

A STUDY OF PATANJALI'S YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI IN THE LIGHT OF MENTAL HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

The word Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word "Yuj" which means "to unite or integrate" It is a physical, mental and spiritual discipline originated in ancient India. Simply speaking, Yoga is balancing the body and mind. Patanjali's thoughts reflected in his Yoga Sutras clearly state the importance of both physical and mental well being for a peaceful life. He has emphasised on the eight limbs of Yoga namely Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi. If the practitioner concentrates on the daily practice of yoga exercises then it improves the physical as well as mental being of the person. The present paper focuses on Patanjali's thoughts reflected in his Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. It is a collection of Sanskrit Sutras on the theory and practice of Yoga. It is made up of 196 phrases that dwells upon the essential things to be done while practising yoga. It investigates the teachings of Patanjali on the physical and mental well being. Human body is a combination of body and mind. Due to ignorance towards body and mind humans do not identify the reasons behind their physical and mental illness. In modern times, it has been observed that people like going to gyms and performing exercise which strengthens their muscles. However, there is no provision for improving mental awareness. Yoga is such an exercise that it strengthens not only the body but also the mind. Therefore, the Yoga practitioners experience the complete health benefits and remain healthy. The paper points out the benefits of doing Yoga and recommends doing it for sustainable health.

Keywords: Yoga, Patanjali's Yog Sutras, Eight Limbs of Yoga, Physical and mental health, Enlightenment etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of human life is to find happiness. How to achieve this goal of achieving happiness? The ancient sages from Indian tradition have successfully given the ways to attain this eternal happiness. Patanjali is one of such sages who has contributed in the field of physical and mental well being. His masterpiece Yoga Sutra of Patanjali is popular in the field of Yoga Tradition and has created its everlasting impact upon the minds of Yoga practitioners who pursue the practice of Yoga. According to Patanjali happiness can be found in the union of body and mind which is possible only with the practice of Yoga. Patanjali compiled Yoga Sutra 3000 years back, he has described Yoga as "liberation from suffering and union with the Universal Energy" (Desigachar 1995). This union is the highest state and can be understood at different levels – a union of the mind, body and soul; mind and body etc. The journey to achieve this physical and mental well being is not easy. Therefore, Patanjali developed a tradition of Yoga with 'Ashtanga Yoga' (Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi) which means eight limbs of yoga. The practitioner needs to follow the path of 'Ashtanga Yoga' in order to achieve physical and mental well being. No doubt, Patanjali has done a matchless work in the field of mental health.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are many significant texts written on Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. A book entitled as Yoga Sutras of Patanjali written by Charles Johnston does a comprehensive study of Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. The research paper entitled 'Effect of Patanjali yoga sutra on personality development: A randomised controlled trial' studies Patanjali's Yoga Sutras and its positive impact on body and mind. Sanjoy's Sarkar's 'Exploring Patanjali's Yoga Sutras for the Essence of Happiness: A Holistic Approach' discusses the significance of Yoga as a tool to pursue a balanced life. It recommends doing Yoga for a happy and sustainable life.

III. PATANJALI'S YOGA SUTRAS OF PATANJALI

While studying the philosophical base of maharishi Patanjali's ideology of yoga sutra one should know the Samkhya philosophy which talks about the fundamental ideas of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*.

The philosophical approach to yoga psychology is grounded primarily in the teachings of Samkhya philosophy, and other sacred texts and practices that were prevalent in the time of Patanjali, which is supposed to be around 200 BCE. Within this paradigm, two fundamental principles *Purusha* and *Prakriti* are postulated as ultimate realities in the universe *Purusha* is the principle of consciousness and *Prakriti* is the principle of materiality (Ajaya, 1983).

The Yoga practitioner experiences the feelings of oneness with the universe and that is the ultimate benefit of Yoga. The Yoga Sutras stand for the affirmations which guide the practitioner to be on the path of Yoga. It is

worthy to mention here one of the Yogsutras here that is ‘Atha Yoganushasanam’. This first Yogsutra from Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra has been interpreted by many scholars which itself shows its holistic meaning and approach.

