

“The evolution of surya namaskara: from ancient ritual to modern yoga”

Ms. N. Swathi Sree¹, Marepally Vaishnavi Netha², Venna Meghana Naidu³,

Assistant professor, St.Pious X Degree and PG college for women

swathisree1213@stpiouscollege.org

Abstract:

Surya namaskar is a part of Yoga that comes from a practice of Sun worship. The Sun gives life, keeps the world in order. People changed the rituals into the set moves of Yoga with steady breathing and meditation. Surya namaskar still keeps the Sun salutations, also helps a person stay fit and calm. Surya namaskar works for the body and the mind. In recent decades, this traditional practice has attracted growing scientific interest for its potential physical and mental health benefits. This review principally concentrates on the meaning of the each Aasan of Surya namaskar along with the scientific evidence of its effect on the physical as well as mental health.

The conclusions, from various research articles say that Surya Namaskar helps keep the body healthy and the body functions well. Surya Namaskar is simple. As a practice Surya Namaskar has drawn scientific attention because Surya Namaskar may improve physical fitness and mental health. This review shows that Surya Namaskar is a cost effective and easy practice that fits preventive health today.

Keywords: Surya namaskar, Yoga Aasan, Sun Worship, Breathing, Meditation, Sun Salutations.

Introduction:

For All living beings begin their morning rituals with the sunrise perhaps there is no life on earth without the sun. In various cultures the sun indeed worshipped as a god. If we talk about India the sun is named by *Surya* in the Vedic period. In Ancient Indian Epic *Ramayana* traditionally attributed to the sage Valmiki, Sage Agasthya advised Lord Sri Rama to worship the sun god by chanting Aditya Hridayam to achieve victory in his encounter with the demon king Ravana. These Verses depict the various forms and names of the sun god, praising his glory and his 12 forms (signifying the shape of 12 months of a year) in the *Yuddha Kanda of Ramayana*. The sun is considered as the ultimate power visible to the eye that is Pratyaksha Swarupa which represents truth, a manifestation of knowledge, and the giver of intellect and prosperity. This is being chanted as a ritual practice among south Indians along with the

performance of namaskara, that is sun salutations at the end of each verse. In present days, Surya namaskar is both a physical as well as a spiritual practice. It was inserted into yogic practices owing to its immense potential in maintaining the practitioner's physical and mental health which is the basic requirement for higher yogic practices (Venkatesh, Vandhana. Prasanna, Bhavanani et.al)

This paper explores the influence of Surya Namaskar from Ancient ritual to Modern Yoga- we will even focus on the Evolution of Surya Namaskar.

Origin of Surya Namaskar:

“Surya Namaskar” is also known as “Sun Salutation is a set of dynamic postures, is considered neither an Asana nor a part of traditional yoga. It is a complete physical exercise that is believed to be conceived and propagated by the King of Aundh, Late Shrimant Balasaheb Pant Pratinidhi in the 1920's and Late by Sri K V Iyer, and Sri Krishnamacharya. The Danda exercises explained in Vyayama Dipika were found to be the basis for Surya Namaskar models presented by Sri Krishnamacharya. Dandaal is an ancient common and important physical training practiced in India by wrestlers and martial artists (Venkatesh, Vandhana. Prasanna, Bhavanani et.al).

The pushups used for body-building purposes in western countries could have been originated from Dandaal. The similarities between Dandaal and Suryanamaskar became a traditional blend of the practice of two different systems such as physical culture and Yoga and thus it heads out to be the forerunner practice of modern-day physical exercises (L. Prasanna Venkatesh and Vandana S).

Surya namaskar mantras and Beeja mantras:

The practitioner chants the twelve names of Surya while performing the Surya namaskar. Beeja Mantras are the alternatives for the twelve names of the sun, which does not have any meaning as such but yield tremendous vibrations and energy to the body and mind. Beeja mantras are generally used during fast Surya namaskar where chanting of twelve names is difficult. These are chanted fur times repeatedly during the performance of one complete round of Surya namaskar. The twelve steps involved in this group of Asanas, the mantras and Beeja mantras along with the associated Chakra for each posture are determined.



Fig 1. Pictorial representation of Surya namaskar postures (Bihar school of Yoga tradition): Final position of each step of Surya namaskar of Bihar school of yoga tradition. Number (1-12) represents the number of each step as Table 1. Picture obtained and modified from Swami Satyananda Saraswathi, *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*.

