

Universal Brotherhood Through Yoga



Editors

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Introduction

This article attempts to describe the chronology of the development of Yoga practice and its adaptation process in the midst of diverse cultures and religions in Indonesia. Because Indonesian society is multicultural, *yogasana*, whose presence is considered new sometimes creates a bit of a problem. There are some who accept it and there are some who question it. For those who receive it, they practice it enthusiastically because they are directly benefitted, while others are questioning it for reasons of their belief system. Few of them who have a certain belief do not accept Yoga because it is considered as coming from another belief. Nevertheless, the practice of Yoga in Indonesia is still going on well. *Yogasana* today is more popular especially in big cities in Indonesia such as Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya and Bali. The growth of this popularity is inseparable from them due to the level of stress in work and daily activities. The *yogasana* exercise for them aims to relax, flex muscles and body fitness.

Looking back, Yoga is nothing new in Indonesia. An ancient Javanese Sivaistic Yoga manuscript "*Dharma Patanjala*" proves that Yoga practices were performed since ancient times. However, for various reasons, especially the collapse of the Hindu-Buddhist Majapahit Empire and the establishment of new Islamic kingdoms in the 15th century AD, the activity of Yoga experienced a vacuum. But lately, when Yoga is booming around the world, in Indonesia especially the practice of *yogasana* has started again.

The spread of *yogasana*-s in Indonesia takes place through various communication networks such as world Yoga teachers' visits, religious teachings, spiritual discussions, mass media, imitating the lifestyles of world celebrities in Yoga, studying abroad, the existence of Yoga centers or *ashrama*-s, social media (Wordpress, BlogSpot, Facebook and Twitter) and even through prohibitions or skepticism. The spread of Yoga is not a planned organization. The Yoga spirit is constantly evolving, spreading and increasingly becoming popular among many people. With various modifications and merging with other forms of fitness, one can thoroughly learn Yoga and even can become a Yoga instructor.

As the practice of Yoga grew up rapidly in Malaysia, the Majlis Muzakarah Fatwa Kebangsaan experts met during 22-24 October 2008 in Kota Bharu Kelantan Malaysia to decide on Yoga's prohibition. On the *fatwa*, in Indonesia, MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia) has also been asked to study and discuss the problem of Yoga. So, the leaders of MUI formed a Yoga Research Team consisting of the Commission of Studies and MUI Fatwa Commission. Some Yoga techniques are indicated to contain *aqidah* deviation because they contain elements of belief / spiritual Hindu religion. AMMFK prohibits systematic Yoga, i.e. Yoga that combines physical movements with religious elements, *mantra*-s, and worship for a particular purpose such as obtaining peace and culminating in

union with God or other objectives that are incompatible and can undermine the Muslim's creed.

The team of MUI in charge of studying Yoga practices in Indonesia, as a result of the *ijtima ulama* of the *fatwa* commission in Indonesia in Padang Panjang, West Sumatra 2009, gave three provisions as follows:

1. Yoga that is purely ritual and spiritual of other religions, the law of doing it for Muslims is *haram* (prohibited).
2. Yoga that contains meditation and *mantra* or spiritual and other religious rituals, the law is *haram*, as a preventive measure.
3. Yoga that is pure breathing exercise for the benefit of their health is *mubah* (permitted).

Of the three provisions, Muslims in Indonesia are encouraged not to choose Yoga activities that demonstrate the elements of meditation and *mantra* as a preventive measure to avoid damage to *aqidah*. From the *fatwa*, it is clearly understood that Yoga in Indonesia is not really dead. What is forbidden is the spiritual practice that emerged and developed in Indonesia from India such as Hare Krishna Sampradaya, Sai Baba and the like. Likewise *yogasana*-s which are combined with spiritual practices such as meditation and chanting of Hindu *mantra*-s are not permitted.

The Progress and Motivation of Yoga Practices

Kompasiana on April 16, 2014 writes that all adults in Indonesia have "heard" the word Yoga, although below 10% out of them have actually practiced it. As a matter of fact, 90% of the Yoga practitioners are generally female of the age between 20 - 45. At the same time, Yoga for children is new and grows because of its unique approach. Thus, now the number of people who practice Yoga is increasing. Consequently TV stations, marketing agencies, life-style magazines, culinary world, education and product brands use Yoga as a vehicle to achieve brand awareness and corporate profits. This makes Yoga increasingly known to the public for free.

