

Vivekananda on the Theory and Practice of Prāṇāyāma

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>In this paper I present Swami Vivekananda's teachings on the theory and practice of prāṇāyāma. Although Vivekananda is widely known as a teacher and scholar who taught yoga and Vedanta in India and later in the West, and his collected works of more than three thousand pages have been published, there are surprisingly few scholarly works about him. The bibliography I compiled lists only sixteen works of secondary literature published in English between 1990 and 2025. Moreover, only two of these works explicitly address the topic of yogic breathing. Further, some interpretations heavily draw on critical theory and postmodernist perspectives, seeking a political dimension to his work rather than a spiritual mission in the West. Hence, although Vivekananda is a key Indian thinker, spiritual leader, and philosopher who was instrumental in introducing Hinduism, particularly Vedanta and yoga, to the Western world, scholarly research on his ideas, and especially the concept of prāṇāyāma and its spiritual dimensions, remains largely unexplored. My objective is to clarify this concept, as presented in his book Raja Yoga and in several shorter texts: "Breathing," "Concentration and Breathing," and "Practical Religion: Breathing and Meditation," published as Lectures and Discourses in the Volume 1 and 6 of The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. The research questions I wish to address concern Vivekananda's understanding of prāṇāyāma and how this concept relates to his overall work on raja yoga.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Vivekananda, Raja Yoka, Vedanta, Pranayama, Yogic Breathing.</p>
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Introduction

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), born Narendra Nath Datta in Calcutta, was a Bengali swami and scholar who taught yoga and Vedanta in India and later in the West. Vivekananda's role in teaching yoga in the Western audience is significant. His address at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 brought him international fame. From 1893–1896 and 1899–1900, he traveled throughout North America and Europe, giving lectures in numerous cities and popularizing Hindu wisdom. To teach the European and American audiences who had a limited knowledge of yoga at that time, Vivekananda used various methods. He gave numerous public lectures, which were

helpful in recruiting yoga students into small groups or private sessions.¹ He organized workshops in which he taught these students asanas and prāṇāyāma. His lectures and talks were later published in several volumes of collected works². One of his most important books is *Raja Yoga*.

Raja Yoga: Or Conquering the Internal Nature (1896)³ is a compilation of a series of lectures delivered during the winter of 1895-96 in the United States. In this book, Vivekananda presents the concepts of prāṇa (life force) and ākāśa (space or ether), which originate from Hindu Samkhya philosophy. He also describes prāṇāyāma in the

¹ Philip Deslippe, "The Swami Circuit: Mapping the Terrain of Early American Yoga," *Journal of Yoga Studies*, 1 (2018): 29.

² See *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. https://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/complete_works.htm

³ *Raja Yoga* was first published in 1896. Then there were many editions of this work. I shall use the edition: Swami Vivikananda, *Raja Yoga*. Leeds: Celephaïs Press, 2003.

context of Raja Yoga, which consists of eight stages: yama (ethics), niyama (purity), asana (posture), prāṇāyāma (control of prāṇa), pratyahara (mind control), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation), and samadhi (superconsciousness). In this paper I show that for Swami Vivekananda, prāṇāyāma is more than a physical exercise of controlling the breath. It is a part of the wider process which leads a yogi to the ultimate state, which is liberation. I discuss the concept of raja yoga, which provides the main theoretical and practical framework for Vivekananda's understanding of prāṇāyāma, and then examine several key issues related to it, such as healing oneself and others, kuṇḍalinī arousal, the attainment of samadhi, and the developments of siddhis.

