

Role of Yoga in Psychology and Development

Savita Deo¹ *, Samprasad Vinod²
*Psychology Department, Pune University, India¹,
Shanti Mandir, Pune, India²*

Abstract: *In this paper we consider systems of Samkhya and Yoga philosophy and psychology with the aim to understand importance of yoga for self-development and contribution in establishing health balance. We also emphasize the methodological issues and challenges related to measurements of effects of the yoga practice and its techniques' application. Yoga is the discipline that encourages proper personality development by offering methods of self-development. By applying them, we will establish and maintain health.*

Key words: *personality, yoga, yoga meditation, well being*

Introduction

Yoga (Unity or Integration) is one of the six Indian philosophical schools and it can be understood as the science of personal growth through achieving spiritual experience, and it can also be defined as a therapy, i.e. knowledge about health and methods of healing.

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity.” (World Health Organization, 1948, No. 2, Page, 100). It clearly affirms that mental health is an important part of the holistic health. Health Psychology is a multidimensional and interdisciplinary in approach to health. It incorporates psychological factors, life style and health care delivery system along with the role of psychology in the promotion and maintenance of health along with prevention and treatment of illness (Santrock, 2003). Contribution of Psychology to Behavioral Medicine focuses on developing and integrating behavioral and biomedical knowledge to promote health. It is assumed that illness results from the interaction of biological, psychological and social systems – BPS model (Myers, 1996; Leigh & Reiser, cited in P. L. Rice, 1998).

Causal relations between personality characteristics and health were reviewed by Sul and Rittenhouse (1990) and other researchers (Matthews, Deary & Whiteman 2003; Rice, 1998) and Friedman also (2000) explained the relationship between personality and health by using a wide array of psychosocial measures and outcomes of longitudinal studies. Emotional instability i.e. neuroticism is known to affect individual and his/her life. Long-term presence of unpleasant emotions affects both physical and mental health. Negative emotions have long-term effects on individual personality. Yoga meditation can be the tool for management of thoughts, feelings and moods.

We live in a multicultural society that is going through rapid technological and social changes. To cope up with these rapid changes (both positive and negative), as a result of globalization, an individual has to adjust and fit himself/herself into the changing social and cultural ethos. Process of adjustment is stressful and filled with emotions. Yoga practice can help to keep pace with life problems. In this paper we will highlight the difference between Indian and Western approach, modes of living and thinking. We presume that life of every individual is imbued with search for meaning which is achieved by the individual development. In Indian philosophy several systems and ways have been discussed to reach this goal. It is therefore very important to understand the Indian perspective of personality, well-being and self-training.

* Corresponding author: savita@unipune.ac.in

Indian Perspective

During last two decades several researches have been carried out in the field of Samkhya and Yoga and there were analyzed contributions to the analysis of personality in terms of Guna theory. Ayurveda (knowledge of life) also describes personality in terms of Dosha theory. Upanishad, Samkhya and Yoga texts, Ayurvedic texts and Purjas describe the traditional concept of human personality.

Samkhya and Yoga systems describe personality in terms of trigunas (*Gunas*) which are first mentioned in *Atharya-veda* (AV 10.8.). During the pre-Samkhya period, this concept was mentioned in *Maitrayani Upanishad* (3/5). In *Katopanishadi* it is related to colours – *lohita, sukla and koja* (Limaye & Vadekar, 1958) and then it is related to *gunas – rajas, sattva and tamas* (*Katopanishad*, 4-5, p. 600). The *gunas* are not directly perceived, but are inferred from their effects or modifications. Their nature is either pleasure or pain or delusion or indifference. *Sattva* Guna represents manifestation of light (*prakasha*) and consciousness. *Rajas* is essential for activity (*pravatti*) – it makes an object to move and an individual to act. *Tamas* is meant for rest and restraint (*niyama*). These *Gunas* cannot be created or destroyed; cannot be changed into one another. All changes are due to various combinations and separation of the *gunas* which are undergoing integration and disintegration all the time. The *Gunas* are eternal, they keep changing all the time (Sinha, 1999).

