman (ultimate reality), Atman (individual self), and the relationship between them.

Brahma satyam jagat mithya jivo brahmaiva naparah

"Brahman alone is real; the world is apparent; the individual soul is none other than Brahman." -- Shankaracharya

The Three Sub-Schools of Vedanta

| School | Acharya | Relationship: Brahman-Atman | World View |
|---------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Advaita (Non-dual) | Shankaracharya | Atman = Brahman -- identical, one | World is Maya (illusion superimposed on Brahman) |

| | | | |
|---|----------------|---|---|
| Vishishtadvaita (Qualified Non-dual) | Ramanujacharya | Atman is part of Brahman - - distinct within unity | World is real -- the body of Brahman/Ishvara |
| Dvaita (Dualism) | Madhvacharya | Atman & Brahman eternally distinct -- never identical | World is real; Jiva and Brahman forever different |

Key Concepts in Vedanta

- Brahman -- The ultimate, infinite, self-luminous consciousness that is the ground of all existence
- Atman -- The individual self, whose nature is consciousness (Chit), being (Sat), and bliss (Ananda)
- Maya -- The cosmic creative power through which Brahman appears as the multiplicity of the world
- Avidya -- Individual ignorance of one's true nature as Brahman/Atman
- Jnana -- Direct knowledge of one's true nature as the means of liberation
- Moksha -- Liberation through the direct recognition of the identity (or intimate relationship) of Atman and Brahman

Vedanta has the most direct and profound influence on contemporary yoga teaching. The concept of 'oneness' (Advaita), the teaching that the true Self (Atman/Purusha) is always free, and the emphasis on direct experience (Anubhava) as the ultimate pramana are all integral to modern yoga philosophy.

The Mahavakyas -- Great Sayings of Vedanta

Vedanta is crystallized in four Mahavakyas (Great Sentences) from the four Vedas:

Prajnanam Brahma

"Consciousness is Brahman" -- Aitareya Upanishad (Rig Veda)

Aham Brahmasmi

"I am Brahman" -- Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (Yajur Veda)

Tat tvam asi

"That thou art" -- Chandogya Upanishad (Sama Veda)

Ayam Atma Brahma

"This Self is Brahman" -- Mandukya Upanishad (Atharva Veda)

Chapter 4: Comparative Study -- Shad Darshan & Yoga Darshan

4.1 Introduction to the Comparative Method

Having explored each of the six Darshanas individually, we now undertake a systematic comparative study focusing on Yoga Darshan's relationship to the other five schools. This comparative analysis serves a vital pedagogical purpose: it reveals what is unique about Yoga Darshan, what it shares with other traditions, and why Patanjali's synthesis represents such a monumental achievement in the history of Indian philosophy.

Each comparison is organized around the key philosophical dimensions that all six schools address: the nature of ultimate reality, the nature of the individual self, epistemology (means of valid knowledge), the cause of bondage, and the nature and path to liberation.

4.2 Yoga & Samkhya -- The Closest Partnership

Samkhya yoga pradhane tvastveva sambodhayami

"Samkhya and Yoga are essentially one -- this I declare to you." -- Bhagavad Gita 5.5

The relationship between Yoga and Samkhya is the most intimate of all the inter-school relationships. Yoga Darshan has been described as 'Samkhya with Ishvara' and 'Samkhya with practice.' This description, while a simplification, captures the essential truth: Yoga adopts almost the entire Samkhya metaphysical framework while adding two crucial elements -- Ishvara (God) and a systematic, practical eight-limbed path.

| Aspect | Shad Darshan | Yoga Darshan |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Metaphysical Base | 25 Tattvas (Purusha + 24 evolutes of Prakriti) | Same 25 Tattvas, accepts Samkhya metaphysics fully |
| Nature of Self | Infinite individual Purushas -- pure consciousness | Same -- Purusha as pure witness consciousness |
| God (Ishvara) | Rejected -- atheistic system | Accepted -- a special, eternally free Purusha |
| Three Gunas | Foundation of all material existence | Same -- used to analyze chitta, prakritis, and states |
| Liberation | Kaivalya through Viveka Khyati (discrimination) | Kaivalya -- but through Ashtanga Yoga practice AND Viveka |

| Aspect | Shad Darshan | Yoga Darshan |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Method | Primarily intellectual discrimination (Jnana) | Comprehensive 8-limbed practical path including devotion |
| Role of Mind | Chitta is a Prakriti evolute, different from Purusha | Chitta Vritti Nirodha -- cessation of mind-modifications |