Previous research

Although Swami Vivekananda is widely known as a preeminent Indian thinker, spiritual leader, and philosopher, and his teachings and ideas are disseminated through the Vedanta and yoga centers he founded in the United States and other countries, there are surprisingly few scholarly works examining his thought. I present these as Secondary sources in the Bibliography at the end of this article. Concerning raja yoga, in 2023 Éadaoin Agnew published “‘Physically this universe is one’: Universal Unity in Swami Vivekananda's Raja Yoga.”⁴ In this article Agnew offers to present Raja Yoga as “radical and hopeful alternatives to imperialist way of knowing,”⁵ “a Vivekananda's contribution to anticolonial cultures and critiques”⁶. The usage of such politicized vocabulary as “antiimperialist” and “anticolonial” shows a limitation to Agnew's interpretation, which is influenced by the Western critical theory. Certainly, Vivekananda's mission was not to come to the West and speak out against imperialism and colonialism, but to present a spiritual

message and teachings related to what he believed was a universal wisdom, which could be shared by all people in the world and that could lead to the spiritual unity of the East and the West. Similar limitations can be noted in the works of Magdalena Kraler, particularly in “Tracing Vivekananda's Prāṇa and Ākāśa: The Yogavāsīṣṭha and Rama Prasad's Occult Science of Breath”⁷ and *Yoga Breath Prāṇa and Prāṇāyāma*,⁸ which are both based on her doctoral dissertation *Yoga Breath: The Reinvention of Prāṇa and Prāṇāyāma in Early Modern Yoga*.⁹ Again, it is a misunderstanding to look at the tradition of yoga and particularly at the yogic art of breathing as an occult tradition. It is certainly not the way that Vivekananda would present his teaching to Western audiences. While occultism may be associated with some secrecy and negativity, there was nothing hidden or negative about Vivekananda. On the contrary, he represented true openness in sharing his knowledge and uplifting of human spirit. Other books and scholarly articles on Vivekananda discuss such issues as education,¹⁰ sports,¹¹ modernization,¹² nationalism¹³, and Vedas and Vedanta.¹⁴ After conducting the literature review, one can assert that Vivekananda's teaching of prāṇāyāma has not been adequately explored in scholarly works and can still be investigated.

Methodology and Objectives

Methodology is a system of principles and general methods for organizing and structuring research. It is always based on certain research strategy and theoretical assumptions¹⁵. Our philosophical stance shapes our perception of reality, what we believe can be known. My research on Swami Vivekananda's teachings on the theory and practice of prāṇāyāma is based on the assumption that he came to the West to share the ancient wisdom of India. If there was a political aspect to his teachings, such as his desire to

⁴ Éadaoin Agnew. “‘Physically this universe is one’: Universal Unity in Swami Vivekananda's Raja Yoga.” *Victorian Popular Fictions*, 5.2 (2023), pp. 41-57. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46911/ATYV2287>

⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

⁷ Magdalena Kraler, “Tracing Vivekananda's Prāṇa and Ākāśa: The Yogavāsīṣṭha and Rama Prasad's Occult Science of Breath, in: Lukas Pokorny, Franz Winter (eds), *The Occult Nineteenth Century*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, 373-397. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55318-0_17

⁸ Magdalena Kraler, *Yoga Breath. Prāṇa and Prāṇāyāma in Early Modern Yoga*. Wien: Vienna University Press, 2025.

⁹ Magdalena Kraler, *Yoga Breath: The Reinvention of Prāṇa and Prāṇāyāma in Early Modern Yoga*. PhD Dissertation, Wien: University of Vienna, 2022.

¹⁰ Vivienne Baumfield, Vivienne, “Science and Sanskrit: Vivekananda's Views on Education” in: William Radice (ed.), *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernization of Hinduism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 194-212.

¹¹ Amitava Chatterjee and Souvik Naha, “The Muscular Monk: Vivekananda, Sports and Physical Culture in Colonial Bengal,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49.11 (2014): 25-9.

¹² William Radice, ed., *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernization of Hinduism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

¹³ Jyotirmaya Sharma, *A Restatement of Religion: Swami Vivekananda and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013.

¹⁴ James Madaio, James (2017), “Rethinking Neo-Vedānta: Swami Vivekananda and the Selective Historiography of Advaita Vedānta”, *Religions*, 8.101 (2017): 1-12; Anantanand Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.