According to *Ayurveda*, each person has a particular pattern of energy, which forms his or her constitution (Biotype – *dosha*). In Ayurvedic philosophy, every thing in the universe is composed of the five elements (*Pancha Mahabhutas*): space (*akasha*), air (*vayu*), fire (*tejas*), water (*apa /jala*), and earth (*pathavi*). Their togetherness is known as *panchakarma* (structural aspect). The combination of *akasha* and *vayu* is *vata*; combination of *tejas* and *apa /jala* is *pitta*; and combination of *pathavi* and *jala* is *kapha*.

The biological/physiological base is also known as *tridosha: vata, pitta, and kapha* (functional aspect). These forces combined together (*doshas* or bioenergetic forces) tend to govern our health – physical as well as mental. According to Vagbhata (A. H. S. 1.10) *pakti* means *Jarira* as well as *manasa pakrti*. When it is called as *manasa pakrti*, it is related to *triguna* – also known as *trigunakarama*. The imbalance of *tridosha* or *triguna* leads to a disturbance in the metabolism functioning, that leads to pathological manifestations or diseases.

Agnipurana clearly mentions the psychological symptoms and nature of dreams. It is important to mention three qualities, i.e. *trigunas* (*Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas*) and three *doshas* (*vata, pitta, and kapha*) (Agni. P.280. 36-40a). *Trigunas* can be related to *tridoshas*. *Sattva* is related to *Pitta*, *Rajas* to *Vata* and *Tamas* to *Kapha*. *Rajas* and *Tamas* are *vikaras*, i.e. *doshas*. Yoga perceive personality through both physical and mental level. Mental level is related to *Trigunas* and physical to *Tridoshas*. The fusion of *Triguna* and *Tridosha* leads to particular type of personality (Deo, S. & Kulkarni, N. R., 2003, 2004). The proportion of mixture between them is different in each person and accordingly a personality can be defined. Their source cannot be accessed directly, but it is reflected in various actions. The structure, nature and evolution of human personality manifests from this source (Singh, 2008).

The psychology and philosophy use to be considered integral parts of the same system. After the accent of psychology have been changed from study of mind to study of behavior, new parameters of measuring and analysis are being used. Few studies in yoga and psychology (Braud, 2008; Jha, 2008; Rao, K. R., & Paranjpe, A. C. 2008; Rao, K. R., Paranjpe, A. C., & Dalal, A. K. 2008), face difficulties in measuring.

In yoga, personality is described in terms of five *koshas*. When we compare the stages that exist in yoga with the Hierarchy of Needs explained by Maslow, it becomes clear that the spiritual stages described in yoga texts are way beyond self-actualization, which is also very difficult to measure. Paloutzian and Park (2005) discussed psychology in the form of spirituality and religion. Abraham Maslow (1943, 1970), a harbinger of positive psychology, introduced the most popular Pyramid of Hierarchy of Needs. Physiological and safety needs are at the bottom of this pyramid. They are objective needs and are known as D-needs. The needs at the top of the pyramid are more subjective and difficult to measure. They are known as growth needs or B-needs.

Through the well-known pyramid, Maslow explains and emphasizes the importance of self-actualization.

1. Need for self-actualization – need to realize our fullest potential.
2. Esteem needs – need for achievement, education and competence.
3. Belonging and love need – need for acceptance and belonging.
4. Safety needs – need for safety and security.
5. Physiological needs – need for food, water, shelter, oxygen and sleep.

Yoga as the form of therapy

Yoga is the process through which one learns to live life in an integrated manner and the body-mind health is an integral part of this process. Techniques to neutralize the ill effects of factors causing health problems are the main concern of yoga psychology. Thus, we can say that yoga at one level is a science of personal growth and spiritual experience, and at the other level it is a science of health and healing. Practical applications of positive psychology include helping individuals and organizations to identify their strengths and to use them for increasing and sustaining respective levels of well-being which happens to be the goal of yoga practice.