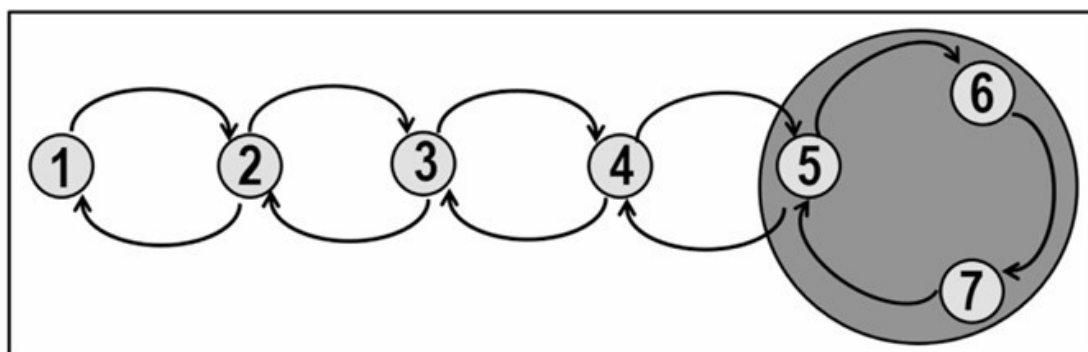


Fig 2. Schematic representation of Surya Namaskar postures (Bihar School of Yoga tradition): Schematic of steps of Surya namaskar of Bihar school of Yoga tradition numbered as per the sequence. Arrow indicates the flow of steps in the respective direction. 1. Pranamasana, 2. Hasta utthanasana, 3. Pada hastasana, 4. Ashwasanchalanasana, 5. Parvatasana, 6. Ashtanga namaskara, 7. Bhujangasana, Steps 5, 6 and 7 highlighted within the circle by themselves fulfil the steps of Dandaal practice.

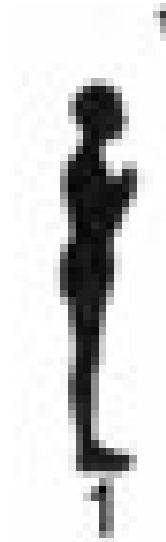
Table 1
Name of the postures in Suryanamaskar, respective Beeja Mantras/Mantras to be chanted, and corresponding Chakras to be concentrated [7].

Steps	Name of the Posture	Beeja Mantra/Mantra	Associated Chakra
1	Pranamasana (prayer pose)	Om Hraam/Om Mitraya Namah	Anahata
2	Hasta Utthanasana (raised arms pose)	Om Hreem/Om Ravaye Namah	Vishuddhi
3	Padahastanasana (hand to foot pose)	Om Hroom/Om Suryaya Namah	Swadhisthana
4	Ashwa Sanchalanasana (equestrian pose)	Om Hraim/Om Bhanave Namah	Ajna
5	Parvatasana (mountain pose)	Om Hraum/Om Khagaya Namah	Vishuddhi
6	Ashtanga Namaskara (salute with eight parts or points)	Om Hrah/Om Pushne Namah	Manipura
7	Bhujangasana (cobra pose)	Om Hraam/Om Hiranyagarbhaya Namah	Swadhisthana
8	Parvatasana (mountain pose)	Om Hreem/Om Marichaye Namah	Vishuddhi
9	Ashwa Sanchalanasana (equestrian pose)	Om Hroom/Om Adityaya Namah	Ajna
10	Padahastanasana (hand to foot pose)	Om Hraim/Om Savitre Namah	Swadhisthana
11	Hasta Utthanasana (raised arms pose)	Om Hraum/Om Arkaya Namah	Vishuddhi
12	Pranamasana (prayer pose)	Om Hrah/Om Bhaskaraya Namah	Anahata

Methodology:

1. Pranamasana (Prayer posture) 1 and 12th:

This is the posture of the person who performs the “Pranama”, i.e. “Anjali Mudra”. Stand with straight legs and straight shoulders and loose hands by your side. Now join hands and exhale “Namaskara” posture (mudra).