¹⁵ Sanya Kenaphoom, “Introduction to Research Philosophy,” *Journal of Anthropological and Archaeological Sciences*, 5.4 (2021): 657-662. <https://lupinepublishers.com/anthropological-and-archaeological-sciences/pdf/JAAS.MS.ID.000217.pdf>

strengthen India's moral authority in Europe, it played only a secondary role. To understand his message for European and American audiences, I propose applying standard methods of textual analysis, namely close readings of his texts and analyzing the concepts that he employs. My research method is primarily the qualitative *content analysis* of the text that is often used in literary, media and philosophical studies, focusing on interpreting underlying meanings of words and statements¹⁶. I assume the object of true knowledge is universal that can be shared with all people who want to know the truth. My objectives are to clarify the concept of *prāṇāyāma* as presented in Vivekananda's book *Raja Yoga* and in several shorter texts: "Breathing," "Concentration and Breathing," and "Practical Religion: Breathing and Meditation," published as part of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* and explain this concept in a wider context of his philosophy. The research questions I wish to address are: What is Vivekananda's understanding of *prāṇāyāma*? How is this concept of *prāṇāyāma* relates to his overall work on Raja Yoga.

Raja Yoga as a Framework for Prāṇāyāma

The broader context in which Vivekananda places his *prāṇāyāma* teachings is the theory and practice of Raja Yoga, which in Sanskrit means "royal yoga" and denotes a perfect spiritual path of mind control and meditation. Its goal is to achieve enlightenment, or *samādhi*—a state of pure consciousness and self-realization, which Vivekananda also describes as "the liberation of the soul through perfection."¹⁷ Philosophy can be described as the attempt to think clearly and deeply about the fundamental questions that concern human beings, particularly the questions of the purpose of their existence and of the nature of the whole reality. Raja Yoga is based on Sankhya philosophy.¹⁸ It is presented in Patañjali's famous book, the *Yoga-sūtra*, which Vivekananda considers the highest authority of this subject.¹⁹ For Vivekananda the study of Raja Yoga is not a matter of faith or belief, but of truth, which people can discover for themselves through experience. It is thus not some form of secret occult knowledge but one that is open and potentially available to all humans. Vivekananda writes of the science of Raja Yoga, which "proposes to put before humanity a practical

and scientifically worked-out method of reaching this truth."²⁰ The method of this science is to observe one's own inner states by the power of the mind. This requires turning the mind inward, back toward oneself, which is not an easy task. "The object is internal, the mind itself is the object, and it is necessary to study the mind itself, mind studying mind."²¹ We must concentrate on our minds and discover the spiritual facts themselves.

It needs to be emphasized that in his book, intended for a Western audience, Vivekananda presents Raja Yoga in a distinctly modern manner. He invokes the scientific method of empiricism, which relies on observation and experience to acquire knowledge. But Vivekananda refers to our inner rather than outer experience. In the truly open spirit everybody can study yoga, because "All our knowledge is based upon experience," he says.²² Further, scientific knowledge makes us to make use of "generalization",²³ meaning that what we observe as individual facts can lead us to the discovery of general laws. By replacing traditional religious or philosophical terms with the language of modern scientific inquiry, Vivekananda places experience above all faith. According to him, Raja Yoga is scientific, being discovered in ancient times and taught by Patañjali, whom he describes as a true "scientist" and the "father of the Yoga Philosophy."²⁴

Prāṇa, Ākāśa and Yāma in Rāja Yoga

To further clarify Vivekananda's concept of *prāṇāyāma*, it is useful to explain *prāṇa*, *ākāśa* and *yāma*. The word *yāma* means control. "*Prāṇāyāma* means the control over *prāṇa*"²⁵. In a more specific sense, *prāṇāyāma* can be also described as yogic breathing or more precisely as "controlling the breathing"²⁶. However, *prāṇa* is more than mere breath. In the Sāṃkhya philosophy to which Vivekananda refers, *ākāśa* is described as the "infinite omnipresent material of the universe" and *prāṇa* is "the infinite, omnipresent manifesting power of the universe"²⁷. Hence, *prāṇa* signifies energy or force, that can be applied to all forms of energy, the vital force within the universe and every being. As Vivekananda asserts in his *Lectures and Discourses*:

Electricity, magnetism, all the movements in the body, all [the movements] in the mind — all these

¹⁶ See Lindsay Prior, "Content Analysis" in: *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.), Patricia Leavy (ed.), Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190847388.013.25>.

