

## A search for a book on “āsanas” for practitioners and teachers

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### ĀSANAS

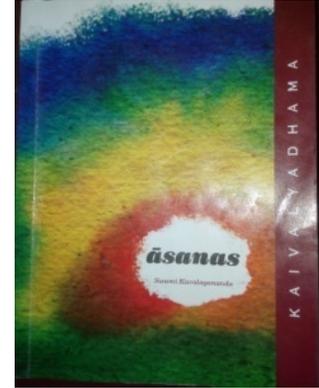
(8<sup>th</sup> English impression)

**By Swami Kuvalayananda**

Kaivalyadhama, Lonavla, Dist. Pune, 410403, India

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### Abstract

There are many books available on asanas and all have their own merit. One such book is ‘āsanas’ written by Swami Kuvalananda, the founder of Kaivalyadhama Institute of Yoga, Lonavla, India long back in 1933. After going deeply through the aforementioned book *along with other popular books* on this topic, it was found that the aforementioned book still presents a unique opportunity to layman as well as to advanced learner which only a few books of this genre can. This book is highly recommended to all yoga teachers, students, yoga trainer and yoga lovers as well as for those, who want to practice āsanās at home. Every chapter of this book is presented in a very systematic and explained in such a lucid manner that even a novice can understand and practice āsanās on their own. As Swami Kuvalayananda was a physical educationist and he was also an erudite in Sanskrit language, he learnt the asanas from the classical scriptures yet presented them in scientifically cogent manner so that modern reader could understand and internalize the logic behind each asanas. This book ends with prescribing three different schemes of asanas. These are very helpful for the self-learner in finalizing his own course of practice. It can be concluded that everyone who want to enter in the world of āsanās must study and follow this book.

**Key Words:** Yoga, Asanas, Full Course, Short Course, and Easy Course

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### Introduction:

Ancient uncivilized men turned into today’s modern civilized men through various stages of changes. The life of a modern man is full of luxurious things and comfort. But with this development several complicated physical and mental problems arise in his otherwise pleasant life. Professional like scientist, educationists, psychologists and medical expert are trying to find the solution to all these problems. In the process of evolution, there were various civilization who come into existence and ebb. Among them few were so established that even they do not exist

today but have deep influence on modern life. In this sequence, ancient civilizations of India Harappan and Mohon Jodaro is a milestone in the development of modern society and gives the yoga to the world as a philosophy of life, as a means to live a happy life, an easy tool to develop physical, physiological and psychological capacities along with spirituality. As a way of life, Yoga is state of aloofness and altruistic. Around 2000 BC, great sage Maharishi Patanjali, brought this scattered knowledge in written form. That is why Maharishi Patanjali is considered as the ‘father of Yoga’ who compiled 195 Yoga

Sutras that become the foundation of Yoga philosophy. The commentary on these sutras is called Bhasya. The core essence of Patanjali yoga sutra eightfold path of Yoga (Ashtanga Yoga) that focused upon healthy living through Yoga.

Recently, the United National General Assembly had declared June 21 as the International Yoga Day. And on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2015, 192 countries all over the world celebrated international yoga day with full passion. Now a day, people are crazy throughout the world about yoga. The credit goes to the earnest effort made by some great yoga practitioners just like T. Krishnamacharya, Swami Kuvalayananda, B.K. S. Iyengar, Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, Swami Chidananda Saraswati, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Paramahansa Yogananda etc. to bring yoga as a solution of all troubles and illness for an ordinary man. There are medical evidences about the utility of yoga practices to keep one healthy. As yoga is an infinite subject and it is very difficult for laymen to practice truly yoga in his life. In spite of that most of the people used to practice asanas and Pranayama on the name of yoga. It is noteworthy here ordinary men use to practice only asanas and breathing technique for the sake of health. It is a common observation that people are confused regarding what and which yogic activities they have to practice to get more benefit. As on one hand there are several asanas and pranayama techniques illustrated in the yogic literature. On the other hand different modern yoga gurus and teachers are teaching different kind of asanas in different style. As common men have shortages of time and it is very difficult for him to learn hundreds of yogic technique which creates confusion. *Present study is taken here to get the solution of this problem by finding best asanas book for the laymen so that common men could practice asanas at their own.*

