

YOGA - ITS SIGNIFICANCE AS A SOURCE OF HEALTHY LIVING

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Abstract : Everything in the world is by nature good and avail themselves to contribute to the happy living of one another. The explorations in every field of study aim to describe the nature of each and every being in the Universe and entreat to pay due respect to ensure happiness to all through healthy relationship in action. Yoga reminds the human beings of their in-depth nature and paves access to compatible understanding and life style that appreciate our life in full in any stage. Yoga is an inevitable way of life that the world has recognized to savour the union of body and spirit, of person with God, of person to person and that of person with the cosmos. The constant unfolding of oneself takes place in Yoga through the practice of different asana, meditation and concentration which help persons to master their sensory impulses, to acquire understanding to have adequate interrelationship with all that around them. Different practices in Yoga purport people with different tendencies and abilities would get benefitted physically, psychologically, mentally, and spiritually; and thus seek holistic development of every person so to translate life a meaningful one to forthcoming generations.

Key Words: *asana, concentration, relation, well-being, fullness.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Yoga has been accepted globally as one of the best methods of happy living that people aspire amidst of their heavy scheduled life. The practice of yoga has got 5,000 year history in ancient India. It has become one of the prominent six systems of Indian philosophy that is to say life of the people of India. Significances make people to accept it as their way of life to maintain physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of life to enjoy the wealth of human life in the world. It brings harmony within a person, harmony of oneself with others and harmony of oneself with the Universe. It is a need not only to Indians but also to the people of the world.

II. NEED OF YOGA:

Philosophical thinking in India has been concerned from the very beginning with the root crisis of the spirit in human. The basic issue of human suffering including moral, religious and psychological problems has been traced to one ultimate cause, to wit, self-estrangement, alienation from existence, loss of contact with Being. Haridas Chauduri, an eminent professor of philosophy, expresses his observation that emotional conflicts, social discords, political wars - all these, in final analysis, flow from man's loss of contact with the ground of existence (*atman* or *Brahman*).¹ Alienation from existence makes human beings outwardly oriented to the point of restlessness. They relentlessly look for their happiness in the outside world. They fiercely fight for the blessings of life with rival contestants. They desperately search for truth as an object of contemplation, as a thing to think about. They seriously endeavour to settle their accounts of life with fellow beings by means of objectivised principles, pacts and agreements. The fact is obviously clear that human beings forget that the crux of his/her crisis lie within one's own self, in the buried discrepancies of one's own nature. *Yoga* calls attention to this crucial fact. It aims at that vital existential experience which reunites every human being with the inmost centre of one's own being.

III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO YOGA:

The word '*yoga*' has been wrongly understood by many in recent years referring to some exercises. "*Yoga*" comes from the Sanskrit verb *yuj*, to yoke or unite.² The meaning is generally understood to signify the union of human with Divine, of the individual with the universal reality, of each with the All of existence. It means union of mortal with the eternal. In this union as has been acknowledged in religious sense that the human being realizes its goal of life in the world. Vedanta uses the word '*Yoga*' to uphold this spiritual union. The *Bhagavad-Gita* defines *Yoga* as that state than which there is nothing higher or worth realizing and firmly rooted in which a person is never shaken even by the greatest pain; that state free from all pain and misery is *Yoga*.³ Having understood religiously Vivekananda held the view that *Yoga* means to join the soul of man with the supreme Soul or God⁴ and continues to point out the end and aim of *Yoga* is to realize God⁵ and thus stresses the goal of *Yoga* as the freedom of the soul.⁶ According to Patanjali, the founder of *Yoga* system in Indian School of Thought, '*Yoga* does not mean union but spiritual effort to attain perfection through the control of the body, senses and mind, and through right discrimination between Spirit (*Purusa*) and matter (*Prakriti*).⁷ In this manner *Yoga* is a process of realisation, not merely confined to knowledge, where one sees the reality face to face and after which there remains no doubt, no fear, no misery.⁸ Philosophically *Yoga* is intimately allied to *Sankhya*. The *Bhagavad-Gita* calls them one. *Yoga* means spiritual action and *Sankhya* means knowledge. *Sankhya* is theory; *Yoga* is practice.⁹

