Name of the element: Yoga

Community: Presently Yoga is practised across the length and breadth of India. Being a practice it involves active participation of the master and disciples which may comprise a wide spectrum of individuals, institutions and general public groups, societies, communities, educational institutions, and members of society at large without any restrictions of gender, age or religious dispositions.

Region: While at present Yoga is a Pan-Indian holistic physical and spiritual wellness system practiced throughout the geography of India, the ancient system of Yoga originated well before the Indus valley civilization. This fact is evidenced on the one hand by archaeological finds across Indian sub-continent and on the other by an authentic, almost unbroken textual tradition of Indian literature on the subject, which deals with its physical, practical, metaphysical and spiritual aspects. Also, the element is permeated in traditional Indian dance and theatre techniques which draw heavily from Yogic practices of various postures, gestures and breathing exercises.

Brief Description: Yoga essentially is a traditional and time honoured Indian holistic system of personal, physical, mental and spiritual wellness focusing on all-round unification of body, mind and soul. It is a perfect example of a lively interaction between the precepts and practice. Like other Indian traditions, this system is also handed down from master (Guru) to disciple (Shishya), who after rigorous practice attains mastery in the system and qualifies to become a master himself and teach others. The presence of Yoga is well documented in Indian textual tradition right from the Rigveda (RV 1/18/7; 1/5/3; 1/30/7 etc.) to Satapatha Brahmana (6/3/2/4 and 13/1/9/10 etc.) to philosophical treatises like the Upanishads (Mundaka 6/28), Katha (2/3/10-11) etc. and the Bhagavadgita (2/48; 2/50 etc.), before sage Patanjali systematized it in his Yogasutras. After Patanjali, many great sages and Yoga masters contributed their bit for the intellectual preservation and furtherance of this system through their treatises. According to Indian mythology, god Siva is the first teacher of this system. As per Yogic scriptures the practice of Yoga leads to the union of individual consciousness with universal consciousness and thus indicates a perfect harmony between these elements. The aim of Yoga is to realize the inner self, to mitigate or overcome all kinds of sufferings and to pave the way for attaining the state of liberation. The widely practiced Yoga Practices are Yama (five abstentions), Niyama (five observances), Asana (Postures), Pranayama (Suspending Breath), Pratyahara (Abstraction), Dharana (Concentration), Dhyana (Meditation), Samadhi (Fully integrated Consciousness), Bandhas (Lock) & Mudras (Gestures), Shat-karmas (Cleansing practices), Yukta-ahara, (Holistic food), Yukta karma (Right Action) and Mantra japa (Chanting of the Sacred Words) etc. Yogic practices help millions to learn to maintain a balanced way of life.