Key Insight for Yoga Teachers: When Patanjali uses the terms Purusha, Prakriti, Gunas, Ahamkara, Buddhi, Chitta -- he is drawing directly from Samkhya. A deep understanding of Samkhya is essential for correctly interpreting and teaching the Yoga Sutras.

4.3 Yoga & Nyaya -- Logic in Service of Liberation

Nyaya and Yoga share the conviction that correct knowledge is fundamental to liberation, and both accept the existence of Ishvara. However, they differ significantly in method and emphasis.

| Aspect | Shad Darshan | Yoga Darshan |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Primary Method | Logical analysis and valid inference (Tarka) | Meditative practice and direct experience (Samadhi) |
| Pramanas Accepted | Four: Pratyaksha, Anumana, Upamana, Shabda | Pratyaksha & Anumana primarily; Shabda (Vedic testimony) |
| Role of Ishvara | Creator of universe; proven by logical inference | Liberator -- object of devotion and meditation |
| Bondage | Caused by mithya jnana (false knowledge) | Caused by Avidya and the five Kleshas |
| Liberation | Apavarga -- cessation of pain through correct knowledge | Kaivalya -- through the eight-limbed path |
| Attitude to Logic | Central and primary method of philosophy | Secondary -- supports but does not replace direct experience |

For yoga teachers, Nyaya's emphasis on valid means of knowledge (Pramana) is enormously valuable. The Nyaya framework helps students understand why yoga relies on direct experience (pratyaksha) as the highest pramana -- and why the teacher's testimony (shabda) is respected but not considered a substitute for one's own meditative experience.

4.4 Yoga & Vaisheshika -- Matter, Consciousness & Categories

Vaisheshika and Yoga engage primarily around their respective analyses of the physical world and the nature of the self. Both accept theism (God's existence), but their metaphysical frameworks differ significantly.

| Aspect | Shad Darshan | Yoga Darshan |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Ontology | Pluralistic -- multiple categories of distinct realities | Dualistic -- Purusha and Prakriti as two realities |
| Nature of Self | Atman -- self associated with 9 substances | Purusha -- pure consciousness, one of infinite Purushas |
| Theory of Matter | Atomic theory -- four types of atoms combine | Guna theory -- Prakriti as three-Guna continuum |
| Ishvara | Accepted as superintendent of creation | Accepted as special Purusha, object of devotion |
| Liberation | Apavarga -- cessation of all qualities including pleasure | Kaivalya -- Purusha recognized as distinct from Prakriti |
| Practical Path | Correct knowledge of categories | Ashtanga Yoga -- comprehensive 8-limbed practice |

4.5 Yoga & Mimamsa -- Ritual, Practice & Inner Work

The relationship between Yoga and Mimamsa is less direct than with Samkhya or Nyaya, but significant. Both traditions emphasize disciplined practice -- Mimamsa through external Vedic ritual (Yajna), Yoga through internal meditative practice (Abhyasa).

| Aspect | Shad Darshan | Yoga Darshan |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Authority | Vedic injunctions (Vidhi) are highest authority | Yoga Sutras and Vedic testimony; direct experience primary |
| Method | External ritual action performed correctly | Internal meditative practice -- Ashtanga Yoga |
| Focus | Karma-kanda -- the ritual section of Vedas | Jnana-kanda (Upanishads) and meditative experience |
| Ishvara | Early Mimamsa rejected Ishvara | Central -- Ishvara as special Purusha and object of devotion |
| Liberation | Initially: heavenly rewards; later: moksha through ritual | Kaivalya through cessation of mental fluctuations |
| Yamas/Niyamas | Some overlap with Vedic ethical injunctions | Explicitly codified in Ashtanga Yoga's first two limbs |

The Niyamas of Yoga (especially Tapas, Svadhyaya, and Ishvara Pranidhana) can be seen as an internalization of what Mimamsa pursued through external ritual. Yoga Darshan radically interiorized the spiritual life that Mimamsa located in external performance.

