

PADA BEDA IN INDIAN CLASSICAL AND TRADITIONAL YOGA

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ABSTRACT

The phrase Pada Beda — derived from the Sanskrit roots pada (foot or step) and beda (distinction, differentiation, or division) — denotes a rich and ancient category of bodily knowledge that spans across the landscape of Indian classical arts and yoga traditions. While modern practitioners often associate yoga exclusively with stillness or seated postures, the tradition itself, as preserved in texts like the Natyashastra, Abhinayadarpana, Hathapradipika, and various Agamic scriptures, reveals an intricate grammar of foot movement, weight placement, and ground contact that is as precise as any notation system in the world.

This paper investigates Pada Beda as a cross-disciplinary concept — one that lives simultaneously in the world of dance, in the somatic experience of classical hatha yoga, in the energy-body understanding of Tantra, and in the ethical and devotional framework of Bhakti practice. Drawing on primary textual sources, oral pedagogical traditions, and contemporary scholarship, the study attempts to trace how the foot has been understood not merely as a physical appendage but as a site of cosmic meaning, energetic exchange, and spiritual aspiration.

The paper argues that Pada Beda is not a relic of performance theory alone, but a living body of knowledge that has much to offer present-day yoga practitioners, somatic therapists, movement educators, and scholars of Indian philosophy alike. Recovering this dimension of the tradition can help restore a depth of embodied awareness that has been partly lost in the global transmission of yoga.

KEYWORDS: Pada Beda, Yoga, Indian Classical Arts, Bharatanatyam, Prakriti, Sthana, Nritta, Padaprakaranam.

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