2. **Hasta uttanasana (raised arms pose) 2 and 11th:**

After the prayer, raise your hands and pull your body back from your toes to your fingertips keeping your biceps close of the ears. Benefits: Strengthening of the abdominal, respiratory system and improves digestion can relieve anxiety and fatigue, especially in asthma.



3. **Hast padasana (hands to feet) 3 and 10th:**

Now bend from the waist, touch the floor with both palms, keeping the back straight as possible and allow the head to touch the knee. Benefits: Back muscles and increases flexibility, stretches hips, hamstrings and calves of the thighs and knees are also strained. Eliminate excess abdominal fat by working the abdominal muscles.



4. AshwaSanchalanasana (Horse) 4 and 9th:

Inhale to push the left leg back as far as possible, the foot should be bent to touch the floor. The right knee should be between the palms. So look for and stick with it. Extend your feet with your toes to balance them on the ground. Benefits: Balances the central nervous system, strengthens the spine. It regulates, abdominal organs such as the kidneys and liver. Increases willpower increases lung capacity.



5. Parvatasana (mountain pose) 5 and 8th:

The pose is similar to the Parvata or Mountain. On Exhalation, stretch the right leg back from Asana Ashwa Sanchal Pose and bring it parallel to the left leg. Lift your hips or wrists at the same time. Put your right hand and support weight the head must be placed between the hands. Benefits: Stretches the spine well regulates the peripheral nervous system. Strengthens the muscles of the upper and lower limbs. Helps build strength and endurance in the arms, shoulder and wrist.



6. Ashtanga Namaskar (Salutations with eight parts of the body) 6 and 9th:

Place the knees gently on the floor, push the hips back and slide forward, Chin and chest on the floor. Stay in this position and continue to touch the eight parts of the body, such as the palms, feet, knees, chest and chin, until you reach the floor. Benefits: Strengthens the musculature and respiratory, muscles of the upper part and lower extremities.



7. Bhujangasana (Cobra pose) 7th:

From the last position, lift your chest and slide forward into position. Bring your hands together and look at the sky. In this position, half of the body of is in the air and the rest on the ground. This is the position of the Cobra. Benefits: Supports and strengthens the back, especially the lower back where the lumbar spine is most compressed. Improves the flexibility of the spine and muscles. It supports the respiratory, digestive, reproductive and genitourinary systems and is beneficial for back pain, sciatica, asthma and menstruation.



Evolution of Surya Namaskara:

Today, Surya Namaskara, also known as the Sun Salutation, is a fundamental yoga practice that is practiced all over the world. Its roots are deeply ingrained in India's spiritual, ritualistic, and philosophical traditions, despite the fact that it is frequently perceived primarily as a physical exercise. Surya Namaskara's development shows how Vedic sun worship gradually gave way to a structured yoga sequence incorporated into contemporary wellness culture.

The Vedic era, when Surya, the Sun deity, was revered as the source of life, energy, and cosmic order, is where Surya Namaskara's earliest conceptual roots can be found. The Sun is praised in many hymns in the Rig Veda as the one who dispels darkness and maintains health and vitality (Doniger 34). Sunrise ritual greetings represented devotion and harmony with the cycles of nature. These early rituals, which formed the symbolic basis of Surya Namaskara, placed more emphasis on spiritual reverence than on physical postures.

Indian spiritual philosophy changed to emphasize self-realization and internalized practices during the Upanishadic era. People started to see the body as a conduit for spiritual development that connected the individual self to the collective consciousness. Surya Namaskara is not specifically mentioned in classical yogic texts like Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, but they introduced key ideas like breath control, mental discipline, and meditative movement that shaped later developments in yoga (Feuerstein 112).

The development of Surya Namaskara was further aided by the medieval Hatha Yoga tradition, which placed a strong emphasis on bodily discipline, controlled breathing, and physical purification. Texts like the Hatha Yoga Pradipika outline dynamic exercises and postures meant to improve vitality and balance body energies. These texts do not contain Surya Namaskara in its current form, but they do contain the fundamental Hatha Yoga concepts of coordinated movement and breath, which prepared the way for its eventual development (Mallinson and Singleton 145).

Early in the 20th century, nationalist reform movements and India's interaction with Western physical culture gave rise to the current structured sequence of Surya Namaskara. The Raja of Aundh, Bhawanrao Shrinivasrao Pant Pratinidhi, is credited with organizing Surya Namaskara as a series of flowing poses intended to foster discipline and physical fitness (Singleton 98). This interpretation presented it as a comprehensive exercise while maintaining its spiritual symbolism.