4.6 Yoga & Vedanta -- Consciousness, Self & Liberation

The relationship between Yoga and Vedanta is perhaps the most philosophically complex and practically important for contemporary yoga teachers, since so much of modern yoga is presented through a Vedantic lens -- particularly Advaita Vedanta.

| Aspect | Shad Darshan | Yoga Darshan |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Nature of Reality | Dualistic -- Purusha & Prakriti both real and distinct | Non-dual (Advaita) -- Brahman alone is ultimately real |
| Individual Self | Infinite individual Purushas -- eternally distinct from each other | Individual self (Jiva/Atman) is ultimately identical to Brahman |
| Nature of World | World is real -- created by Prakriti | World is apparent -- Maya superimposed on Brahman |
| God (Ishvara) | A special Purusha -- eternally free, personal God | Brahman with attributes (Saguna) -- lower level of truth |
| Liberation | Kaivalya -- Purusha recognized as distinct from Prakriti | Moksha -- Atman recognized as identical with Brahman |
| Primary Means | Eight-limbed yoga -- Ashtanga Yoga practice | Jnana (Direct knowledge) + Upasana (meditation) + Karma |
| Role of Mind | Chitta must be stilled -- vritti nirodha is the goal | Mind is transparent -- Brahman shines when mind is pure |
| Maya | Not explicitly a central concept | Central -- Maya is the cosmological principle of appearance |

The apparent tension between Yoga's dualism (Purusha separate from Prakriti) and Vedanta's non-dualism (Atman identical with Brahman) has been a subject of philosophical discussion for centuries. Many scholars and teachers see these as complementary rather than contradictory: Yoga Darshan describes the experiential path of practice, while Advaita Vedanta describes the metaphysical nature of the liberation that practice aims at.

For the Yoga Teacher: When you teach yoga philosophy, you will often draw on both Yoga Darshan and Vedanta simultaneously. Understanding where each begins and ends -- and how they complement each other -- will make you a far more nuanced and accurate teacher.

4.7 Master Comparison Table -- All Six Schools

| Aspect | Nyaya | Vaisheshika | Samkhya | Yoga | Mimamsa/Vedanta |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Self (Atman) | Atman -- substance with qualities | Atman -- one of 9 substances | Purusha -- pure consciousness | Purusha -- witness consciousness | Jiva/Atman -- related to Brahman |
| God | Accepted | Accepted | Rejected | Accepted (Ishvara) | Accepted (Brahman/Ishvara) |
| World | Real (Pluralistic) | Real (Atomic) | Real (Prakriti) | Real (Prakriti) | Apparent (Maya) |
| Liberation | Apavarga | Apavarga | Kaivalya | Kaivalya | Moksha |
| Method | Logic/Tarka | Analysis/Atomic theory | Viveka Jnana | Ashtanga Yoga | Jnana/Bhakti/Karma |
| Key Text | Nyaya Sutras | Vaisheshika Sutras | Samkhya Karikas | Yoga Sutras | Brahma/Mimamsa Sutras |

Chapter 5: Practical Implications for Yoga Teachers

5.1 Teaching Philosophy Without Preaching

As yoga teachers trained in the tradition of SKM Yoga, your role is not to convert students to a particular philosophical viewpoint but to create an environment in which the philosophical wisdom of yoga can illuminate their practice and their lives. This requires both intellectual clarity and experiential grounding.

The study of Shad Darshan equips you with intellectual clarity. The practice of yoga equips you with experiential grounding. When both are present, the philosophy you share in class will carry a conviction and authenticity that no amount of book learning alone can provide.

