



International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)

A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal

ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)

ISJN: A4372-3142 (Online) ISJN: A4372-3143 (Print)

Volume-VIII, Issue-VI, November 2022, Page No.114-119

Published by Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

DOI: 10.29032/ijhsss.v8.i6.2022.114-119

Some steps of Astanga-yoga and their beneficiaries in our life

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Abstract:

It is known to all that 'meditation' is an important part as the seventh step of astangayoga. This step is just the previous step of samadhi. Attainment of samadhi is the highest spiritual goal to a yogi. But, if we try to search its root, we shall find that everyone follows it in their every field of daily life.

We also know that it is too difficult to control our mind. Hence, Sri Krishna told Arjuna in the Gita that we have to control our mind through the regular practice. Again, it is also very true that without controlling the mind no one can completely any work in any field properly. The great Indian sage Patanjali leads us to the way of eight-fold means of yoga. He defines the yoga as (Yogascittavrttinirodhah). - Yogasutra 1.2 That is to say, yoga is the cessation of mental modifications. Here, he also is indicating us to control our mind through the regular practice of asana, pranayama, meditation etc. Our mind will be calm, peaceful and enlighten through the regular practice of meditation. As a result, we must gain success in any field of work. Here, this paper is attempted to show how we may be benefitted through the practice of some steps of yoga.

Keywords: Meditation, Yoga, Concentration, Mind, Samadhi

In general sense, we know that everyone wants to be a conqueror in his own course of work. But it is not very easy to achieve success. We are rational being in born. When we do anything, do it rationally. But it is very true that our intelligence will not be used properly if our mind is distracted. Both success and failure are contrary in nature and also, they are complementary to each other. In this perspective, it may be mentioned here that both success and failure are dependent on the will power or the concentration power of mind. A man whose concentration power is as strong or prolonged, he would be more successful than others. So, we have to focus our mind on a particular aim. It is known to all that all the great men who were famous in their own course of work, must became succeed through the sincere practice of concentration. Hence, it may be stated that concentration is the secret of success. Again, on the other side, meditation has another value and that is in this competitive era we all are lives a stressful life. If we practice meditation regularly for a few minutes, must get rid of stress, anxiety etc. Except this benefit it has also spiritual value.

Our mind becomes calm and enlighten through the practice of meditation. As a result, this enlighten mind leads us to the way of spirituality and that is liberation. Patanjali defines meditation in his Yogasutra as: “Tatra Pratyakatanata dhyanam”.¹ That is to say, meditation is constant concentration of mind on any particular spot or object. It will be like a flow of oil. There we find many verses in the Yogasutra regarding different spots or objects for concentrate the mind. Here, we see that concentration and meditation are co-related, because, without concentration meditation is not possible. Swamiji used to say that the difference between a genius and an idiot is their powers of concentration. He also says, “The powers of the mind are like the rays of the sun when they are concentrated, they illumine”. Usually, we know that the form of meditation is that where a person must sit on a posture for a few minutes with closing his or her eyes and concentrates his mind on a particular object.

II

The great Indian sage Patanjali has mentioned eight-fold means of yoga. The main aim of a yogi is to attain samadhi. The first two steps of astanga-yoga are yama and niyama which leads us to the way of morality. Third step is asana. Fourth step is pranayama. Both asana and pranayama help us to keep our body fit. Pratyahara, dharana and dhyana directs us to be introvert. These three steps are called together samyama. After attaining these seven steps samadhi is attained. To attain samadhi is the highest goal to every yogi. According to Vyasadeva, the commentator of yoga, yoga is samadhi. The term ‘yoga’ is used in a variety of senses. Literally, the term ‘yoga’ means union which refers to unite any two individuals. Again, according to Sri Krishna, yoga is efficiency in action (yogah karmasu kausalam)². Nowadays the term ‘efficiency’ is a great word to all. We all want to be efficient in our own field of work. Again, we find a definition in the Upanisads: “Tam yogamiti manyante sthiramindriyam”.³ that is to say, yoga is to fix our organs on anywhere. It is very true that our life is full of sorrows. Yoga Philosophy is a spiritual system and it admits liberation like other spiritual systems. If a person can attain samadhi, he must be free from all kinds of sufferings of life eternally. Here, a question may arise that how is it valuable for those who are not yogi? We know that concentration of mind is an important part of yogic method. When our conscious mind is fixed with a particular object, we must be able to attain certain knowledge of those things. Every great person had discovered anything by the force of concentration. Hence, it is not right that yoga is only valuable for those who want to be a yogi, not for householders. Anybody may be benefitted through the practice of yoga. In this context, we may quote Swami Abhedananda here: “Concentration is the one and only method by which we can know something”.⁴ We shall try to see the effects of concentration and meditation in view of Yogasutra later on.