But one would be stunned to reflect the relation between these two schools of Indian Philosophy. The Classical *Sankhya*, under the influence of Materialism, Jainism and Early Buddhism, became atheistic. According to this school, *Prakriti* and *Purusa* are sufficient to explain this universe and therefore there is no reason for postulating a hypothesis of God.¹⁰ Still in Indian literature the *Yoga* system is rightly regarded as a branch of the *Sankhya*.¹¹ It must be considered that in the real *Sankhya-Yoga* there is no room for a personal God.¹² The idea of God, far from being organically interwoven in the *Yoga* system, is only loosely inserted. In the *Yogasutras* the passages that treat of God stand disconnected, and are, indeed, in direct contradiction to the contents and aim of the system. The object of the *Yoga* system in inserting the conception of a personal God into the *Sankhya* is merely to satisfy the theists, and to facilitate the propagation of the theory of the universe expounded in the *Sankhya*.¹³ The idea of God, however, once having been received into the *Yoga* system, it became necessary to establish a connexion between God and

the world of mankind.¹⁴ Nevertheless, in the later *Yoga* literature, especially in the numerous more recent *Upanisads* which are founded upon and develop the *Yoga* doctrine, the conception of God takes a much more definite place. God gradually becomes more personal, and the relation between God and man closer. Here also, therefore, the universal need of the human heart has proved stronger than the logical reasonings of philosophy.¹⁵ Such adoptions and developments reveal the strong orientation of *Yoga* system in nurturing human beings to realize their potentiality inherent in their nature. *Yoga* evades from all kinds of discrimination to reach every person.

Yoga is very much globally understood as a useful method to live a happy life. The United Nations General Assembly declared unanimously in 2015 to celebrate International Day of *Yoga* on 21 June responding to the proposal made for the first time by the current Prime Minister of India, Mr. Narendra Modi during his speech at the UNGA, on 27 September 2014.¹⁶ Human beings engaged themselves from the time immemorial to dig out the root cause of all that come across life. *Yoga* should not be limited to mean some exercises; it signifies human potentiality to reach a higher horizon of life.

IV. ORIENTATION OF YOGA:

J. K. Thakur held the view that *Yoga* defines itself as a science - that is, as a practical, methodical, and systematic discipline or set of techniques that have the lofty goal of helping human beings to become aware of their deepest nature.¹⁷ This highlights the goal of *Yoga* as seeking to experience this deepest potentiality of human not being a part of a religious process, but an experiential science of self-study. According to Shri Yogendraji, Founder and President of the *Yoga* Institute in Bombay, '*Yoga* represents the efforts, the path, the progress and the end of human evolution.'¹⁸ This explains with force that *Yoga* is a process of conscious unfolding of oneself whereby the physical, mental and spiritual nature of the individual attains its perfect development - the totality of the whole life. It implies union of the mind with the inmost centre of one's own being, the self or *atman* - union of the conscious mind with the deeper levels of the unconscious - resulting in the integration of personality.¹⁹ That is indeed the chief objective of *yoga*. *Yoga* administers eight stages of self-discipline to materialize the objective. These are self-control (*yama*), religious observance (*niyama*), postures (*asana*), regulation of the breath (*pranayama*), restraint of the senses (*pratyahara*), steadying of the mind (*dharana*), meditation (*dyana*), and profound contemplation (*samadhi*).²⁰ The passage through the eight stages cherishes the person to inculcate universal moral commandments, to cultivate self-purification by discipline. To practice this requires postures and rhythmic control of the breath to be in withdrawal and emancipation of the mind from the domination of the senses and exterior objects. This helps for concentration and meditation to reach a state of super-consciousness brought about by profound meditation in which the individual aspirant becomes one with the object of his meditation or the Universal Spirit.²¹ Thus holistic growth of a person is aimed at in *Yoga*.