5.2 Samkhya-Yoga in the Classroom

The Samkhya-Yoga framework is the most directly applicable to day-to-day yoga teaching. Here are specific ways this philosophy enters the teaching space:

- The Three Gunas (Tamas, Rajas, Sattva): Teach students to observe their own Guna balance -- in their mood, in their practice, in their diet and lifestyle -- and to consciously cultivate Sattva through yoga.
- The Kleshas: The five Kleshas (Avidya, Asmita, Raga, Dvesha, Abhinivesha) are directly observable in a yoga class. Helping students notice attachment to performance, aversion to challenge, and the fear beneath habitual patterns is profoundly transformative teaching.
- Chitta and Chitta Vritti: Students benefit enormously from understanding the yoga model of mind -- chitta (mind-field) and its fluctuations (vrittis) -- as distinct from their true nature (Purusha/Atman). This is the foundation of mindfulness in the yoga tradition.
- Purusha as Witness: The practice of stepping back into the Witness -- Purusha, the detached observer -- is one of the most powerful tools in the yoga teacher's repertoire. This has its roots directly in Samkhya-Yoga.

5.3 Vedanta in Contemporary Yoga Teaching

Advaita Vedanta's teaching that 'You are already That' -- that the true Self is eternally free, whole, and complete -- is one of the most healing and liberating messages a yoga teacher can offer students struggling with self-judgment, shame, or feelings of inadequacy.

- The Mahavakyas (Tat Tvam Asi -- 'That Thou Art') can be offered as mantras or contemplative invitations during Savasana or meditation.

- The concept of Maya (not dismissing the world as unreal, but understanding that our habitual perception superimposes limitation onto an inherently boundless reality) helps students understand why yoga practice leads to expanded awareness.
- Brahman as the all-pervasive consciousness supports the teaching of yoga as union -- union of individual awareness with universal awareness, not as a future achievement but as a recognition of what already IS.

5.4 Nyaya's Gift: The Pramanas in Yoga Teaching

Nyaya's analysis of valid means of knowledge is directly practical for yoga teachers:

- Pratyaksha (Direct Perception): Encourage students to trust their direct experience on the mat and in meditation. The body is a laboratory of self-knowledge.
- Anumana (Inference): Help students reason from what they observe in their practice to deeper principles -- noticing how stress affects breath, how breath affects mind, how mind affects action.
- Shabda (Testimony): Help students understand why they study with teachers and read authentic texts -- not blind faith, but intelligent trust in tested transmission.
- Upamana (Analogy/Comparison): Use metaphor and analogy liberally in teaching. Yoga teaching has always been rich with image and metaphor because direct experience is difficult to communicate.

5.5 Integrating Philosophy into Class Structure

Rather than treating philosophy as separate from practice, the finest yoga teachers integrate philosophical insight seamlessly into instruction:

| Class Moment | Philosophical Theme | Darshana Source |
|---------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Opening invocation | Setting sankalpa; Ishvara Pranidhana; connecting to source | Yoga Darshan; Vedanta |
| Asana cues | Body awareness; Sattva cultivation; witness consciousness | Samkhya-Yoga; Vaisheshika |
| Breath work | Prana as bridge between body and mind; Guna balance | Samkhya-Yoga |
| Meditation guidance | Dharana/Dhyana/Samadhi stages; chitta vritti nirodha | Yoga Darshan |
| Savasana | Purusha as witness; returning to the ground of being | Samkhya-Yoga; Advaita Vedanta |

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Post-class reflection | Svadyaya; using Nyaya pramanas for self-inquiry | Yoga Darshan; Nyaya |
|-----------------------|---|----------------------------|

Chapter 6: Self-Study Questions & Reflection

6.1 Comprehension Questions

The following questions are designed to test your comprehension of the material covered in this text. Answer each question in your own words, drawing on the concepts and comparisons you have studied.