¹⁷ Swami Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga*, op. cit., p. vi.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 13.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. vi.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 6

²¹ Ibid., p. 9.

²² Ibid., p. 3.

²³ Ibid., p. 7

²⁴ Ibid., p. 111.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 26

²⁶ Ibid., p. 22

²⁷ Ibid., p. 26

are various manifestations of one thing called prāṇa. The best form of prāṇa, however, is in [the brain], manifesting itself as light [of understanding]. This light is under the guidance of thought²⁸.

All forms of energy are prāṇa, but the highest and most powerful of all our thought, which is manifested as the light of understanding. Knowing and controlling this force, Vivekananda contends, is precisely what is meant by prāṇāyāma. A yogi who masters prāṇāyāma perfectly gains immense powers. “When the Yogi becomes perfect there will be nothing in nature not under his control”²⁹. Human beings are not aware of the immense powers that they have, and these powers are their own power of thinking. On how these powers will be used the future of humanity depends. Ultimately, it should be used for spiritual liberation, for achieving the super-conscious state of samādhi, and not for destruction.

In colloquial language, prāṇāyāma is often associated with breathing because at the basic level of self-control, it means “controlling the motion of the lungs, and this motion is breath.”³⁰ “Prāṇāyāma is not breathing, but controlling that muscular power which moves the lungs.”³¹ In his attempt at the mastery of the forces of the universe and of himself, a yogi begins by controlling the breath and can then move on to controlling other processes and parts of his body, eventually raising his prāṇa to a high vibrational level that makes him a master and attracts others to him. In this way, he can acquire great powers of control. From this perspective, the practice of raja yoga involves controlling prāṇa, which manifests as mental force, through mental means³². However, within the framework of Raja Yoga, prāṇāyāma’s most important function is not only to controlling the breath, but also the mind. “The mind should be able to control every part of [the body] just at will.”³³ Yogis start practice with the body, controlling the breath, which in turn influences the mind, and once mastered, becomes a tool for accessing and changing mental states. “The science of breathing is the working through the body to reach the mind”³⁴. Thus, prāṇāyāma (science of breathing) refers to an extremely powerful technique for mental controlling. It ultimately refers to the yoga practice leading to samādhi, the state of super-consciousness.

Whereas consciousness is a general characteristic of human beings, super-consciousness is a state when the mind gets to a higher meditative state, which, as Vivekananda claims, is the highest state of human existence³⁵.

The work *Raja Yoga* offers several unique explanations of what prāṇāyāma is and what it is not. One of Vivekananda’s observations is that the use of prāṇāyāma in religion allows religious practitioners to attain the super-consciousness of great prophets and holy persons and verify their claims through their own direct experience. He explains that all religions originate from a direct, extraordinary experience, a personal self-realization of historical persons, such as Hindu Rishis, Buddha, Christ. Christianity, like other religions, is “based upon experience.”³⁶ The difference in religions are not related to their initial experience, the infinite knowledge that they obtain,³⁷ but to its subsequent interpretations, which can become dogmatic and thus distort the original experience. Further, through appropriate practice, every human being is capable of reaching the superconscious state of the founders of religions. Hence, Vivekananda distinguishes prāṇāyāma, which clearly has a spiritual dimension and is related to raising human consciousness to ultimate levels, from bodily exercises such as found in Hatha Yoga, whose main purpose is “to make the physical body very strong.”³⁸ According to him, the practices of Hatha Yoga deal exclusively with the physical aspects of human behavior. The practice of prāṇāyāma has a much higher goal than any a kind of gymnastic. It is not merely designated to foster health and bodily fitness, but to guide humankind to its ultimate goals, to knowledge, perfection and bliss.

Prāṇāyāma: Practice, Goals and Healing

The yogi must always practice. Having knowledge of Raja Yoga is not enough. Vivekananda describes some conditions that make a perfect environment for yogis to do prāṇāyāma: not speaking much, leaving all distractions, shouting minds to outside influences, devoting ourselves to developing truths within us³⁹. The practice of prāṇāyāma must take place at least twice a day: the morning and the evening, at best in a specially designated room, decorated with flowers, in which an atmosphere of holiness should be created. Half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the

²⁸ Swami Vivekananda, “Breathing” in *Lectures and Discourses*, Vol. 1, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, op. cit.

