

Lakṣya to Liberation: Lakṣādi Yoga in the Nātha Yogic Tradition

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Abstract: Lakṣādi Yoga, a unique practice from the ancient Nātha tradition that focuses on training a person's attention (*lakṣya*). By studying key texts like the *Yogakarṇikā*, the research explains how this system uses simple techniques—like where to look, how to breathe, and how to become aware of different parts of the body—to sharpen the mind and help a person grow spiritually.

The study argues that Lakṣādi Yoga is highly relevant today, especially with India's new National Education Policy (NEP 2020). Modern people often focus too much on just memorising facts for jobs, which leaves students feeling stressed and distracted. Lakṣādi Yoga offers a "fix" for this by teaching students how to focus deeply and understand themselves better. Instead of just reading from a book, it treats the human body and mind as a "living classroom" where students learn through actual experience.

In short, this research shows that by bringing these ancient Indian practices into modern schools and colleges, we can help students become more focused, emotionally strong, and ethically grounded. It offers a way to balance modern science with traditional wisdom to create a better, more complete way of learning.

Keywords: Lakṣādi Yoga, Nātha Tradition, Yogakarṇikā, Ṣoḍaśa Dhārā, Ākāśa, Yogic Psychology, Non-duality, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), NEP 2020, Holistic Education, Experiential Learning.

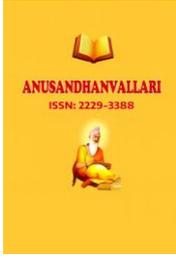
Introduction

The Indian yogic tradition encompasses diverse methods aimed at liberation (*mokṣa*) through the discipline of body, breath, and consciousness. Among these, the Nātha yogic system occupies a distinctive position due to its integrative approach, combining physical techniques with profound metaphysical insight. Lakṣādi Yoga, as expounded in the *Yogakarṇikā* and elaborated by Nātha Aghorānanda, constitutes a significant yet relatively understudied dimension of this tradition.

Lakṣādi Yoga emphasises *lakṣya*—the intentional fixing of awareness upon specific inner or outer points—as the central means of yogic realisation. Unlike purely meditative or ascetic paths, this system presents a graded methodology suited to practitioners of varying psychological and spiritual dispositions. The present paper seeks to analyse the conceptual structure of Lakṣādi Yoga, its classifications, and its philosophical implications, thereby situating it within the broader framework of Indian yogic thought.

To undertake such an analysis, it is first necessary to clarify the foundational concept of *lakṣya* and the systematic manner in which it is classified within the yogic tradition. Lakṣādi Yoga refers to those spatial and experiential dimensions upon which a *sādhaka* consciously fixes attention during yogic practice. Classical yogic texts identify five primary types of *lakṣya*: upward, downward, middle, external, and internal. These classifications reflect a refined understanding of human consciousness and its progressive purification.

The upward *lakṣya*, practice of looking steadily upward, is a way for a practitioner to connect with the highest spiritual power. This is called the First Goal. To do this, you focus your gaze on a spot about twelve finger-widths above your nose. By keeping your eyes and your mind perfectly still at that exact point, you train your brain to



become calm and deeply focused. The second goal is a downward focus where you keep your eyes on the tip of your nose; this is believed to balance your energy and lead to a long, healthy life. The third and fourth goals are "External" and "Middle" focus. External focus is meant for advanced students who have let go of all worldly desires, while Middle focus is for those who are still working through their everyday thoughts and wishes. Both methods are designed to stop the mind from wandering and keep it steady.

Finally, the fifth goal is "Internal Focus," which is the most advanced stage. In this state, a person stays focused on their inner self all the time—even while walking, eating, or sleeping. The goal is to reach a state of complete mental stillness called *śūnyatā* (emptiness), where you feel one with everything and the divine. By seeing the physical body as temporary and avoiding the trap of sensory pleasures, the mind becomes so calm that it is no longer bothered by the stress of "good" or "bad" actions. This deep, internal peace is considered the ultimate path to freedom.

Through this realisation, the practitioner transcends merit and demerit and attains the experiential knowledge of *Sat-Cit-Ānanda*, ultimately realising identity with Brahman. this natural and continuous inward focus does not happen on its own; it develops through disciplined and systematic yogic practice involving the body.