III

In general sense, we know it that concentrated mind is the secret of success. Sage Patanjali has defined concentration as: “Desabandhaschittasya dharana”.⁵ One, who wants to be a yogi, has to fix his mind on any external or internal object with full of concentration.

We find a strategy for understanding the states of concentration and meditation according to Vijnanabhikshu. He says that when the mind is fixed in any object for 144 seconds, that state will be called meditation. Again, when our concentration or fixation of mind will be continued for twenty-nine minutes, that state will constitute as samadhi.⁶ The state of concentration will be cleared to us if we give an example. In the Mahabharata, we find that Drona was a teacher as well as martial art trainer of Arjuna, Yudhishthira, Bhima, Duryodhana etc. and once he arranges a competition of archery. He kept a wooden bird on the branch of a tree on top and said to each of his disciples to target that bird. He asked Arjuna what he was seeing in the tree. Arjuna replied that only a bird, nothing else. Drona again told him to more focus his mind. Arjuna said that now I am seeing only the head of the bird, nothing else. Drona told him to throw the arrow. Here, we can say that Arjuna has followed the method of yoga and fulfilled his target. In this manner, everybody gains success through the follow of yogic methods in their own field of work by known or unknown. If a person does any work, must concentrate his mind at least for 144 seconds. Here, Vyasa, the commentator of yoga has mentioned some spots of the body for concentrating the mind viz. naval centre, heart, tip of the nose, tip of the tongue etc. In this manner, when an aspirant becomes succeed to fix his mind, he becomes able to attain next step meditation or dhyana. In the definition of meditation Patanjali says, “Tatra pratyakatanata dhyanam”.⁷ That is to say, here Patanjali means to say that though our main goal is to attain samadhi, yet without practice of concentration and meditation it is not possible. Hence, He has defined samadhi as: “Tadebarthamatranirbhasam svarupasunyameva samadhih”.⁸ In this state, aspirant’s mind becomes identical with the object of meditation. This triad (dharana, dhyana and samadhi) are called together samyama. After attaining samyama that aspirant must attain right knowledge (prajna). It is called also super consciousness of mind.

IV

We shall try to show the effect of concentration in view of the Yogasutra in this chapter. According to Patanjali, if a person concentrates his mind on his own mind-stuff, he can know other’s mind-stuff.⁹ Again, a yogi may disappear from the locality if he fixes his mind on his own form of body.¹⁰ In this manner, we find more verses in the third chapter of the Yogasutra regarding various miraculous power of a yogi. We may quote here Swami Abhedananda rightly: “But, along with the practice of concentration and meditation, what will you gain? As you progress, you will develop the wonderful powers, i.e., the powers of reading other’s minds. You will be able to send your thoughts to your friends, just as through wireless telegraphy, and you may send messages across the oceans, thousands of miles away, in an infinitesimal part of a second”.¹¹ We find in another verse of Yogasutra of Patanjali where he has mentioned that if anyone practice dharana, dhyana and samadhi, he can attain all kinds of knowledge of past, present and future.¹² Even, an aspirant can know other’s mind also.¹³ In this manner, we find various verses in the Yogasutra regarding the power of concentration. Except those miraculous powers of a yogi, we can say about common people who do not want to be a yogi, are they become benefitted through the