The main motivation of Yoga practices in Indonesia is still for sport or physical fitness, which in itself is not against the *fatwa*. So, many of the *yogi*-s, practitioners and Yoga teachers who are generally between the age of 25-45 years, still rely on *asana*-s (postures) or movements that strengthen muscles and nerves. For this reason, they see that Yoga can be commercialized. Yoga is packed with brand name of business, style, price / cost, modern facilities, air conditioner / heater, modern building, natural music, sporting goods, poster, retail store, and others. To this day, Yoga is still a crowd related to frequent Yoga festivals, Yoga fairs / exhibitions, selling mats, selling Yoga books, VCDs, and more. There are some Yoga practitioners, especially in Bali, although still very little, raising their Yoga practice to a higher level of consciousness, towards true well-being, healing and enlightenment.

So, the initial motives of people practicing Yoga in Indonesia are for fitness, health, beauty, flexibility, tranquility and the like. Especially in urban areas such as Jakarta, Surabaya, Bandung, and others that bring stress and heavy depression, they consider Yoga as an alternative. Why is Yoga an alternative for them? First, they see that Yoga is an exercise for both physical and mental health. Anyone who diligently practices Yoga will be physically and mentally healthy. It has been thoroughly researched in the West, so they say that Yoga is inner science. Secondly, because Yoga is a science, it is interreligious. People, irrespective of their religion, are unafraid to learn Yoga because it is not blamed by the belief. However, in Indonesia, Muslim people must still pay attention to the *fatwa*. Third, Yoga is easily practiced by various circles and ages, male or female, young or old, smart or ordinary people, farmers or corporates; anyone can do Yoga with similar outcome. Fourth, Yoga is practiced as a fashion trend. At present, Yoga is a fashion, but it could be that people may switch to another exercise model when the moment arrives.

There are some who think that the practice of Yoga is the most ideal way for the development of real human life. Yoga can be practiced by those who are ready to enter the inner world. So, many are guessing, Yoga will continue to be implemented throughout this millennia. However, there is also a pessimist approach about the development of Yoga. Because they view that the practice of Yoga has much deviated from its original texts. Yoga is a *sadhana* - practice performed by a special person in a tradition. They think that contemporary way of practicing Yoga is a market Yoga spread by those who take advantage of the latest Yoga development momentum. Later, time will come when the practitioners will go back to the original texts. There is also a view that whatever the motives might be, as long as the Yoga is practiced, it need not be criticized too much.

Type of Yoga Developed in Indonesia

There are many types of Yoga that developed in Indonesia either brought directly from India or brought by Westerners who have modified it. All types of Yoga in principle are *yogasana*-s with various modifications tailored to the objectives that will result from the exercise. Many foreigners who come to Indonesia, especially Westerners who teach Yoga mostly in Bali, carry their own Yoga type. They come to Bali to teach foreigners who are also on holidays in Bali. Many Yoga practitioners deliberately come to Bali just for Yoga practice. Like, for example, in Ubud, there are hundreds of Yoga studios filled with foreigners both practitioners and instructors. They love to practice Yoga in Bali because of its natural atmosphere and supportive climate. This is what makes Bali a Yoga tourists' destination. It's just that very few local people are involved in it.

Meanwhile, especially for the Balinese, *asana* practice has begun to be in demand by various circles. Even some Yoga groups are trying to introduce them to schools as well as to existing associations such as *banjar*, *sekea*, *pasraman*, and others. People, especially women, routinely practice Yoga with the goal of obtaining health, fitness and beauty.

Also schools are now starting to teach *yogasana*-s to their students because they have a direct impact on the effectiveness of learning. Children become more calm and physically fit so they can follow the lessons better. In the long term, Yoga practice which they have learnt at early age will help the development of their personality. Children will grow spiritually so that they will have maturity and good character.

Because most Balinese adhere to Hindu traditions, they are not subject to *fatwa*-s, so they can carry out various types of Yoga in full. There are several Yoga associations whose reference is sourced from local traditions. Tradition like "*Seruling Dewata*", for example, implies Yoga exercises combined with the tradition of martial arts in Bali. Yoga also incorporates different types of breathing and certain meditation techniques.

Likewise, bio-energy meditation known as Shaking Movement developed by Ratu Bagus in the Karangasem region has proven to cure various types of diseases. Many people with certain physical illness, after undertaking the shaking practice, have gradually recovered in a few days. Likewise, many people suffering from mental disorders finally become normal with regular shaking exercises. Ratu Bagus says that by shaking the whole body, the potential in the body is fully resurrected. The main core of this exercise is actually the development, expansion, and silence of the mind. When the mind calms, all kinds of diseases, both physical and mental are uprooted.