The true subject of the *Yoga* is to describe how the senses may be withdrawn from the objects of sense and reduced to inactivity. This takes place when the activity of the organ of thought, in which all the functions that are dependent upon the influence of the external world are suppressed, is wholly centred upon the *atman* (self or soul). In the last stage of absorption, thought and its object completely coincide.²² By regular observance of the *Yoga* praxis the hindrances arising from our natural disposition, which make the attainment of saving knowledge so difficult, are most successfully overcome. When absorption has risen to such a height, or rather has penetrated so deep, that no wandering of thought towards other objects is any longer possible, when that disposition of our organ of thought which is prone to go astray can no longer manifest itself, the knowledge of the essential difference of soul and matter is revealed in the form of an intuitive perception, and therewith the final goal of human endeavour is reached. This mobilization of the inner resources of personality with a view to attaining self-integration is that which religion calls God-realization, and mysticism calls immediate union with the infinite.²³ In this sense *Yoga* is the method or technique, the programme of psycho-physical, moral and spiritual training, by following which one can fulfil the ultimate destiny of life. Thus the word *Yoga* implies both the goal of life and the path leading to that goal.

V. RELEVANCE OF YOGA IN MODERN LIFE:

What is expected of *Yoga* in modern life is expressed by Shri Yogendraji well that the society expects from *Yoga* today is physical health - what they term fitness - for efficiency, besides mental balance and quietude (*Samatvam*).²⁴ The eight stages of *Yoga* are vastly interpreted to aim at the total health of human living and prepare persons to lead a happy and healthy life in relation to one's own self and also to others. B.K.S. Iyengar in his book '*Light on Yoga*' lists out 202 *asanas* that effect steadiness, health and lightness of limb. He assures from his experience and from that of others that a steady and pleasant posture produces mental equilibrium and prevents fickleness of mind.²⁵ *Asanas* are not merely gymnastic exercises; they are postures. They secure a fine physique, which is strong and elastic without being muscle-bound and they keep the body free from disease. They reduce fatigue and soothe the nerves. The effects of each *asana* give the picture that every minute part of human body is concentrated and trained to be fit so as the body be free of disease. But their real importance lies in the way they train and discipline the mind. B. K. S. Iyengar enumerates 14 types of *pranayama* (practice of breath control) that connotes extension of breath and its control. This control is over all the functions of breathing, namely, (1) inhalation or inspiration, which is termed *puraka* (filling up); (2) exhalation or expiration, which is called *rechaka* (emptying the lungs); and (3) retention or holding the breath, a state where there is no inhalation or exhalation, which is termed *kumbhaka*.²⁶ The rhythmic patterns of breathing strengthen the respiratory systems, soothe the nervous system and reduce craving. As desires and cravings diminish, the mind is set free and becomes a fit vehicle for concentration.²⁷ He attaches meaning to our breath that every living creature unconsciously breathes the prayer '*So' 'ham'*' (*Sah=He; Aham=I-He, the Immortal Spirit, am I*) with each inward breath. So also with each outgoing breath each creature prays '*Hamsah'*' (I am He). This *ajapa-mantra* (unconscious repetitive prayer) goes on within each living creature throughout life. The *yogi* fully realizes the significance of his *ajapa-mantra* and so is released from all the fetters that bind his soul. He offers up the very breath of his being to the Lord as a sacrifice and receives the breath of life from the Lord as his blessing.²⁸ The practice of *pranayama* reminds the practitioner that *prana* in the body of the individual (*jivatma*) is part of the cosmic breath of the Universal Spirit (*Paramatma*). An attempt is made to harmonize the individual breath (*pinda-prana*) with the cosmic breath (*Brahmanda-prana*) through the practice of *pranayama*.²⁹ Hence the practice of *pranayama* makes the person to feel and live oneself a part of the whole cosmos.