1. Define Shad Darshan and explain the significance of the term 'Darshana' as distinct from merely academic philosophy.
2. What is the fundamental metaphysical claim of Samkhya Darshan? How does Yoga Darshan accept and build upon this claim?
3. In what way does Yoga Darshan differ most significantly from Samkhya Darshan? Why is this difference philosophically and practically important?
4. Compare the concept of 'liberation' across any three schools of Shad Darshan. What do these conceptions share, and where do they fundamentally differ?
5. How does Nyaya's theory of Pramanas (valid means of knowledge) apply to the practice and teaching of yoga?
6. Explain the Three Gunas and their relevance to yoga teaching. Give examples of how each Guna might manifest in a yoga class.
7. What is the significance of Ishvara in Yoga Darshan? How does this compare to the role of God in Nyaya and Vedanta?
8. Compare the Samkhya conception of the world as real (Prakriti) with Advaita Vedanta's doctrine of Maya. How can these two views be reconciled or do they represent genuine philosophical alternatives?
9. What are the five Kleshas of Yoga Darshan? Give an example of each Klesha as it might appear in a student's yoga practice.
10. Describe the Eight Limbs of Yoga (Ashtanga Yoga). How do these eight limbs reflect a comprehensive vision of human transformation?

6.2 Reflection & Application

These questions are for deeper contemplation and journaling. There are no 'correct' answers -- only honest, thoughtful inquiry.

- Which of the six Darshanas most resonates with your own understanding of reality, self, and liberation? Why?
- How does the Samkhya distinction between Purusha (pure awareness) and Prakriti (matter) appear in your own experience on and off the mat?
- In your own yoga practice, have you noticed the three Gunas at work? Reflect on a specific practice session and describe which Gunas were most prominent.

- How might the teaching of the five Kleshas transform your approach to working with students who are struggling emotionally or physically in class?
- Vedanta says 'You are already That -- already free.' How does this teaching sit with you? Does it feel true in your experience? How might it transform how you relate to your own limitations?
- If you were to integrate one philosophical concept from Shad Darshan into your yoga teaching immediately, what would it be? How would you teach it?

6.3 Sanskrit Practice

Learn and reflect on the meaning of each term. Practice writing these in both Devanagari (if possible) and transliterated form, and be able to explain their meaning to a student in simple, accessible language.

- Purusha, Prakriti, Guna, Chitta, Vritti, Klesa, Kaivalya, Moksha
- Viveka, Vairagya, Abhyasa, Samadhi, Dharana, Dhyana
- Avidya, Asmita, Raga, Dvesha, Abhinivesha
- Ishvara, Pranava (OM), Japa, Tapas, Svadhyaya, Santosha
- Sattva, Rajas, Tamas, Mahat, Ahamkara, Manas, Buddhi

Glossary of Sanskrit Terms

This glossary provides working definitions of the key Sanskrit terms used throughout this text. Definitions are given in the context of Shad Darshan and Yoga philosophy.

Abhyasa -- Consistent, sustained practice -- one of the two pillars of Yoga Darshan alongside Vairagya

Advaita -- Non-dual; the Vedantic school of Shankaracharya asserting that Atman and Brahman are ultimately one

Ahamkara -- The ego-principle; the sense of 'I-am-ness'; one of the evolutes of Prakriti in Samkhya-Yoga

Ashtanga -- Eight limbs; the eight-limbed path of yoga as codified by Patanjali

Atman -- The individual Self; in Vedanta, identical with Brahman; in Samkhya-Yoga, synonymous with Purusha

Avidya -- Fundamental ignorance; misperception of the self and reality; root Klesha in Yoga Darshan

Brahman -- The ultimate reality; infinite, self-luminous, non-dual consciousness; the ground of all existence in Vedanta

Buddhi -- Intelligence; discriminative faculty; the highest evolute of Prakriti; the seat of Viveka (discrimination)

Chitta -- The mind-field; individual consciousness as a material evolute of Prakriti in Samkhya-Yoga

Darshana -- Vision; direct perception of truth; the six classical schools of Indian philosophy

Dharana -- Concentration; the sixth limb of Ashtanga Yoga -- fixing the mind on a single object

Dhyana -- Meditation; the seventh limb of Ashtanga Yoga -- uninterrupted flow of awareness