practice of concentration and meditation? Yes, they also will be benefitted viz. it is known to all that (Dharmmarthakamamoksanamroyam mulamuttamam), health is wealth. If our body is not well fit, mind will not be calm and one-pointed. We face various obstacles in any course of work in our own field due to some physical ailments, disorders of mind etc. and these all kinds of obstacles are vanished through the practice of some limbs of yoga. So, our weakness is not to do one-pointed our mind. We must overcome it. Patanjali has mentioned it in his “Yogasutra”: “Vyadhistanasamsayapramadalasyaviratibhranti darsanalabdhahumikatvanavasthitatvani cittaviksepastehantaraya”.¹⁴ Here, anyone may suspect that all the miraculous powers which have been mentioned in the Yogasutra are not real or imaginable. It may be stated against this suspect that we find a real story of Sankaracharya where he disappeared from his body for one month when he was involved in a debate with Bharati Mishra. He had been defeated by her sexual questions because he was established in firm chastity. At that time, he sits down in a posture and starts meditation. He attains samadhi. He enters into the dead body of king Amaruka. After acquiring sexual knowledge from Amaruka’s wife he came back in his body after one month and he defeats Bharati Mishra.¹⁵ All the effects of concentration mentioned above are true but the perspective is supernatural power. Besides, those powers it has also some social or real perspectives. Let us know here now how this concentration or mind-power helps us to make a better society in next paragraph.

We saw before that how a person can acquire various miraculous powers but now, we shall try to see how the power of concentration can be utilized for our day-to-day life. We know that today we are suffering from various mental disorders like stress, anxiety etc. As well as, there many kinds of disorders are increasing in our society viz. drug addiction, communal riot, commitment of suicide, political violence, rape, murder etc. All of these incidents are the cause of mental illness and mental weakness. It is true that we are living in a highly developed science and technological era. We can remove any kind of physical or mental diseases with the help of ultra-modern invented medicines. It is right that medicine can cure ailments but it is initial, not permanent. All kinds of medicines have many side-effects by which another ailment may beget. It is admitted by many doctors and medical scientists. If we practice some asanas and pranayamas, we must be cured from many physical ailments permanently without any side-effect. Even, there may not be found any disease in our body. Hence, Swami Sivananda Saraswati says, “Yoga is the highest physical and spiritual science”.

The first step of astanga -yoga is yama which is divided into five steps viz. ahimsa, satya, asteya, brahmacharya and aparigraha. We have a common sense that non-violence is fully opposite of violence. Every animal wants to win or rule on others. It comes from ego (I-feeling). It begets violence. The great sage Patanjali advises us that violence comes from greed, anger and delusion. So, we have to remove these enemies. Violence is that thing which comes back to own as boomerang, because, it is the cause of sin and nobody may get rid of that sinful work without enjoying its fruits. Thinking it, we should become desisted from any type of violence.

Again, we see that terrorism and political violence are common facts in our society. There is no invention or technology which can make us scrupulous. As a result, violence will be vanished from our society. In this context, we may quote Patanjali: “Ahimsapratisthayam tatsannidhou vairatyagah”.¹⁶

We see that there are many scams in the society as cheating of money, some persons are taking bribes for giving job, some political leaders and ministers are cheating people. All of these may be allowed as social disorders. These incidents are occurring due to the non-establishment of truth, contentment and non-covetousness. The moral path of yoga (yama and niyama) leads us to be moral in every field of life by speech, deed, body and mind.

V

Critical Remarks and Conclusion: Till now we have discussed regarding the effects of some steps of yoga. There may arise an objection against yoga that it is only effective for the purpose of physical fitness and for yogis who want to attain samadhi; but it is not effective for common people who have no extra time to practice yogic methods. It may be answered against the objection that it is very effective for all men. It is known to all that we are the complex form of body and mind. So, our primary duty is to keep our body fit and mind calm and peaceful. It is only the yogic method which gives us a healthy body and mind. For this purpose, we have to give at least thirty minutes for practising a few asanas and meditation for own wellness. Again, it may be stated that when a person does any job for a long time with full of concentration, he also practices limbs of yoga by his work. The main cause of social disorders is mental weakness. Concentration gives us mental strength by which we may complete any difficult work and we may be benefitted individually as well as socially.

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