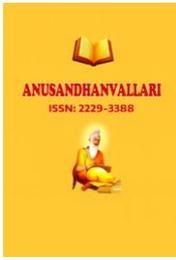
In simpler terms, Nātha Aghorānanda teaches that to truly master yoga, you must understand how your body's inner energy works. He introduced a system called the Sixteen Supports (*Ṣoḍaśa Dhārā*), which acts like a step-by-step map for your mind to travel through your body.

Aghorānanda believed that just doing physical poses isn't enough; a real yogi needs to understand deeper things like energy centers (*chakras*) and different qualities of the mind. By focusing on these sixteen specific points in the body—one by one—a student learns how to control their breath and energy (*vāyu*).

As you move through these steps, you stop feeling like just a physical body and start feeling more like pure awareness. This practice prepares you for the ultimate goal: a deep, quiet state where your mind is perfectly still and you feel connected to everything.

The Sixteen Supports (*Ṣoḍaśa Dhārā*) are practiced as a progressive journey of self-mastery, moving awareness systematically through the following stages: (1) The Big Toe, (2) Soles, and (3) Heels, which serve to ground the practitioner's initial focus; (4) The Anal Region and (5) Genital Base, where rhythmic contractions stabilize vital energy and unlock a sense of deep inner joy; (6) The Abdomen and (7) Navel, where core control awakens the "inner sound" and frees the mind from external power struggles; (8) The Heart, which involves expanding the "inner lotus" to achieve emotional and breath stability; (9) The Throat, using the chin lock to retain energy; (10) The Tongue Tip, (11) The Lengthened Tongue, and (12) The Palate, where specialized movements stimulate "inner nectar" to fuel creative and scientific intelligence; (13) The Teeth, where pressing the tongue removes physical illness; (14) The Nose Root and (15) The Nostrils, where steady gazing restores physical radiance and stills the thoughts; and finally, (16) The Eyebrow Center and Eyes, where fixing the gaze reveals a brilliant inner light and leads to a state of total wisdom and direct perception of reality. Lakṣādi Yoga further expands into a cosmological dimension through its doctrine of five types of *ākāśa*: Ākāśa, Mahā-ākāśa, Parā-ākāśa, Tattvā-ākāśa, and Sūrya-ākāśa. These are not merely physical spaces but experiential fields of consciousness.

Now the doctrine of the five types of *Ākāśa* (space) elevates Lakṣādi Yoga from a physical practice to a cosmic experience of consciousness. This progression begins with *Ākāśa*, a state of pure, objectless awareness attained through effortless gazing into the void. As the practitioner's focus deepens, they encounter *Parā-ākāśa*, perceived as a vast, cloud-like abyss, followed by *Mahā-ākāśa*, which manifests as a fiery radiance resembling the dissolution of the universe itself. This journey reaches its peak in *Sūrya-ākāśa*, which shines with the brilliance of innumerable suns, symbolising the ultimate state of inner illumination. Mastering these internal spaces signifies



a profound liberation from ethical dualities and existential bondage, allowing the practitioner to reside in a "Śiva-like" state of absolute, detached presence.

This mastery of inner space serves as the essential bridge to the final stages of the yogic journey. By moving from the emptiness of the initial void to the radiant light of *Sūrya-ākāśa*, the seeker effectively clears the mental canvas of all distractions. Having refined the mind through these expansive states of awareness, the practitioner is no longer a prisoner of their thoughts but a master of their internal environment. This profound mental clarity provides the perfect foundation for the next stage of practice: the integration of these high-level states of consciousness into the effortless, daily rhythm of living, where the boundary between the "self" and the "universal" finally disappears.

In today's educational institutes, students often struggle with short attention spans, high stress, and a focus on just getting a job rather than on growing as people. Lakṣādi Yoga offers a way to fix this by focusing on three main areas:

First, it teaches "Lakṣya," which is the skill of deep focus. In a world full of digital distractions, this practice trains the mind to stay on one task through simple steps—starting with focusing on things outside of us and moving toward our inner thoughts. This helps students remain calm and think more clearly.