Dvaita -- Dualism; the Vedantic school of Madhvacharya asserting Jiva and Brahman are eternally distinct

Gunās -- The three fundamental qualities of Prakriti: Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas

Ishvara -- God; in Yoga Darshan, a special Purusha eternally free from afflictions; object of devotion and meditation

Jnana -- Knowledge; especially direct, liberating knowledge of one's true nature

Kaivalya -- Liberation in Samkhya-Yoga; absolute independence of Purusha from Prakriti

Karma -- Action and its accumulated impressions; one of the forces binding the individual to the cycle of rebirth

Klesha -- Affliction; the five root causes of suffering in Yoga Darshan

Mahat -- The cosmic intellect; first great evolute of Prakriti in Samkhya

Maya -- Illusion or creative power; in Advaita Vedanta, the principle by which Brahman appears as the world

Moksha -- Liberation; freedom from the cycle of birth and death; ultimate goal of all six Darshanas

Pramana -- Valid means of knowledge; in Nyaya, there are four (Pratyaksha, Anumana, Upamana, Shabda)

Prakriti -- Primal matter/nature; the active, material principle in Samkhya-Yoga; constituted by the three Gunas

Pranayama -- Expansion and regulation of Prana (vital life force) through breath; fourth limb of Ashtanga Yoga

Pratyaksha -- Direct perception; knowledge through direct sensory or meditative experience; first Pramana

Purusha -- Pure consciousness; the witnessing Self in Samkhya-Yoga; eternally free and unchanging

Sadhana -- Spiritual practice; the means employed on the path to liberation

Samadhi -- Absorption; the eighth and culminating limb of Ashtanga Yoga; states of non-dual consciousness

Samkhya -- Enumeration; the dualistic school of Kapila forming the metaphysical basis for Yoga Darshan

Shabda -- Verbal testimony; sacred sound; the syllable OM as the symbol of Ishvara

Tattva -- Reality; principle; one of the 25 metaphysical categories of Samkhya

Vairagya -- Non-attachment; dispassion toward worldly and spiritual objects; paired with Abhyasa in Yoga Darshan

Vedanta -- End of the Vedas; the school of philosophy based on the Upanishads and Brahma Sutras

Viveka -- Discrimination; the capacity to distinguish Purusha from Prakriti; the direct means to Kaivalya

Vritti -- Fluctuation or modification of the mind; what yoga aims to still (chitta vritti nirodha)

Yoga -- Union; a practical discipline of meditation and self-transformation; also the fourth Darshana

Bibliography & Further Reading

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Recommended Translations of the Yoga Sutras

- Swami Satchidananda -- The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (accessible and devotional)
- B.K.S. Iyengar -- Light on the Yoga Sutras (detailed and practical)
- Georg Feuerstein -- The Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali (scholarly and comprehensive)
- T.K.V. Desikachar -- The Heart of Yoga (includes commentary on Yoga Sutras)
- Chip Hartranft -- The Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali (elegant contemporary translation)

Secondary Sources on Indian Philosophy

- Dasgupta, S.N. -- A History of Indian Philosophy (5 volumes; comprehensive academic reference)
- Radhakrishnan, S. -- Indian Philosophy (2 volumes; classic accessible overview)
- Feuerstein, Georg -- The Philosophy of Classical Yoga (excellent for yoga teachers)
- Michaels, Axel -- Hinduism: Past and Present (excellent historical context)
- Zimmer, Heinrich -- Philosophies of India (beautifully written survey)

Recommended for Yoga Teachers

- Swami Vivekananda -- Raja Yoga (excellent exposition of Yoga Darshan)
- Swami Vivekananda -- Jnana Yoga (accessible Advaita Vedanta for yoga teachers)
- Pandit Rajmani Tigunait -- The Secret of the Yoga Sutra (Himalayan tradition)
- Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati -- Prana Pranayama Prana Vidya
- David Frawley (Vamadeva Shastri) -- Yoga and Ayurveda

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

May this study bring clarity, depth, and liberation to all who engage with it.

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