VI. YOGA AS A THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION:

The application of *Yoga* as a therapeutic intervention, which began early in the twentieth century, takes advantage of the various psycho-physiological benefits of the component practices. Human society also expects emotional control so that persons may not suffer from strain and tension causing psychosomatic ailments which are on the increase. And finally *Yoga* should provide for contentment, happiness and peace within oneself. The physical exercises (*asanas*) may increase patient's physical flexibility, coordination, and strength, while the breathing practices and meditation may calm and focus the mind to develop greater awareness and diminish anxiety lest they get entangled with mental distresses and evil practices, and thus result in higher quality of life. Other beneficial effects involve a reduction of distress, blood pressure, and improvements in resilience, mood, and metabolic regulation.³⁰ Vivekananda summarizes the effects of *Yoga* that it changes the body. He expresses that the continual practice of *Yoga* brings remarkable changes in the body that the body after the practices is not the one before.³¹ Constant transformation becomes inevitable result of *Yoga* even in the bodily life of human being.

VII. CONCLUSION - SIGNIFICANCE OF YOGA:

The practice of *Yoga* in the strict sense of the term is a resolute will to allow the power of being to work more and more freely within us. It is a commitment to higher values. Ordinary life is a slow and meandering movement unconsciously determined by the cosmic power. *Yoga* is intelligent co-operation with that power in full measure. It is an acceleration of the tempo of life's process occasioned by a sort of Copernican revolution in the field of consciousness, i.e. by a transition from the egocentric to the Cosmo-centric outlook. It was emphasised in the speech of Mr. Narendra Modi in the UN General Assembly when he stated, "*Yoga* is an invaluable gift of India's ancient tradition. It embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfillment; harmony between man and nature; a holistic approach to health and well-being. It is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with yourself, the world and the nature. By changing our lifestyle and creating consciousness, it can help in well being."³² For, many still remark *Yoga* as a practice associating with Hinduism to place it in the domain of spirituality; *Yoga* is also looked upon as not much fruitful as it demands long period of continuous practice to think about its effects; and it is felt helpless to free physical ailment of persons without stamina. Yet, *Yoga* warrants our attention to its most important teaching that has to do with our nature as human beings. It states that our true nature goes far beyond the limits of the human mind and personality - that instead, our human potential is infinite and transcends our individual minds and our sense of self. Vivekananda described the utility of *Yoga* is to bring out the perfect human being.³³ Thus, *Yoga* helps persons of every age, especially the youth to concentrate the wealth of potentiality of human nature to set goal in life and step toward accomplishing it with commitment. Hence a healthy and happy life is a natural flow of *Yoga*.

¹ Haridas Chaudhuri, *Integral Yoga*, p. 19.

² Piyush Jain, *Yoga and Recreation*, p. 1.

³ Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, p. 169.

⁴ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 8, p. 36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 124.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 55.

⁷ Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, p. 169.

⁸ Shambhu Nath, *Speaking of Yoga*, p. 4.

⁹ Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, p. 169.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹¹ James Hastings, (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. XII, p. 831.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 832.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 831.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 832.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Day_of_Yoga/14.10.2018.

¹⁷ J. K. Thakur, *Yoga for Wellness*, p. 1.

¹⁸ Shambhu Nath, *Speaking of Yoga*, p. 4.

¹⁹ Haridas Chaudhuri, *Integral Yoga*, p. 21.

²⁰ Frank H. Vizetelly, (ed.), *New Standard Encyclopedia of Universal Knowledge*, p. 420.

²¹ B. K. S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga*, p. 21.

²² James Hastings, (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. XII, p. 832.

²³ Haridas Chaudhuri, *Integral Yoga*, p. 21.

²⁴ Shambhu Nath, *Speaking of Yoga*, p. 5.

²⁵ B. K. S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga*, p. 41.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Arndt Bussing, Andreas Michalsen, and others, '*Effects of Yoga on Mental and Physical Health: A Short Summary of Reviews*', <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:10436227>.

³¹ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 1, p. 224.

³² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Day_of_Yoga/14.10.2018.

³³ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 2, p. 39.

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