As A. K. Aruna observes, Patanjali himself here indicates that there was this earlier body of literature from which he was summarising this topic of yoga. The prefix ‘anu-’ in this initial sūtra is often used in the sense of anurūpe, meaning in conformity with. When applied to the term śāsana (teaching), it indicates that this will be the traditional teaching of yoga. This text is then meant to be in conformity with the prior traditional texts that deal with the topic of yoga and the topic of liberation, the goal of yoga. (26)

In this sutra Patanjali advises the practitioner to start doing Yoga at the present moment. This idea of the present moment is very significant in Yoga teachings. It believes in the present moment. It can also be interpreted as that one should be committed towards following the Yoga practice at the present moment without pondering much neither in the past nor in the future.

Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras are divided into four chapters – samadhi pada, sadhana pada, vibhuti pada, and kaivalya pada. They provide a detailed account of the nature of mental activities, their types, the steps to stop their activities, the difficulties one encounters in this process, ways of overcoming them, the different levels of concentration one can achieve, the associated effects, the types of extraordinary powers that manifest, and the ultimate liberated state. (Jayasheela, S. 3)

Maharshi Patanjali has rightly been called the Father of Yoga. It is strongly believed that Maharshi Patanjali systematised yoga on the basis of the foundational metaphysics of Samkhya. Yoga sutras of Maharshi Patanjali are considered as a key work on yoga during the classical era. According to Dr. Radhakishnan, Maharshi Patanjali codified the nebulous tradition evolved under the pressure of life and experience. Yoga sutra of Maharshi Patanjali which has also been termed as Yoga Philosophy or Raja Yoga is considered as the first coherent philosophical system. It is believed to have been compiled between 200 BCE- 200 CE. As yoga darshana of Maharshi Patanjali adopted the concepts of Prakriti and Purusha, metaphysical rationalism and methods of acquiring knowledge, yoga philosophy of Maharshi Patanjali is also called Ishwar Samkhya, owing to the presence of concept of Ishwara or God which is missing in the Samkhya philosophy of Kapila.

Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi are the eight limbs of Yoga taught by Maharshi Patanjali. It is significant to study these teachings.

1. Yama:

‘Yama’ is about the practices we need to follow while living day to day life. It includes: Ahimsa (non-violence), satya (truthfulness), Asteya (non- stealing), Brahmacharya(following the right path) and Aparigraha (lack of greed).

2. Niyama:

The second limb of Yoga ‘Niyama’ refers to the five duties of the individual which can help him to go inward and sustain well being. These five duties are: Saucha, santosh, Tapas, Swadhyaya, Ishwarpranidhan. Saucha means taking care of cleanliness. Patanjali wants to make the people aware about the importance of cleanliness. After cleaning the body only one has to aspire towards yoga practice. Santosh refers to the contentment that means living a life full of satisfaction. The one who has contentment within only can pursue happiness in the long run. ‘Tapas’ means to create passion towards the goal that one has set. For example the Yoga practitioner has to practise yoga on a daily basis in a disciplined way to achieve perfection. Swadhyaya insists on self study means one needs to understand the inner self rather than the outer self. It is very important for one to realise his/her true self to find happiness. ‘Ishwarpranidhan’ refers to one’s faith upon the higher self. As an individual one lives in physical and mental bondages which limit one’s existence. With practising Ishwarpranidhan the yoga practitioner develops a sense of courage with the belief that there is God, Universe or a collective consciousness to guide. So one needs to surrender to that higher self in order to live a life full of faith, joy, and bliss.

3. Asana:

It means a posture, one of the physical aspects of Yoga. Patanjali refers to Asana as a pose which is comfortable and motionless. The position which relaxes the human body and mind is considered as ‘asana’. As he writes, “*sthira sukham asanam*”.

4. Pranayama:

It is a yoga practice related to breathing exercise. Simply speaking, it teaches the aspirants to have control over breathing. The regular practice of Pranayama strengthens the physical and mental well being.

5. Pratyahara:

The meaning of ‘pratyahara’ is a sense of withdrawal. It refers to focus on a certain posture and to remain focused on it. It is the ability not to get distracted by outside objects. It is very important quality of the individual which is helpful while performing yoga exercise.