²⁹ Swami Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga*, op. cit., p. 27.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 32

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 40

³³ Swami Vivekananda, “Breathing,” op. cit.

³⁴ Swami Vivekananda, “Concentration and Breathing,” in *Lectures and Discourses*, Vol. 6, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, op. cit.

³⁵ Swami Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga*, op. cit., p. 69

³⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 187.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 58-59.

evening of breathing exercise will make one into a different person⁴⁰. One should sit in a straight posture, the chest, the neck, and the head being in one line, send a current of holy thought to all creation, and repeat: "Let all being be happy: let all beings be peaceful; let all beings be blissful"⁴¹. Each part of the body should be brought under control. This is done through prāṇāyāma.

The first step is to control the motion of the lungs⁴². This is done through breathing in a measured way, in and out. Drawing the air in for a four seconds, holding it for sixteen seconds, and throwing it out in eight seconds makes one prāṇāyāma. With regular practice its length should be increased. The practice brings calmness of the body and mind, improves health, enables to think more clearly, and brings beauty to the face and voice. One day the power of kuṇḍalinī will be aroused⁴³. It is the force that unveils the layers of the human mind, leading it to the super-conscious perception and Divine Wisdom. The breathing can be accompanied with repetition of *Om* or some other sacred word. The success in practice is based on niyama (regular habits and observances), tapas (fasting, austerity), śrādhya (study), santosa (contentment), saucha (purity) and Īśvara pranidhāna (worshiping God)⁴⁴.

The control of prāṇa by prāṇāyāma can be used for various purposes. The first goal is to transform a person from vicious and ignorant individual to virtuous and wise. Ultimately it is the task for the whole humanity to replace vice and ignorance that lead to conflict and wars by virtue and knowledge that produce peace and cooperation. If someone enters into the highest state of samādhi, a super-conscious state, he or she becomes enlightened; even a fool is transformed into a sage or prophet, and one's life is changed, illuminated⁴⁵. Further, the superior qualities that someone develops, the purification of the mind and body, can be shared with others. One application of prāṇāyāma is healing oneself and others. This can be also distant healing. Ultimately, the yogi's high vibrations, induced by rhythmic breathing, serve to heal by bringing others into the appropriate "state of vibration."⁴⁶ Some passages in Raja Yoga and other works of Vivekananda provide an introduction to distance healing practices in yoga. This is also a key reference point through which Vivekananda's healing practices related to prāṇa have often been analyzed. This theme is part of the yogi's prāṇa-related abilities,

which depend on the control of prāṇa through yogic breath control

The results: Kuṇḍalinī, Samādhi, and Siddhis

Prāṇāyāma is the fundamental practice of Raja Yoga. The highest energy is thought that can be mastered through the mind control. Mastering it, the yogi becomes almost omniscient. Prāṇāyāma results in awakening of kuṇḍalinī, samādhi or super-consciousness, and the acquisition of siddhis. These results can only be obtained through regular practice. Additional benefits include a beautiful appearance and voice, the hearing of subtle sounds, good health, and full control over body and mind. The body and mind become instruments of the will. The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, quoted by Vivekananda, describes the benefits of yoga practice as follows: "lightness, health, the skin becomes smooth, the complexion clear, the voice beautiful."⁴⁷ It is also said that prāṇāyāma can help prolong life.

For Vivekananda, the most fundamental way to achieve samādhi is to awaken kuṇḍalinī, which is described as a dormant life force, energy that resides at the base of the spine, coiled like a snake⁴⁸. It is believed that, upon awakening through yoga, kuṇḍalinī rises through the body's main energy centers (chakras). This process begins with gradual mastery of the subsequent layers of the mind through prāṇāyāma. Ultimate control over the body and mind is achieved through the journey of kuṇḍalinī from the lowest to the highest chakra. Arousing kuṇḍalinī brings profound spiritual, psychological, and physical changes, leading to heightened consciousness and self-awareness. Only then will the "perception of the Self", "super-conscious perception", "Divine Wisdom", and "the realization of the spirit" be achieved.⁴⁹ The latter points at the ultimate reality, which Vivekananda refers to as the "essence of knowledge, the immortal, the all-pervading."⁵⁰ Thus, the path to liberation is described as the awakening of the kuṇḍalinī, which leads to a yogi to the state of super-consciousness, enlightenment, Divine Wisdom, and the realization of ultimate reality.