At the time when India was struggling for independence Swami Kuvalayananda thought

to motivate the youth through yoga for the real freedom, freedom from British Empire and freedom from illness physical and mental. He started his teaching carrier at Partap High School, Amalner under Khandesh Education Society from 1915 to 1923. Here he built a special hut for himself which gave an ideal atmosphere for his Yoga sadhana. He lived like a Yogi. Here up to 1923 he studied deeply in yoga, philosophy and spirituality and finally, he established an ashram known as Kaivalyadham at lonavla in 1924 and started to impart the knowledge of yoga along with physical education to the Indian youth (Gharote & Gharote, 1999). It was Swami Kuvalayananda, who by his scientific approach to yoga removed existing misunderstanding and literally brought yoga to the doors of common men. Latter yoga becomes mission for the swami Kuvalayananda. According to Swami Kuvalayananda (1964) "Yoga has a complete message for humanity. It has a message for the human body. It has a message for the human mind, and it has also a message for the human soul. Will intelligent and capable youth come forth to carry this message to every individual, not only in India But also in every other part of the world?" and he gave his complete life to serve the humanities through yoga.

Earlier before the Swami Kuvalayananda, yoga was limited only to Rishi Munis and common men were uninformed about the benefits of yoga. It was myth that it is something highly complicated practice and meant for only Rishi Munis, having no benefit for common men. Swami Kuvalayananda recognized the importance of it for laymen and brought it in simple form for common men. Before it the benefits of practicing of yoga was based on the experience of Rishi Munis, those who were regular practitioner. There were no scientific evidence about the benefits and practicing of yoga. Swami Kuvalayananda started to test the effects of yoga practices particularly asanas, paranayamas and yoga at scientific laboratory. And to make the benefits of this science accessible for common men, he started to

published “YOGA MIMANSHA” in 1924, the first ever scientific journal of yoga in the world published from Kaivalyadhama under the guidance of Swami Kuvalayananda. He tested the physical, physiological and psychological effect of various practices of yogāsanas. Keeping in the mind importance of āsanas and paranayamas for laymen Swami Kuvalayananda wrote some books including the book “Asana” written in 1933.

Prior to this book Yogis and very few people used to practice yoga and they explained their own experiences about the benefit of yoga. There was no scientific literature on yoga to explain the effects of practicing yoga. He was the first person, who started to testify each and every asanas, paranayama etc in the scientific lab. Since 1917 he conducted ample researches in the field of yoga. Then his knowledge came out in the form of this book in 1933. At present eight reprints impressions of this book are in the market for the reader. He examined the effect of asanas at physical, mental, physiological along with spiritual level. And this book of āsanas which is being studied here is the result of this long research. Researcher felt that it was the first book written for common men. All other books which were available that time was in Sanskrit and usually covered all the aspect of yoga together such as yamas, niyamas, āsanas, paranayama, partyahara, dhayan dharana and Samadhi.

#### **Books of asanas:**

Researcher, during his Certificate course in Yoga from Kaivalyadhama, observed that there are plenty of books available on the Yoga particularly on āsanas. Some are written by Indian and few are written by foreigner also. Further we can divide all these books under two categories - One group of books includes the books written by educationists who were not practitioner of Yoga and hence the content of the book was more mechanical without elaborating the real essence behind the practices. The other group of the books were usually written by great Yoga practitioners and amateur Yoga enthusiasts.

These books were quite rich in content and figures. Because of enormous number of books, generally reader and practitioner get confused easily which book they have to study and practice. These situations raise a question which book is better and suitable for the laymen to practice yoga particularly āsana. That is why analytical scrutiny of the available āsana book in the market is the demand of the day. To get the answer of this uncertainty researcher decided to go through all the āsana books available in the library of Kaivalyadhama as well as in Indian market. The following books written by well-known Yoga gurus and academician were scrutinized for their efficacy as a textbook for the utility of yoga practitioner.

1. “Āsanas” written by Swami Kuvalayananda; published in 1933
2. “Light on Yoga - Yoga Dipika” by B. K. S. Iyengar; published in 1966
3. “A Systematic Course in the Ancient Tantric Techniques of Yoga and Kriya” by Swami Satyananda Saraswati; published in 1981.
4. “Complete Hatha Yoga” by Kevin and Venika Kingsland; published in 1983.
5. “ĀSANA – WHY & HOW?” by O. P. Tiwari; published in 1984.
6. “The illustrated *Light on Yoga - Yoga Dipika*” by B. K. S. Iyengar; published in 1997
7. “Yoga – Jivan” by Dr. kaushal K. Bhardwaj; published in 2006.
8. “Yogasana and Pranayama” by Pandit Jainarayana Sharma; (date of publishing not mentioned on the book).