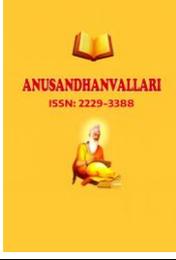
Second, it connects the mind and body. Instead of just memorising facts, Lakṣādi Yoga uses breathing and body awareness to make learning something you "feel" and experience, not just something you read in a book. This helps information actually stick and become meaningful.

Finally, it uses a system called the "sixteen supports" as a roadmap for growing up. It guides students from basic sensory awareness to deep wisdom and self-control. By bringing these ideas into classrooms, we can help students become well-rounded, balanced people who are ready for life, not just for a test.

In modern education, a multi-dimensional crisis is defined by fragmented attention, high psychological stress, and a narrow focus on job-readiness at the expense of character. While students are increasingly adept at information acquisition, they often lack the inner discipline and emotional regulation necessary for deep, meaningful learning. Within this context, Lakṣādi Yoga offers a vital corrective. By prioritising *lakṣya*—the cultivation of sustained, intentional attention—it provides a practical solution to the digital distractions of the modern age. Through its graded approach to focus, moving from external objects to internal awareness, Lakṣādi Yoga builds the cognitive clarity and resilience that are foundational not only for academic success but for ethical decision-making.

This shift toward inner discipline serves as the perfect bridge to the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The NEP advocates for a move away from rote memorisation toward Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), which view learning as a holistic, transformative process. Lakṣādi Yoga exemplifies this IKS framework by treating knowledge as an embodied experience rather than a conceptual one. Through the doctrine of the sixteen supports (*ṣoḍaśa dhārā*), the student's own body and breath become a "living curriculum." This aligns perfectly with the NEP's emphasis on experiential learning and student-centered pathways, where the educational journey is adapted to the psychological maturity of the learner.

Beyond academic performance, the integration of Lakṣādi Yoga directly addresses the NEP's focus on mental health and character formation. Its practices of internal stillness and the transcendence of anxiety provide students with a culturally rooted toolkit for resilience. Furthermore, by exploring the five spaces (*ākāśas*), Lakṣādi Yoga creates an interdisciplinary dialogue between ancient philosophy and modern cognitive science, fulfilling the NEP's vision of a multidisciplinary education. Ultimately, by systematising these Nātha traditions into modern curricula, we can move toward the NEP 2020 goal of developing "global citizens" who are technically skilled, emotionally balanced, and deeply rooted in Indian intellectual wisdom.



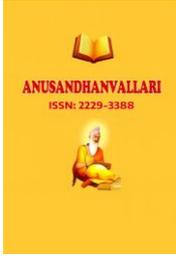
The investigation into Lakṣādi Yoga reveals it to be far more than a historical relic of the Nātha tradition; it is a sophisticated system of psychological and physiological mastery with profound implications for modern pedagogy. By systematising the cultivation of *lakṣya* (intentional focus) and mapping the progressive development of the practitioner through the *ṣoḍaśa dhārā* (sixteen supports), this tradition provides a structured methodology for transcending the cognitive fragmentation that defines the current educational era. It reframes the human body and mind not merely as tools for data processing, but as a "living curriculum" through which experiential wisdom is realised.

Furthermore, the alignment between Lakṣādi Yoga and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 highlights a significant opportunity for the revitalisation of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). This yogic framework fulfils the NEP's mandate for a holistic, learner-centric, and multidisciplinary approach by bridging the gap between physical health, mental clarity, and ethical grounding. Through the experiential mapping of the five *ākāśas*, Lakṣādi Yoga offers a unique intersection where philosophy, cognitive science, and wellness studies meet, providing a robust model for "learning how to learn."

In conclusion, as the Indian educational landscape evolves to meet the challenges of the 21st century, the integration of Lakṣādi Yoga offers a path toward a truly transformative education. By shifting the focus from purely utilitarian outcomes to the development of deep concentration and non-dual awareness, we can cultivate a generation of learners who are not only professionally competent but also internally stable, resilient, and ethically centred. Lakṣādi Yoga thus stands as a vital bridge between India's indigenous intellectual heritage and its future as a global leader in holistic human development.

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