

Perspective of Rajayoga in its Application to Mental Health

Volume: 04**Issue: 02****July 1986****Page: 133-138**

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Abstract

Different stages of Rajayoga of Patanjali have been explained. A comprehensive account of this system of yoga has been given in a mental health perspective in order to promote its acceptance among the mental health professionals. This is considered vital for suitable modification of the ancient system of yoga in its application for the solution of mental health problems. This treaty incorporates the theoretics on causation of mental afflictions and suggests the yogic processes for modifying the afflicted behaviour. It is also for the promotion of mental health and for the transcendence to the highest level of conscience.

Key words -

**Raja Yoga,
Affliction,
Meditation**

A vast amount of literature, both ancient and modern, is available on yoga and its various techniques for the treatment of physical and psychological disorders. Some of these techniques are similar in principle to that of behaviour therapy [1]. There exist many schools of yoga in Indian thoughts founded upon different metaphysical and epistemological theories [2]. However, all these schools of yoga advocate two approaches in an integrated manner, i.e., physical and experiential. The physical approach involves certain physical exercises, such as asanas or postures [3] pranayamas or deep breathing exercises [4], mudras or symbolic gestures and bandhas or blocking of passages of organs by fixing their status with contraction of certain muscles [5] and shatkriyas or 6 ways of physical cleansing [6] for attaining voluntary control over nadis as aspects of human anatomy [7]. The experiential approach (not merely learning) restructures the cognitive and analytic apparatus of the psyche for a higher order stability and equilibrium of the personality as a whole. The former approach has also been styled as Hatha or 'by force' or 'at will'. Its philosophy has been extensively worked out in Hindu Tantra yoga literatures like Shivasamhita (600 AD) [8] Hatha Yoga Pradipika (1100 AD) [9] and Shatchakra Nirupana (1526 AD) [10].

Scientific studies demonstrated on Hatha Yogic methods have shown changes in heart rate and other autonomic activities; reducing heart rate, blood pressure, lowering the oxygen consumption and metabolic rate of the body [11].

Some of these yogic techniques also have found their application in the treatment of essential hypertension [12], anxiety states [13], psychoneurotic conditions [14] and physical stress [15]. Unfortunately, these experiments have excluded the experiential aspect of the yogic system for sake of convenience and thus have ignored the vital dimensions of personality growth, which is imperative in the context of cognitive restructuring and model psychotherapy. The dichotomy of physical and experiential aspects of yoga have been further deepened with independent developments in bio-feedback and behaviour modification techniques [16] and transcendental meditation [17]. It is possible to incorporate the experiential approach in an integrative manner to the current packages of yogic therapies for various psychoneurotic and existential

problems. This can facilitate the cognitive growth in experiencing, understanding and transcending the "self".

This paper gives a comprehensive treaty of the 'Rajayoga ' in order to maintain the integrity of the ancient Indian traditional system. This total approach is vital and inseparable from the ideals of perfect mental health and ascent of man.

The system of 'Rajayoga ' is thought to be founded by Patanjali (200 AD). However, its existence antedates any human documentation. Though the physical techniques of 'Rajayoga' have had existence in other systems of Indian thoughts, it is never prescribed alone as a method of controlling the physiological system of the human body. It is always accompanied by a system of theoretics depending upon the particular school of philosophy. The credit goes to Patanjali for unifying different methods in his well known classic "The Yoga Sutra". (Y.S)

Patanjali's Concept of Mind and Causes of Mental Afflictions.

Patanjali's Yoga philosophy is an extension of Sankhya philosophy (a dualistic system), which rests on the two principles of Prakriti or matter and Purusha or consciousness. The living systems according to this school of thought, are unique transformations of Prakriti where suitable energy fields exist for expression / reflection of the Purusha. Through Purusha's presence, the entire psychological and material phenomena are evolved from the Prakriti. There seems to be some parallelism to the modern concept of dissipative structure evolution expounded by Nicholis and Prigogine [18]. But their system completely ignores the involvement of consciousness in the evolution of matter.

The Prakriti or matter has three dynamic attributes viz.,

- (i) Sattva or essence of being
- (ii) Rajas or, motion and Tamas or inertia [19].