Practicing prāṇāyāma opens the door to almost limitless human power. Vivekananda writes: "Suppose, for instance, one understood the prāṇa perfectly, and could control it, what power on earth would not be his? He would be able to move the sun and stars out of their places, to control

⁴⁰ Swami Vivekananda, "Practical Religion: Breathing and Exercises," in *Lectures and Discourses*, Vol. 6, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, op. cit.

⁴¹ Swami Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga*, op. cit., p. 25.

⁴² Ibid., p. 48.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 44.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 73.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 63

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 190.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 71.

everything in the universe, from the atoms to the biggest suns, because he would control the prāṇa. This is the end and aim of prāṇāyāma”.⁵¹ How should we understand this conclusion? Does Vivekananda really mean that such powers as he describes can be given to an individual human being? I believe that what he says about human power should rather be applied to humanity collectively. We as humans have already acquired great powers to either build or destroy. The yogic power, for which the basic prerequisite is yama (ethics) and niyama (purity) should always serve morally good purposes and potentially prevent the negative forces of evil from the world destruction. To spread goodness and to direct humanity to perfection can also be seen as the goal that Vivekananda has set for India. Like other yogis coming to the West, he believed that Hindu religious and philosophical traditions have a lot of offer to the Europeans and Americans, so often engaged in purposeless and destructive conflicts. His teachings reflect a long tradition described in tantric and yogic texts of invoking siddhis to overcome the laws of nature through yogi practice. Through self-mastery, the entire world is in our hands. Vivekananda emphasizes that Raja Yoga, based on prāṇāyāma, can lead human beings to acquire infinite powers that can be wisely used for the benefit of the whole humanity and for further human development.

Conclusion: Vivekananda's Teaching

Vivekananda's teachings of prāṇāyāma encompass a broad and bold philosophical vision. They cannot be reduced to physical exercises aimed at improving health. To the troubled world in which we live today, he offers a solution: knowledge. The key to solving the world's problems lies in our understanding that the greatest power is not the force derived from nuclear reactions used in atomic bombs that can bring destruction, but the power of thought within our minds that can transform human lives. This power, and especially its purpose, must be understood. Vivekananda draws on the ancient Vedic tradition and teaches it to Western audiences to see the ultimate reality in thought, in consciousness. Human life has an ultimate goal: the unification of individual consciousness with universal consciousness, the acquisition of Divine Wisdom, and the attainment of a state of super-consciousness. However, achieving this state requires more than understanding alone. Theory must be supplemented by the practice of mind-body control. This is precisely what at practical level prāṇāyāma is about.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 27.

Today humanity is a century more advanced than when Vivekananda conducted his teachings in London, New York, San Francisco, and elsewhere. Humanity's technological progress is undoubtedly unquestionable. During the last hundred years, humankind has made enormous advances in science and technology. However, the overall human progress can be questioned. It seems that Vivekananda's teachings are less understood in the West today than they were in the past, and this is evidenced by contemporary scholarly interpretations of his thought. Describing his teachings as a doctrine that “embodies anti-colonial values by dismantling western dualities and working toward universal unity in a profoundly political and ethical ways”⁵² obscures Vivekananda's message to the West. It changes its spiritual meaning to a political one. It is a result of misapplication of critical and postmodern methodologies to the ancient Hindu thought. However, Vivekananda did not travel to Europe and America to preach anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. As an ambassador for yoga and India, Vivekananda sought to spread the spiritual knowledge and power of yoga to the Western world, to demonstrate the lasting significance of Hindu religious traditions, and to share the universal wisdom expressed in the Vedic tradition. This wisdom still requires clarification and explanation to be truly understood in the West and beyond.

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