Surya Namaskara later got incorporated into dynamic yoga practices by yoga founders such as T. Krishnamacharya, focusing on movement in synchrony with breathing (vinyasa). His students took it to the stars, spreading to the far reaches of the planet and becoming integral to modern-day yoga practices (De Michelis 187). Even today, Surya Namaskara retains its reverence for the Sun and harmony between the body, breath, and mentally clear focus in its evolved form.

Ancient Practices of Surya Namaskara:

In 1936, Rajah Bhavana Rao Pant Pratinidhi of Aundh, India, introduced the Sun Salutation of England through lectures and an exhibit film. As a result of his visit, he met Louise Morgan, a journalist who would later support his work in a series of articles for the News Chronicle, which received widespread public support in England at the time. Morgan became a fan of the practice, and she helped popularise Surya Namaskar amongst women at the time as an anti-ageing remedy and an elixir for a healthy life. Her meeting with the Indian ruler was the beginning of the West's love affair with this flowing yoga pose (Erling yoga the history and practice of Surya namaskara).

Bhavana Rao Pant Prathinidhi: Through Rajah Bhavanarao Pant Prathinidhi's progressive programme to establish constitutional democracy in the royal state of Aundh in the 1920s, Sun Salutation began to gain popularity in the broader Indian Society. He wanted to ensure that people of Aundh could govern themselves. As a result, he advocated a series of constitutional reforms, pioneered through education, and established village councils and people's assemblies as part of what became known as The Aundh Experiment.

Bhavana Rao Pant Prathinidhi began seriously practising Surya Namaskar around 1908. Although he learned the form of movement (religious worship) from his father, the emphasis on the physical benefits of practice became a goal with the influence of western physical culture in the late nineteenth century, as exemplified by the Victorian bodybuilder Eugen Sandow. At the time, the practice was confined to the ruling Indian upper classes. But that was about to change thanks to Bhavana Rao's foresight.

Like any current exercise craze, Surya Namaskar gained popularity to promote better health and the development of dynamic yogic system. To Broaden the exercise's appeal to non-Hindus and "smooth the path to health, efficiency, and longevity, "the rajah advocated reducing the traditional chanting of Beeja and Vedic mantras during practice(Erling yoga the history and practice of Surya namaskara).

Modern Practices of Surya Namas

In contemporary times the surya namaskar is no longer the rigid sequence of postures, it integrates the physical exercise, breathing, mindfulness to increase the therapeutic properties while retaining the spiritual essence

In case of hatha yoga, the Surya namaskar is slowly done with controlled breathing and posture alignment. While in the case of Vinyasa yoga inhalation is done during the stretching whereas the exhalation is done during bending or contraction steps of Surya Namaskaram. Accelerated Surya Namaskaram, as in the power yoga, is mainly used to decrease calories, increase stamina and strength. Asthana yoga includes surya namaskar A and B that increases the body and prepares the body for the further steps.

Practicing these modern yoga integrations with Surya namaskar builds the body, increases the stamina, flexibility and mindfulness.

Integration of the breathing exercises such as Anuloma Vilom, helps in relaxing the nervous system. The accelerated steps of Surya Namaskar are a part of cardio routines and are helpful in weight loss.

The modern-day practices help in customizing the Surya Namaskar according to the person's health conditions. Modified sequence of Surya Namaskar in case of obesity, PCOS, body pains such as knee pain and back pain. The modernization of the Surya Namaskaram along with the preventive healthcare has paved its way to become a universal practice. Modern day technologies, initiatives taken by the government, schools, and the work place have led to the globalization of yoga.

Surya namaskara in the present times is a complete mind-body practice that fulfilled the demands of the present generation while retaining the original aspects of it. It is a way to develop oneself to become physically, mentally, physiologically a better individual.

Tirumalai Krishnamacharya: Sri Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888-1989) or Krishnamacharya for short, was an Indian Auyurvedic healer, scholar, and yoga teacher. Often referred to as “Father of Modern yoga”, Krishnamacharya is widely regarded as one of the most influential yoga teachers of the 20th century.