There are also other types of Yoga that emphasize the practice of meditation as the one practiced by the Bahung Tringan community. Ida Wayan Jelantik Oka, the founder of this community, uses the principles of *Tantra* called Shiva-Buddha unification. According to him, meditation is an important aspect in life, because the objective of the human being is to return to *Sangkan Paraning Dumadi* (The Origin). For that purpose an appropriate technique is required. With the Shiva-Buddha union technique people will be able to gradually achieve this goal. This tantric technique, namely, positive and negative polar encounters of the mind, gives birth to the vacuum. From this vacuum comes *jnana* that can lead the spirit to break away from attachment to the world.

In addition, there is also a practice of meditation with *devata-nava-sanga* or *akshara*-s in the body. The *akshara*-s are *Sa, Ba, Ta, A, I, Na, Ma, Si, Va, Ya* in heart, kidney, gall, solar plexus, spleen, colon, and others.

There are many more spiritual practices that engage in Yoga from both outside and local traditions that appear on the island of Java (such as *sapta-dharma*, etc.), Bali (such as Bambu Kuning and others) and on other islands. Yoga practices from Indian spiritual organizations are also evolving in Indonesia such as Art of Living, Transcendental Meditation (TM), Sri Chinmoy, and others. Everything goes by not negating each other. Even on several occasions, practitioners often meet and exchange opinions so that there is a cross-understanding.

In general, all Hindus in Indonesia carry out Yoga practice once a year for 24 hours, namely on Nyepi Day. The implementation of Nyepi Day is followed by the *Catur Brata Penyepian*. There are four abstinence during Nyepi Day, i.e. not lighting a fire

(*amati geni*), not doing activities (*amati karya*), not throwing a party or having fun (*amati lelangan*), and not traveling (*amati lelungan*). These four are called *Chatur Brata* which are held simultaneously during the celebration of New Saka (Nyepi) year. In practice, people do not cook and do not turn on lights to *amati geni*, do not work, whether in the office or at any other workplace to *amati karya*, fast or do not enjoy a rich meal or anything good that is sensed by the five senses to *amati lelangan* and do not go out of the house to *amati lelungan*. So during Nyepi, the Hindu community for a whole day (24 hours) stays at home, does nothing, fast and remains in dark at night. For Hindus in Indonesia, *amati geni* will be the death of anger, ego, lust and ambition that is endless. *amati karya* will be silence in every action or find a silent space while working. *amati lelangan* will be an experience of a divine pleasure. Finally, *amati lelungan* will turn into a state that remains silent within the true self.

In addition, daily Yoga Practice conducted by Indonesians, especially in Bali prior to the contemporary Yoga is a natural practice. Balinese Yoga practices are closely related to the implementation of Hindu religious ceremonies. The ceremonial tradition in Bali is unique, elaborate, and aesthetic, so it requires concentration, dedication and totality in the process. Practice of *karma-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga* is connected to the implementation of *yajna*. So, thus, preparing the ceremonial means is a form of Yoga of Balinese people ever since. They devote their dedication to *Ishvara*, from daily ceremonies in their homes such as *yajna-shesha* after cooking, every *Kajeng kliwon* routine (15 days), full moon (*pujuma*), new moon (*tilem*), and celebration of major holidays such as Galungan, Kuningan, Pagerwesi, Saraswati, and others. Likewise they hold ceremonies that fall every decade like *Ngenteg Linggih*, *Rsi Gana*, *Panca Wali Krama* and others. This tradition is still alive among the Balinese.

Conclusion

Based on this brief review of the practice of Yoga in Indonesia it can be concluded that Yoga existed extensively in Indonesia since ancient times; however it was discontinued because of the collapse of the Majapahit Kingdom. Finally these practices are still preserved only in Bali in different ways along with the Yoga techniques developed in India. The Balinese place more emphasis on *karma-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga* through ritual practices. Bali ceremonies are classified as aesthetic and require a dedication and totality so that with the ceremony, the Balinese automatically perform Yoga. However, when many neo *sampradaya*-s are present in Indonesia, coupled with the booming *yogasana*-s both from India and the West, Indonesian people also began to glance at this Yoga activity. People especially in big cities have started to like the Yoga movement because it has a direct impact on health, flexibility, beauty, and fitness. Likewise schools have introduced the practice of *yogasana*-s because it has a direct impact on the mind. Children well trained in Yoga will in future have a good impact on the health, intelligence and maturity of their character.