After an analytical study of several books author’s felt that the book of āsana written by Swami Kuvalayananda in 1933 is still useful. This is a ‘must read’ for all students of yoga course, as well yoga practitioner and for those who want to become a good yoga teacher. Keeping this in view an analytical study is present hereunder of this book “āsanas” written by Swami Kuvalayananda.

#### **Aims:**

The aim of the study was to find best book of yogasanas for the laymen practitioner and investigate the worth of book ‘āsanas’ written by swami Kuvalayananda in modern time.

**Analysis of physical quality of book:**

It is an original, research based, reference asanas book. The book has 188 pages including index and Glossary. The size of pages is ideal (1.2 x 14 x 21.4 cm). Cover page is very simple but attractive. The eighth reprints impressions in 2012 are in the market even the writer is no more in this world. His books still enlighten the path of asanas specially and yoga in general for the youth throughout the world. Due to the size of this book, it is easy to carry anywhere anytime for the yoga lovers in general and asana in particular.

**Writer’s efficiency:**

When we used to discuss about any written matter we usually as a reader want to know who is the writer, whether he had the quality and deep knowledge about that subject. As we know that swami Kuvalayananda was the expert in Sanskrit, physical education, having deep knowledge in ancient history particularly in religious development, and no doubt master in yoga even we can say that he was real yogi along with a scientist attitude. According to international survey, Swami Kuvalayananda is considering as top three yoga guru in the world.

Gharote & Gharote (1999) rightly said that swami Kuvalayananda put yoga on the scientific basis at a time when prejudice about yoga was prevalent among the scientific circle and the aspect of science completely absent in yogic circle. His contributions in yoga have been recorded in the areas of scientific research, literary research, therapeutically research, education in general and physical education in particular as well as in the field of yogic therapy.

Tiwari (2012) said “swami Kuvalayananda, the founder of Kaivalyadhama and doyen among researchers in the field of yoga”.

**Content analysis:**

The book is divided into six chapter and three appendixes with glossary and index. Swami Kuvalayananda writes in preface the aim of the book that it is useful for both categories of practitioner of physical culture as well as spiritual culture. According to him there are two categories of asanas practitioner, one who does the asanas only for the purpose of physical development, where as another one, who do the practice of asanas only for the purpose of spiritual journey. Here it is important that either you want to get physical benefits or spiritual, practices of āsanās is the most important for both categories.

The first chapter “Human Body” covers all the anatomical and physiological aspect of āsanās. Through it Swami Kuvalayananda cleared all doubts regarding the benefits of asanas, such as how the practice of yogasanas can modified the body at the level of physical, mental as well as Paranic energy level (Kundalini awakening). He explained each and everything about the physical body and various systems working in human body independently and interdependently. By reading this chapter anyone can understand how our body work and get repair itself. He started with the structure of cell and continues through all the major system of the body such as bone, muscles, circulatory system, respiratory system, digestive system, urinary system, finish with nervous system and endocrine glands. Swami Kuvalayananda put his full experience and deep knowledge to make a boring topic very interesting and comprehensible with suitable examples and scientific logic. In the conclusion of this part of the book, Swami Kuvalayananda is successful to convey the reader how practice of asanas will lead a healthy life by maintaining the balance in-between anabolic and catabolic process. He is very well aware why peoples use to practice yoga particularly asanas. That’s why in his last sentence of this chapter he said that the aim of yoga on its physical side is to avoid disease and ensure health by establishing and maintaining physiological harmony in the human body.

