

THE APPROACH OF YOGA TO HUMAN MISERY

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Yoga could be explained as a way of life or rather the way in which the life could be lived. It is a process which emphasizes integration (from you to join, assemble, balance etc.) at every level of existence, every aspect of life be it social, personal, physical, emotional or intellectual. It increases the awareness of different dimensions of our existence, their mutual dependence and mutual influence and the various factors which lead to disharmony in their functioning, ultimately causing disintegration, fragmentation. Thus Yoga makes us aware of our state of fragmentation at every level and the factors responsible for this fragmentation and the way to overcome this fragmentation and shows us the way of living in the most integrated way.

Thus Yoga as integration is the aim for which Yoga the practical discipline is the means.

Before we take an overall view of Yoga, it would not be out of place to recollect that according to Indian tradition Yoga, Ayurveda and Vyakarana, represent the living system i.e. man as a whole, the mind, the body and speech. These three disciplines were essential for perfection as internal, external and expressional aspects of man. Therefore, Patanjali composed three treatises one each on Grammar, Yoga and Ayurveda. Thus Yoga cannot be separated from grammar and medicine at least in Indian context. With this introduction let us turn to the problem of stress which not only causes disintegration but also increases misery. Every one, in every walk of life at any time or place continuously experiences stress and tension. At extreme levels it has highly adverse consequences for human functioning, at the individual as well as social levels. Most of the stress research in modern times is laboratory based. Psychological stress within the western tradition has been defined as the response of an individual to a situation where he perceives that environmental demands exceed his capacity and resources to respond appropriately. In such situations, one usually responds with a variety of physiological changes including a feeling of mental distress. The heart rate and respiration rate goes up, the muscles including those of stomach tense up, the galvanic skin resistance drops down indicating physiological functions to be under the effect of stress. The stress experienced for a longer time influences immunological system of the body. 'Stress' and 'Strain' in this modern sense is not easily found in the traditional texts. Nevertheless there is an extensive treatment of the problems of misery and suffering in the major ancient Indian texts. The references that are most useful for the purpose are from Patanjala Yogasutra, Bhagavad Gita and Charaka samhita. The concepts most germane to our discussion of stress are dukkha (pain, misery), klesa (afflictions), kama or trsna (desires), ahamkara (ego) and adhi (mental aberrations). It is interesting to note that the body mind relationship, characteristic of modern stress studies, is emphasized in the Ayurvedic system of medicine. The Indian are not given very respectable position in the individual's life and are considered baser levels of operation. The contrast self is identified with the ultimate reality. Physical or mental diseases are treated in terms of imbalance of the individual body and mind together within the context for their functioning at the higher level of selfhood. Gita says that the senses are great, greater than the senses is the mind, greater than the mind is the intelligence but greater than the intelligence is He.

Reverting back to the problem of stress, Gita beautifully expands psychological concepts related to stress.

When a man dwells in his mind on the objects of sense, attachment to them is produced, from attachment springs desire and from desire comes anger. From anger arises bewilderment, from bewilderment loss of memory, from loss of memory, the destruction of intelligence and from the destruction of intelligence he perishes. Obstacles to the fulfilment of desires lead to frustration that may become aggression along with anger. The state of frustration and accompanying emotional upset create impairment of intellectual functioning leading to confusion, failures of memory and problems of discrimination. These lead to a vicious circle of further failures. Thus the conditions leading to frustration beginning with desires are at the root of the experience of stress. Western psychologists recognize that frustration is a function of the intensity of desires or needs.

Similar concepts find confirmation in other traditional texts. Suffering is caused by desires both in Buddhism and Jainism. Every alternate verse in Gita emphasizes importance of giving up desires and experiencing calm and bliss.

Caraka also declared that state of thirst, desire is the cause of happiness and unhappiness. This causes affliction, pain, sorrow called vedana in sanskrit. It is not possible to uproot it by medicine. Its ultimate medicine lies in Yoga and moksa only.

It is the highest state of renunciation which leads to Yoga and that in turn bestows liberation. This is state of samadhi i.e. self realisation. It is here we achieve perfect health. This is a metaphysical meaning of health. Its literal meaning is sva + stha to be seated in one's own self. This is borne out by yogic text, e.g. tada drastuh svarupe avasthanam i.e. then the seer is established in his own essential form.

In the context of health, the term samadhi needs some explanation. Vyadhi means physical disorders and can be treated by medicine, and adhis i.e. mental disorders can be treated only by samadhi. Thus adhi, vyadhi and samadhi have something to do with each other. It means ultimately to uproot adhi and vyadhi, - samadhi is the only cure. It is here Ayurveda meets Yoga. Curiously enough all the three words have the same root dha to place, establish, while only prefixes change the meaning & level. Samadhi means perfectly co-ordinated placement as against case with diseases of both psycho-somatic types.