All living systems express these attributes in varying proportions. The three attributes act essentially in close relation. They overpower and support one another and intermingle with one another [20]. The manifold of transformations of Prakriti in both ontogenic and phylogenic cycles further results in the expression of Buddhi or intellect in human beings. All transformations lead to metastable states like dissipative structures with a intellect transforms in to Ahankara or ego (not similar to the concept of psychoanalysis). Ahankara has 5 sense organs of perception that are capable of processing the input from the environment for feature extraction, five motor organs and a manas or ?= mind - a supersensory system for semantic and symbolic interpretation of features of the world [21]. The manas or ?= mind, Ahankara or ego and Buddhi or intellect constitute Chitta or psyche. This Chitta is a process of complex interaction of these three faculties.(Fig. 1)

Prakriti or matter - Purusha or consciousness

with

Sattava or essence of being

Rajas or motion

and Tamas or inertia

.Conscious living organisms

The chitta is habitually very fickle and unsteady. Its lines of action are always uncontrolled without any proper direction or destination. The five states in which the chitta functions are:

Kshipta : or extreme restless state (tension, emotional conflicts, etc.).

Mudha : or stupefied / infatuated state (passions like lust, anger, etc.).

Vikshipta :or fickle and partly calm.

Ekagra : or one pointedness and

Niruddha : or highly ordered, stable and tranquil [22].

The first three states are the initial conditions for the generation of psychopathology of any kind, whereas fourth and fifth states are suitable for Yoga or heightened state of consciousness. In the first three states, there occurs ceaseless transformations of Prakriti (matter). In the fourth state, it is minimal while in the fifth state, the transformation completely ceases and results in the maximum awareness / enlightenment / samadhi. Hence, Yoga is defined Chitta vritti nirodha [23].

Patanjali has enumerated mind pathological conditions namely

- (1) Vyadhi or Somatic disturbance
- (2) Styana or gloominess
- (3) Samshaya or doubt
- (4) Pramada or procrastination
- (5) Alasya or sloth
- (6) Avirati or craving for sense pleasure
- (7) Bhrantidarshana or hallucination
- (8) Alabdhabhumikattva or failure to attend with concentration and
- (9) Anavastha or instability [24].

These pathological conditions are obstacles in the way of Samadhi or enlightenment and generate Kleshas or afflictions. These afflictions are five in number:

- (1) Avidhya or ignorance (similar to lack of information in a state of maximum entropy of system)
- (2) Asmita or egoism
- (3) Raga or attachment
- (4) Dwesha or antipathy and
- (5) Abhinivesha or fear of death [25].

Coster [26] has compared these kleshas or afflictions with the primary anxiety and insecurity in the light of psychoanalysis . It is mentioned that the concept of kleshas are universal in character and can give a general theory of psychopathology far more richer than the current psychoanalytic theories.

'Rajayoga' - The Path of Perfect Mental Health

Patanjali described the following eight steps in his Yogasutra that have to be practised in succession for emancipation from kleshas or afflictions [27]. These are

- (1) Yama or restraint
- (2) Niyama or observance
- (3) Asana or posture
- (4) Pranayama or deep breathing exercise
- (5) Pratyahara or restraining of sense organs
- (6) Dharana or concentration
- (7) Dhyana or meditation and
- (8) Samadhi or transcendence / enlightenment.

Yama or restraint is of five kinds namely Ahimsa or non-violence, Satya or truthfulness, Asteya or non-stealing, Brahmacharya or continence and Aparigraha or self-reliance [28].

Niyama or observance includes Sauch or cleanliness, Santosha or contentment, Tapah or austerity, Swadhyaya or practice with help of words and Ishwar Pranidhana or surrender to God [29].

These two steps are the rigorous learning methods dealing with "human conduct". In psychotherapeutic terms, Yama and Niyama are the mechanisms for behavioural control in external milieu.

Asana or Posture:

It is a means of attaining the best stability of the physique. Patanjali has not specified any particular Asana for yogic meditation but suggested that the Asana should be comfortable and in which one can stay for a long period [30]. Behaviourally it leads to habituation of skeletomuscular system and the concomitant neural parts.

Pranayama or deep breathing exercises:

Pranayama is meant for controlling the internal mechanisms of the body through respiratory control. The technique involves in controlling the respiratory movement and proportionating it to inhalation, relation and exhalation (1:2:1). When observed according to space, time and number for a long time, Pranayama becomes subtle and more effective [31]. The oxidative processes of the body by Prana or oxygen can be controlled by these exercises. The steps of Asana and Pranayama have effects not only on the individual systems (skeletomuscular and metabolic) but also on the total health of the individual. The main aspect of the two steps according to Patanjali, is to overcome the disturbances in the Angmejayattva or tonic rhythms of the body [32]. So, these two steps are meant to achieve voluntary control over the internal physical milieu of the individual system.

Prtyahara or restraining from of sense organs:

In this step, the senses are separated from their corresponding objects. They are allowed to flow as it were and thus, psyche manifests itself in its natural form. This brings the spontaneous control over the sense organs [33]. The methodology of Pratyahara has some similarity to free association techniques of classical psychoanalyses but the interpretation here is done by the supervisory control system i.e., the Buddhi or intellect instead of therapist.