Second chapter is incredibly better and necessary to go through for everyone, who want to start practice yoga particularly asanas and Pranayamas. In this chapter, Swami Kuvalayananda elucidates everything effectively and authentically, regarding the preparation before start to practicing yoga. Here he advocates the observation of YAMAS and NIYAMAS to get maximum desired results by practicing asanas. In this chapter Swami explains interrelationship of mind and body and established that mind has great effect on body compare to body on mind. He is able to convince the readers that to train our body we use to practice asanas (physical exercises) so that to get maximum benefit we must train our mind also through mental exercises. According to him YAMAS and NIYAMAS is the mental practices to train our brain. Swami Kuvalayananda divided the asanas in to two categories cultural and meditative. Whereas according to recent yogic books cultural postures can be divided into two categories such as physical and relaxative. Shavāsana and Makarāsana come under the relaxative āsana. *Swami Kuvalayananda put the Shavāsana under the cultural poses, the reason is clear behind this that according to traditional texts of yoga, there is no place of fatigue during asanas so that he didn't mention it separately.*

Swami Kuvalayananda explains the relationship of body mind with suitable example. He clearly explained how emotions control over behavior? In supports of his statement he has given medical evidences which show how well he prepared to write this book. With the explanation of positive and negative effect of emotion on over day to day life and action, he concluded that our mind has more profound effect on our body compared to body on mind. With various suitable examples, he established that before to start physical training we have to take up mental training means yamas and niyamas. He assured that the result of other systems would be far more encouraging if they also required their followers to practice mental hygiene

simultaneously with the physical exercises. At last he briefly explains about the place of asanas, seat or types of carpet etc. in this chapter.

Next part of the book is most useful. This part is consisting of chapter third, fourth and fifth along with appendix. In this part of book swami Kuvalayananda give some most useful yogic activities such Drishti or Gazes, Bandhas, Mudrā, Viparit Karni along with most useful asanas. He adopted continues explanation methods to give details the technique of yogic practices, even though it is too easy and conveying that a novice can understand and practice all the asanas at their own.

Third chapter dealt with four meditative postures along with two Drishtis (Gaze) and three Bandhas (Lock). Here author of the book explained that how one has to use different Drishtis (Gaze) and Bandhas (Lock) during the practice of Meditative poses and explain what difficulties can come and how can one overcome with these difficulties. Important things about the description of any pose is that he explain the position of each and every body part which is directly involved during the performance of asanas such as eyes, hands, spine, neck, legs, toe etc. and give the option for every difficult asanas. If anybody does not succeed to perform these difficult asanas he can go for that easy option to get benefit.

Chapter fourth consisting of seventeen cultural poses along with their variations. Here he selects the asanas very carefully so that every part of the body gets exercises. We can classified the asanas on the basis of body position means supine line poses, prone line poses, inverted poses, sitting poses and standing poses. Whereas on the basis of bending, we can classified asanas into three categories such as forward bending, backward bending and twisting asanas. It is noteworthy here that swami Kuvalayananda did not give any inverted pose but to cover it through Viparit Karni which can be considered as asanas also. Most attractive characteristic of

this book is that author explained the technique of each yogic pose in continue flow and provide the picture at the end of book. Which brings two benefit First unnecessary repetitions of figure is avoided which bring the size of book small. Here it is also noteworthy that swami Kuvalayananda was aware about the dynamic form of asanas (see chapter five of this book) even though he is adamant on traditional way of asanas. Intention behind this is clear that asana means no fatigue, no injury. Whereas another benefit of tradition form of asana is that you do not need big place and huge equipment.

He has given the option of difficult asana along with the advance stages of important asanas for the advanced learner. As far as benefits of each practice he has mentioned separately as physical benefits, therapeutic benefits and spiritual benefits which are based on his own experience and results of the scientific investigation in to the laboratory conducted by him at the scientific lab of Kaivalyadhama.

The special character of this book is that author gives a numbers of repetitions, sets and time of hold for both practitioners means physical culturist as well those who are looking spiritual benefits.

Chapter fifth contains four additional exercises known as Yoga-Mudrs, Jhiva-Bandha, Viparita Karani and Nauli kriya. At present time, when Baba Ramdev demonstrates Nauli kirya or which is known as the isolation and rolling of the abdominal Recti muscle, people get crazy. Author explains this difficult exercise in so uncomplicated and lucid manner that a layman also can learn it by practicing.