He is widely regulated for his revival of hatha yoga during the 1930s at Mysuru palace and for influencing some the most famous yoga practitioners who have helped popularise modern postural yoga in the west. Whether you practice the dynamic series of Pattabhi Jois, the refined alignments of B.K.S. Iyengar, the classical postures of Indra devi, or the customised viniyoga, your practise stems from the life work of Krishnamacharya.(Erling yoga)

He was a pioneer who refined postures, sequenced them optimally, and attributed therapeutic value to specific poses. By combining pranayama and asana, he made the postures an integral part of meditation instead of just a step leading toward it. But one of the most critical aspects of Krishnamacharya's teaching was infusing yoga with Surya namaskar, or sun salutation, to create a flowing, linked series of postures performed with breath awareness which he named Vinyasas(sterling yoga).

In fact, Krishnamacharya's influence is most visible in the emphasis on asana practise, which has become the hallmark of yoga today. There was probably no other yogi who had gone to such lengths to develop the physical practises. He transformed Hatha, which had previously been a neglected branch of yoga, into its primary current. His countless lecture tours and demonstrations during the 1930s were instrumental in the resurgence of yoga in India(Erling yoga).

Conclusion:

Suryanamaskar practice is the most widely adopted sequence of asanas which has its origin from Indian traditional physical training. It also has lots of variations regarding different yogic traditions of India in the modern era. The review presents the physical benefits of the practice with regards to the increasing mobility of joints, extending muscle power, and vitality with the literature reference. Highlighting the yogic point of view of the benefits of Surya namaskar practice, the positive effects of Suryanamaskar is necessary not just for those who are regular yogic practitioners or spiritual seekers but for a common man, to maintain the physical, physiological and mental health by spending very little time of their choice. If this practice is initiated to children at the age of 7 or 8 it helps grow better not only physically but also with great mental health. We suggest that Suryanamaskar practice could be a group activity or can be a individual practice can ensure one's health. Suryanamaskar is a boon for those who want to involve in yogic practices but yet not even a dedicated hour every day.

Surya Namaskar plays an important role in balancing the functioning of endocrine glands. This property helps to regulate/delay the transition period between childhood and adolescence in growing children, especially in females. Puberty and followed by Menarche is an important process in every female's life that prepares their body for reproduction. Due to environmental factors and food habits, Puberty/Menarche is advanced to an early age, when the body is not well prepared to undergo those processes. This leads to various complications in their menstrual cycle, mood disorders, dysmenorrhea, infertility, complications in childbirth, risks of cardiovascular disease, and decreased life expectancy. Suryanamaskar plays a vital role in delaying the age of puberty in a girl child and prepares the body for the necessary changes to happen. Hence it is important to introduce surya namaskar at a young age as early as 7 years.

India have many national revivals in this article we have Bhavanarao Pant Prathinidhi who have established constitutional democracy in the royal state of Aundh, where Sun-Salutation began to gain popularity. Where as Father of Modern Yoga practices Sri Tirumalai Krishnamacharya an Indian Ayurvedic healer, scholar and yoga teacher.

Hence, it is essential to incorporate Surya Namaskara into a modern lifestyle for a healthy mind and body. From Ancient times it was an essential practice in everyone's day lifestyle and many personalities has pioneered to make those practices useful and helpful for modern day busy schedules and lifestyles.

References:

1. Venkatesh, L. Prasanna, and Vandhana S. "Insights on Surya Namaskar from Its Origin to Application towards Health." *Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2022, p. 100530. *ScienceDirect*.
2. De Michelis, Elizabeth. *A History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism*. Continuum, 2004.
3. Doniger, Wendy. *The Rig Veda: An Anthology*. Penguin Classics, 1981.
Feuerstein, Georg. *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*. Hohm Press, 2001.
4. Mallinson, James, and Mark Singleton. *Roots of Yoga*. Penguin Classics, 2017,
Singleton, Mark. *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice*. Oxford UP, 2010
5. Kumari, Priya, et al. "Impact of Sun Salutation in the Human Body." *World Journal of Pharmaceutical and Medical Research*, vol. 8, no. 12, 2022.
6. Erling, Yoga with. "The History and Practice of Surya Namaskar." *Yoga with Erling*, 20 June 2025, Accessed 31 Dec. 2025