Dharana or concentration:

It is a process of fixing / holding the psyche on any points in the body or outside [34]. This fixation of psyche has to be practised repeatedly and for a long time. It, then, produces stability in the thought processes and prepares a ground for the next step viz., Dhyana or meditation.

Dhyana or meditation:

An incessant flow of knowledge in the concentrated object is called Dhyana [35]. This state is uninterrupted by any other knowledge or thought. The continuousness of a thought leads to singleness of impression from which the psyche has to emerge out to a transcendental state. Since meditation is a process of subjective education, 'Rajayoga' suggests three principal methods of achieving such education [36]. The first and the most effective method is to become a witness to the flow of the stream of consciousness (Pravahachittam). The second method is somewhat slow but simple. It is the constant repetition of the sacred word 'Om' and the last method is that of fixing the gaze on a point so that the eyes may close slowly and automatically. Generally, a beautiful image of worship is chosen and the

gaze is fixed on its feet or more preferably on its face. In the beginning, the practice of meditation is voluntary and through deliberate effort, but through habituation, it becomes automatic and adaptive, ultimately leading to a final stage of Samadhi.

Samadhi or transcendence or enlightenment:

It is a state when the empirical reality is transcended [37]. This transcendence has to be achieved in two serial ways following repeated Abhyasa or practice of 1 to 7 steps of yoga with Vairagya or detachment [38]. The first step of Samadhi that overcomes the impressions on the psyche is called Samprajnata Samadhi or cognitive trance. It is attained by successive process of Savitarka or acute reasoning, Savichara or subtle analysis of acquired knowledge, Sananda or perennial happiness and Sasmita or self-consciousness [39]. The second stage in the Samadhi is called Asamprajnata Samadhi or ultracognitive trance, which brings about the disappearance of all fluctuations of the psyche and drives it to a meta-stable state wherein the only latent impressions remain in a dormant form i.e. psyche is sublimated from all realities whatsoever.

Conclusions

Patanjali's 'Rajayoga' represents the Hindu Clinical Psychology as it stood 2000 years ago. Though his Yoga Sutra is classed with the six principal systems of Hindu philosophy, it is not merely a philosophical analysis of reality but also a practical discipline for the self growth or transcendence. The initial two steps Yama and Niyama have the mechanisms of behavioural control. These behavioural control principles are initially value laden and uncompromisable according to the philosophy of the system. This form of behavioural control reduces the attachment on the external world, hence its practice internalises the values as a preparative step for ultimate annihilation of such values. Asana and Pranayama are more than the voluntary control of the physiology of the body. It is not just a passive learning as in biofeedback, but curative in nature, depending on the psychogenic state of the individual. Then comes the Pratyahara state, in which behavioural and psychophysiological controls are integrated spontaneously and Sadhaka or practitioner does not feel any strain due to external or internal stimuli. Self analysis and self reflection that occur in stages, Dharana or concentration and Dhyana or meditation are meant to restructure one's perceptions about the world and oneself as well. These stages bring about the cognitive change uncomparable to modern cognitive psychotherapies. The changes, in emotions and perception are so profound, that it cannot be easily explained, rather to be experienced. It is culturally embedded in the learning, feeling and experiencing the Hindu way of life. The last state, i.e., Samadhi is the prescription of 'Rajayoga' is for transcendence to highest level of awareness of psyche. It is the state of 'no value' and there are no transformations. The psyche unlearns everything and is open and naked. This kind of mysticism, again, may sound unscientific (it is as much unscientific as any other cognitive psychotherapy, as the human psyche, in its experience, is not logical). Logicalness is an imposition of psyche on itself through socio-cultural developments (learning/ acquiring, practicing etc.). On a more substantive level, one should note that all eight steps of Patanjali's system be employed as a therapeutic approach to behavioural and emotional disturbances (and not few Asanas or Pranayamas or other such techniques). Therefore:

- (1) Yoga therapy would involve a total and radical change in any western mode of life,
- (2) It takes decades to progress through all of Patanjali's steps to enlightenment and

(3) it probably takes longer to progress, the more serious the mental health problem to begin with. Patanjali's concept of mind and its afflictions is based on an interacting co-operative process of body and mind. Therefore the therapy suggested is also for a total change of the system, i.e., a complete transformation of socio-ethical, physiological and psychological outlook of the individual. It is gratifying to acknowledge that Patanjali has shown the techniques of personality growth (not merely for the modification of maladapted personality), and thus the process of essential ego psychology. The present paper makes a simple survey of this unified ancient system of Yoga and tries to explore the possibility of further developments in application of these principles to, and evaluation of their utility, in specific clinical situations.

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