Chapter 5 named as scientific survey of yogic poses which is an important and unique chapter of this book. No other book I have ever seen which give such type of scientific proof of benefits of asanas practice. Here author enlightens the physical, physiological, psychological and spiritual benefits of asanas

practice with scientific evidence. Here he explains in brief, how practices of various asanas lead to ultimate aim of yoga means awakening of Kundalini. How every important system of our body such as digestive system, circulatory system, muscular system, respiratory system, endocrine glands and central nervous system get affected in positive manner by the practice of these yogic poses are give in details. In this chapter very clearly he recommends the dynamic form of yogic pose only for those who want to build his body. For him yoga is not intended for physical development only. Physical body is a means to achieve the ultimate aim of yoga. The aim of yogic practice is much higher than this simple physical development. That is why he did not give any place of dynamic form of yogasana practice in this book.

He explains meditative poses separately with their importance and benefits for both categories means for physical culturist and spiritualist. Very nicely, he clarifies the concept of spine erect, Body position for the meditation- horizontal or erect position which one is better after reading this chapter the readers can understand what it means. According to Swami Kuvalayananda sāvasana is not meant for meditation at all.

There are three appendixes in this book which makes this book unique as compared to other books available in market. There is no book in the market, which prscribed such type of asanas program for practitioner known as easy course – appendix third for biggner, short course – appendix second for intermediate level and a full course – appendix one is for advance level practitioner of yoga. This section is showing how deep knowledge he has about physical exercises and yoga together.

#### **Discussion:**

There are three more books in the market which has given practices courses for the yoga sadhaka. The first one is “A systematic course in the Ancient tantric technique of YOGA AND KRIYA”by Swami satyananda saraswati

consist of 977 page and several week (36 types daily practice program) program; second one is “Light on Yoga - Yoga Dipika” by B. K. S. Iyengar consisting of 546 pages and prescribed 300 week training program; and third one is “The illustrated *Light on Yoga - Yoga Dipika*” by B. K. S. Iyengar consisting of 179 pages and 35 weeks program; all these books are very good but very difficult for a layman to follow even to understand.

As in the preface Swami Kuvalayananda, the writer of the book has explained the intention of writing of this book that this book is for public and covered the whole field of physical culture of practice of asanas. In full course, short course and easy course he has give time of retention, repetition, how we add time or progress gradually. To avoid repetition of subject matter he gives limitations, measure, caution, place, seat, time and sequence and how we combined with exercise of asanas practice given together at the end of full course which bring two benefits reader will understand easily and will not get weary while reading the book.

Writer has prescribed pranayama in his training modules viz. Full course, short course and easy course but did not cover in this book that is why in preface of this book, he recommend to the reader to studies another handbook named ‘PRĀNĀYĀMA’ to get knowledge about Pranayama techniques.

The main characteristics of this book that writer had followed the international style of book writing means books end with the glossary and index. This was very rare during that time in Indian literature especially in the field of physical education. Glossary is very important to improve professional vocabulary where as index save the time of students to get knowledge about important topic given in book.

Another distinctiveness of this book is that all the diagrams and pictures are given at the end of the book. This makes this book different from all other book available in the market.

### **Conclusion:**

Quality has several meaning but as far as concern about the āsana books it stands for the fitness for use or purpose. In other words quality is an ability of any book which satisfies the customer’s needs and expectations. The following qualities of this book make it worthy among all the yoga books studied hereunder-

- It has small size which makes it a yoga handbook which is easy to carry.
- Each and every yoga poses taking from traditional text and presented here under on scientific basis.
- Only relevant and useful āsanās are given in the book.
- Variation is also given of difficult āsana.
- By practicing the given modules viz. easy course, short course and full course, practitioner may get exercise of all major body parts along with all majors muscles of the body.
- Presentation style and explanation of each āsana in term of procedure, benefits, indication and contra-indication, duration of maintenance, set and repetition is extraordinary.
- Writer is in favor of traditional style of yogic practices. Reason is very clear that dynamic form is nothing just stretching and strengthening exercise of gymnastic where chance of injury and fatigue is very high , where as in traditional form of yoga there is no place of fatigue and injury during practices of asanas.
- Each and every chapter is proper and systematic in order.
- Additional yogic practices also given which are necessary to be incorporated with asanas.
- The book is clear, readable and adequately illustrated.

Therefore it concludes that this is a wonderful book which will give each reader knowledge and insight about yogasanas practice. As at

present yoga is also in the curriculum in education so every Physical Education or yoga teacher working in education institute or

having personal class of yoga should read it to give best training to his students and clients as well. Even anyone would enjoy this book.

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