The issue of desires and their fulfilment is complicated further by what we call ego-involvement. It leads to strong likes and dislikes, attraction and repulsion for objects. These are called klesas in the Patanjala Yogasutra. These explain the root of all human misery and pain. Yogic philosophy & practice are directed at dealing with these klesas.

Avidya the first and the root of the other four, does not mean ignorance. It is a different kind of knowledge which is characterized by the lack of fundamental differentiation. The non-self is mistakenly considered self.

Asmita means 'I am' ness. It is originally pure consciousness but due to avidya which are characteristic of the body and further to things associated with the body. These lead to attraction and repulsion in life. Raga and dvesa are klesas according to Yogasutra. Raga is the attraction accompanying pleasure, while dvesa is repulsion accompanying pain. These two bind us to innumerable persons and things and

condition our life to a great extent. They breed prejudices and preferences and make life miserable. Abhinivesa, the last of the klesas, is the strong desire for life which dominates even the learned. Mere knowledge is inadequate for freeing a man from this attachment to life. For destroying the tree of klesas one has to tread a systematic path of Yoga.

Patanjali gives three methods for attenuating klesas and finally destroying them, namely pratiprasava, dhyana and kriya yoga. Three of the niyamas namely austerity, self study and surrendering to Isvara constitute the kriya yoga. It is both practical and preliminary. It is preliminary because it has to be taken up in the initial stages of the practice of Yoga and it is practical because it puts to a practical test the earnestness of the sadhaka. All these three point out the complexity embedded in the way of samadhi.

They form a background, a canvas for the eightfold yoga discipline. They are pre-requisite conditions satisfying the eligibility criteria for Yoga. Patanjali therefore treats them right at the essential stage as an independent ingredient.

The ideas of a practitioner become clarified and his capacity and earnestness are tested severely in the practice of kriya Yoga. This preparatory self discipline is triple in its nature corresponding to the triple nature of a human being. Tapas is related to his will, Svadhyaya to the intellect and Isvara pranidhana to his emotions. Thus it develops all the three aspects of his nature and produces an all around and balanced growth of his personality.

Tapas combines a variety of practices which purify his mind and discipline his life. Tapas includes such practices as fasting, observing vows of various kinds, pranayama etc. It is essential to bear in mind the sadhya - sadhana bhava while resorting to tapas. These practices are the means to purify the mind, to increase the will power and to control the body. But many a times this goal is forgotten and the means become the end in themselves. Thus fasting is done for fasting's sake and not for the purification of mind. Mistaking the means to be the end seems to be the highest crime in life. This increases ritualism and stops the progress of the person. One has to be very careful while choosing any one of the practices and watch very intently as to what effects it brings in terms of burning off of the dirt of mind. Svadhyaya is sometimes used in a limited sense for the study of sacred scriptures. The student has to be acquainted with the essential literature bearing on the different aspects of Yoga, just as he does in the study of any science. Though this study being theoretical would not take him far on the path, it is of great value to the student. Many students have a vague and confused intellectual background and lack the grasp of subject for steady progress. The thorough and detailed study of yogic literature is a necessary part, but it must be followed by reflection over the deeper problems studied through the books.

This reflection on the fundamental truths of life takes the form of meditation. Svadhyaya can also be understood in the sense of minutely observing one's behaviour, one's thoughts and try to find out the inconsistencies of the character. When one is aware of the defects, it is easier to get rid of them. Isvara pranidhana is resignation to Isvara. The progressive practice of Isvara pranidhana can ultimately lead to samadhi". Thus it signifies a much deeper process of transformation in the sadhaka. It dissolves the asmita or 'I' ness by the systematic and progressive merging of the individual will with the will of Isvara.



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The active modifications of klesas are suppressed by dhyana (P. n. ll). The word dhyana stands for a comprehensive self discipline of which meditation is the pivot. The essential part of the kriya Yoga referred to previously, is really dhyana. For it is not the mere external performance of the act which brings about the desired result, but the inner concentration of purpose and the alert mind underlying the act. The active form of dvesa can be nullified by just watching it like a spectator. Thus the active form of klesas can become latent by dhyana. But this does not mean that these klesas are destroyed forever. They can reassert themselves any moment. Moreover they might assume a different form. So the kriyayoga and dhyana can transform the klesas from the fully active to the dormant state. The subtle ones can be reduced by resolving them backwards into their origin. This is the method of pratiprasava or re-absorption of effect into cause i.e. reversing the process of evolution. The process of development of avidya into its final expression abhinivesa is a casual process.

The process must be reversed whereby each effect is absorbed in its immediate cause and the whole series disappears. This is not an intellectual realisation but is attained in its fullness by the higher stages of Yoga.

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