

YOGA

Introduction

Yoga today is subject of worldwide interest. This is, indeed, a wholly new and remarkable phenomenon in the long history of Yoga. Until only a few years ago, Yoga used to have a very limited appeal. It had little meaning for the common man busy in the routine of daily life. Those who understood it were very few, and fewer still practiced it. It was a pursuit reserved for the chosen ones. They were usually men of not this world. Their main interest was in the world hereafter. In order to study Yoga, one had to renounce the world of achievement, desire, and enjoyment. Yoga was taught and practiced in remote places called ashrams under the direct supervision of a guru.

We find lucid descriptions of ashrama life, its atmosphere and surroundings, in the writings of ancient times. Kalidasa (who lived probably before Christ), Shanikaracharya (7th century), Jnyaneshwara (12th century), and Swatmarama, and Swatmarama, the author of the renowned Hathayogaradipika (16th century), have depicted how Yoga was practiced in the ashrama in an atmosphere of peace and serenity.

This view of Yoga practice has recently undergone vast changes.. Yoga is no more regarded as a discipline to be followed only by those who have set 'emancipation' as the highest goal of their life. It is now very much a thing which interests the man in the street. The factory worker, the office-goer, the housewife, the business executive, and the student and the teacher, have all alike found Yoga to be useful in their daily life. Renunciation is no longer a pre-condition to the study of Yoga. Yoga has come out of its secret 'hiding place'. It has crossed the boundaries of its land of origin, and has spread to practically every nation of the world. The popularity of Yoga has not been hindered by the diversity of religious beliefs, languages, or geographic conditions.

One often wonders as to how such a sudden and widespread revival of interest in the age-old practices of Yoga has come about. The reason for the growing universal interest in Yoga in our day is twofold. The popular and conventional means of solving human problems having been found to be increasingly inadequate, the need for a new approach is being felt more and more. Secondly, the awareness that Yoga provides answers to some of our immediate and distant problems better than anything else is increasing.

The fact is that we are today faced with a situation that is wholly new, and with certain problems which were never felt so acutely in the past. And Yoga, it is being realized, can be of great utility in these changed circumstances. That is why Yoga, which had remained obscure and little known for centuries, has all of a sudden come into limelight. It would be interesting to see how this new change came about.

In the pre-scientific days man lived in a rather compact world. Religious beliefs had a profound influence on his way of life. He was far more helpless in the face of natural calamities and epidemics than we are today. With the advent of science a new factor came into existence, namely, the machine. With its use man acquired better control over the external world. His knowledge of happenings in the world around him increased rapidly, and with it his power to influence them according to his will. The

steam engine, the diesel engine, the petrol engine and newer sources of power like electricity and nuclear fission increased his hold over nature.

Scientific knowledge has been progressing rapidly in all fields of life through physics, chemistry, engineering, biology, medicine, and agriculture. The variety and quality of tools and devices employed are improving at an accelerated pace, and what was unimaginable and unthinkable a few decades ago is now becoming possible. In essence, scientific progress may be said to have given us three major boons: tremendous speed and power of movement, increased power of perception with highly sensitive instruments, and highly specialized devices to take over the work of our body parts. For example, a few generations ago a man could not travel at a speed exceeding forty or fifty miles a day, whereas today it is possible for him to go round the world in a few hours.

As regards the powers of perception, we can today view on TV a distant event at the same time of its actual happening. Similarly, a speech being delivered thousands of miles away can be heard on the radio while one is working in the field or factory, or lying down in bed. The X-ray machine, electron microscope, polygraph, and micro-filming machines are some of the instruments which have helped us to expand the range of our perception to the minutest happenings inside our bodies or in the external world. Scientists can now perceive things which could not even be imagined to exist in the past. Thus the frontiers of knowledge have expanded tremendously in all possible directions. If we were to make a list of the various devices used by us in the kitchen, in the household, and elsewhere which have taken over the jobs that our forefathers had to do with their own hands, there would be no end to it. The most striking technological aid devised to help us is the computer. With its help, tedious calculations which even a highly intelligent person will take months to make may be done in a jiffy. But, it is doubtful whether these wonders of science have made us happier than our less knowledgeable and slow moving ancestors. Science while bringing about vast changes in our immediate external world has been able to do practically nothing to improve our inner world of desires, emotions, and conflicts.