6. Dharana:

As pratyahara refers to not getting distracted, ‘Dharana’ refers to hold that concentration for a longer time. There are different yoga postures which the individuals can practise for a longer time in order to develop concentration and mental stability.

7. Dhyana:

It refers to meditation, which means to sit quiet and observe the thinking process. It is very difficult to find the source of the thought process. While doing meditation one is expected to minimise the thinking and to concentrate on certain mantra chanting or thought etc. The practice of meditation helps the individuals to remain stable and calm even in the crisis time if it is practised on a regular basis.

8. Samadhi:

If the practitioner of Yoga follows all above limbs of yoga taught by Maharshi Patanjali, he/she can achieve the state of ‘Samadhi’ which means enlightenment. It is a state where one is able to control one’s body and mind. The disciplined body and mind results into this blissful state. Thus, the learning of Yoga is nothing but a kind of a journey from ignorance to enlightenment.

IV. PRACTICE OF YOGA AND MEDITATION AND MENTAL AWARENESS

As the eight limbs are discussed earlier, it has been very much clear that the practice of Yoga exercise makes a tremendous impact upon physical fitness. It creates positive vibrations in the body while performing the yoga exercise because the poses which were developed by the ancient sages are the products of meticulous research over the anatomy of the body. For example, the simplest exercise, Vrikshasana, creates awareness in humans when it is done on a regular basis. In this asana the practitioner is supposed to stand on a single foot and to set the other feet on the knee of the feet which are on the floor. He needs to look straight with concentration without disturbing the pose. It seemed easy earlier. But when one increases the duration of the pose it remains challenging for the practitioner to remain calm and stable. The simple also teaches concentration, perseverance and discipline if done with patience and faith. The other simple practice is ‘Tratak Dhyana’. It is an ancient spiritual practice which is a type of meditation. In this meditation the practitioner needs to sit in Sukhasana and concentrate at a certain point without closing the eyebrows. It also seems like simple practice. However, if one increases the duration it becomes very challenging to hold attention at a certain point for a long time. Thus, while practising such meditation like Tratak, one experiences the unstable nature of mind as well as body. In day to day lives if one wants to perform better this practice of yoga is very essential.

As Dr. K.P.V Ramanakumar and P. Selvakumar write, “Yoga helps us to realise ourselves. It can be a great tool for improving our leadership qualities. The concept of self-awareness (or) knowing yourself is central to both yoga and leadership. Learning to be an effective leader requires introspection, adherence to ethics and moral standards which is available in Yogic practices.” (25) The doer realises that they are only body and mind which are continuously fluctuating and if one maintains silence and remains calm they can be controlled. The understanding of this human nature has prime significance in the practice of Yoga. Patanjali through his Yoga Sutras and Yoga exercise wants humans to attain this tranquillity of body as well as mind. The successful union of body and mind takes humans to the level of consciousness. It is the actual purpose of Yoga. It is clearly mentioned as ‘Kaivalya Pada’ in the fourth division of the book, the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. The meaning of Kaivalya is liberation. The practitioner seeks ultimate joy and pleasure while doing Yoga which is considered to be the final goal of humans as narrated by the ancient scriptures like Upnishads. Ancient knowledge believes in the tranquillity of body and mind. It is taught in the Vedic philosophy that one needs to acquire such a self where there is no conflict in body as well as mind. This attainment is called nothing but ‘Kaivalya’. It is considered as a final goal of every human being. This goal can be achieved by practising Yoga.

V. CONCLUSION

Thus, Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* teaches humans the foundations of physical and mental well being. It is not only limited to just physical exercise but also dwells upon the inner psyche of the human mind. Today in the world of technological advancement where humans are facing a lot of distractions, physical and mental illness, Patanjali’s Yoga Sutra remains a torch bearer for those who want to pursue a journey from ignorance to enlightenment. Human life is full of challenges and physical and mental stability is required to overcome those challenges. Therefore, understanding Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras is significant for physical and mental well being

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