

Rethinking Patañjali and āsana: The relationship between āsana (posture), sukha (bliss), and meditation in early Buddhism and Patañjali's yoga

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This paper offers a new history of the link between āsana, bliss (sukha), and meditation in Ancient India. In particular, it offers a new interpretation of the passage on āsana in the Pātañjalayogaśāstra (2.46-2.48) by exploring its ascetic background. Philipp Maas (2018) and Dominik Wujastyk (2018) have already argued that the usage of the term samāpatti in 2.47 suggests a Buddhist background, but without exploring this potential background further. A more detailed consideration of early Buddhist evidence suggests that Patañjali drew on an earlier discourse on overcoming the hardships of prolonged meditation and ascetic life in the wilderness by using meditative techniques to suffuse one's body with a pleasant feeling or bliss (sukha) that cancels out the pain (duḥkha) which might otherwise be felt. The importance of the noun sukha in the Buddhist discourse on meditation suggests that the compound sthirasukha in 2.46 might best be taken as a bahuvrīhi compound, referring to a stable (sthira) feeling of sukha (ease or bliss) during āsana practice.

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