Yoga is the self-training program. It is used as tools for better handling of negative emotions and reduction of their intensity as well. It can significantly contribute to the maintaining of emotional stability. The outcome is high concentration, high level of confidence, high level of control and ability of the deep commitment, which are the main qualities needed for success. This approach to yoga are directed towards achievement of the higher level of consciousness and better quality of life.

Conclusion

There was studied the personality of an individual who was aimed toward achievement of individual growth and development through the yoga practice. Practicing yoga can serve as the tool of awakening, understanding and managing emotional relations. The term "developed person" primarily means the person with balanced *gunas* (energies), understood as such in Samkja and Yoga philosophical systems, and balanced *doshas*, perceived as such in *Ayurveda*. Obvious problem in the studies of the phenomenon of yoga practice exists in the field of methodology. Besides idiographic, there are more nomothetic studies that research effects of yoga practice. There are observed, measured and repeated results of many researches. There are monitored opened and hidden changes. Scientists identify problems, create a plan, goals and hypothesis of research, by using modern methodological means that offer qualitative and quantitative statistics. Problem appears when there are no parameters for measuring *trigunas* or spiritual changes that are very important for yoga.

There is still a strong need for researches in the field of yoga and disciplines related to it by using modern methodological tools. Yoga is a discipline of self-development and approved instrument that assists overcoming many health related problems. It is obvious that yoga contributes in creating positive lifestyle and health improvement. Being researches, we should find the ways and means to scientifically prove that in order to make the results available to those who will introduce yoga directly into the practice.

References:

1. Braud, W. G. (2008). Patanjali Yoga and Siddhis: Their relevance to parapsychological theory and research. In K. Ramkrishna Rao, A. C. Paranpe, and Ajit K. Dalal (Eds.) *Handbook of Indian Psychology*. Pp. 217-243. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
2. Deo, S. (2002). *The comparative study of the personality of addicts and non addicts: Employing Eysenckian and Five Factor Model*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Pune University.
3. Deo, S. (2011). Female addicts' personality in relation to health. *Proceedings of the UGC- sponsored National Seminar on Health and Well-being: Contemporary Issues and perspectives*, pp. 104-109, 2011. ISBN 978-81-8465-398-4.
4. Deo, S. (accepted). Community counseling: A tool for positive social change. Paper presented at International conference on Counseling as a Tool for Non-violent Social change and accepted for the Journal of Psychological Counselling. Vellore: India
5. Deo, S. & Kulkarni, N. R. (2003). *Addictive personality and its counterparts in Indian Psychology*. Paper presented at National Conference on Challenges and Responses: Psychology for Integration, February 27-28 & March 1st 2003, Bharathiar Univresity, Coimbatore.
6. Deo, S. & Kulkarni, N. R. (2004). *Personality types: Indian and Western*. Paper presented at National Conference on Indian Psychology, Yoga and Consciousness. Organised by the Indian Council of Philosophical Research at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, 10-13 December 2004, Pondicherry.

7. Friedman, H. S. (2000). Long-term relations of personality and health: Dynamisms, mechanisms, and tropisms. *Journal of Personality*, 68, 1089-1107.
8. Jha, A. K. (2008). Personality in Indian Psychology. In K. Ramkrishna Rao, A. C. Paranjpe, and Ajit K. Dalal (Eds.) *Handbook of Indian Psychology*. Pp. 348-360. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
9. Kulkarni, P. H. (2000). *Ayurved philosophy*. Delhi: Satguru.
10. Limaye, V. P. & Vadekar, R. D. (Eds.) (1958). ĪvetĀḌvataropaniĀad (pp.283-300) in *AĀĀdaĀda UpaniĀada*½ Pune: Vaidik SaḌshodhana Madalam.
11. Lodhi, P. H. & Deo, S. (2009). Personality of the Aged persons: Some lessons from research on Adults. In F. M. Sahoo (Ed.) *Behavioral issues in ageing: Care, concern & commitment*. New Delhi: Concept Publications, 2009.
13. Lodhi, P. H., Deo, S. & Belhekar, V. M. (2004). Evaluating the Five-Factor Model of personality:

Received: June 29, 2011
Accepted: August 4, 2011