Our inner world has remained chaotic. The balance between our inner and outer being is lost. And it is this balance which is the most crucial factor in deciding whether or not one can have happiness in life. Science definitely has contributed enormously to improving our lives by increased production of food and consumer goods, by effective control of pests and diseases, by providing better living conditions and means of transport, and by inventing new means of enjoyment. But the net result of all this has not been quite happy. That is because the growth of scientific knowledge has been one-sided. Human happiness is not merely a product of what things one handles in daily life. Our relationship with the things we use is, of course, important, but more important is our interaction with people and with ideas. And it is in this field that science has had no influence so far. The instruments which are useful in our dealing with things have been wholly revolutionized by science, but the instrument used in our relationship with people, that is to say, the instrument called the mind, remains unchanged. It needs training and improvement which science, unfortunately, cannot provide, this is one of the greatest contradictions of the present scientific age.

The most recent advances in science have aggravated the situation rather than ameliorating it. Thus we find the highest incidence of insanity among not the poor countries but in societies which are most advanced materially. The lowest moral standards are perhaps shown by resourceful strata of society.

The rapid increase of scientific knowledge in recent times has, due to its inability to train the mind to use that knowledge properly, resulted in enormous stockpile of destructive weapons capable of wiping out all human life from the globe. Science actually has the potentiality of turning the world of man into a veritable paradise. But it has not yet been able to achieve this, because it only tells us what to believe in, or rather what to expect, and not how to live or how to behave.

Wisdom and Self-Control

Two qualities, namely, wisdom and self-control, are the most essential factors in deciding whether or not there will be happiness, do not fall within the purview of science. It is supposed to be the business of science to give us knowledge, not wisdom. Science does not ordain anything. It remains silent on the issue of what is right and what is wrong or what is good. Knowledge is not enough for happiness to come into being. One may excel in knowledge of various kinds and may still be very unhappy.

Wisdom certainly includes knowledge of the world as one of its components. But what is important is not so much knowledge of the world as knowledge of the self or self-knowledge. Self-knowledge or *atma-jnyana* was given the highest place in the religion and philosophy of the past. It involves enlightenment regarding the goals of life. Science does not include the aim or goal of human life in its inquiry. And without a clear idea of it happiness is not possible to achieve.

Wisdom in its turn makes for self-control. It is an inner attitude and not a discipline imposed from outside. Self-knowledge automatically results in self-control, because it purifies the mind, so to say, by wiping out the animal tendencies.

Had science been able to give us self-knowledge along with knowledge of the world and self-control along with control of the external world, then all our problems of the present times would have been solved, not only this: many of the problems would not have arisen at all. Then human happiness would have increased in proportion to scientific growth. But such a thing has not happened because our inner mental world does not obey the laws which science has found for the material physical world. To influence the mind is very much different and their behavior. To remove the imbalance created by science by destroying, on the one hand, the authority of religion and philosophy, and with it their power to give rise to self-knowledge and self-control, and by making man's life so speedy and complex, on the other hand, it would be necessary to establish a sort of harmony between science and religion and philosophy. This could be achieved by making science religious or by making religion scientific. Perhaps both these options are impossible. This impossibility arises from the fact that the concepts of religion, viz. god, soul, heaven, virtue, and liberation, are not amenable to any scientific treatment. And religion, in its turn, does not deal with anything that comes within the scope of science. Thus there is hardly any area where religion and science can overlap or interact.

Yet, it has been realized more and more in recent years that there is available to us a field of enquiry which is related equally to both science and religious experience. It is none other than the age-old

science and art of Yoga which has been carefully preserved for us from time immemorial. Many of the ancient procedures propounded in the system of Yoga have recently been studied scientifically and their value in solving human problems of the present day is being recognized increasingly. It is mainly due to this recognition, accorded to Yoga by scientists, social workers, psychologists and humanists that its ancient discipline of training the body and the mind, which lay almost hidden for centuries, has all of a sudden won acceptance and popularity.

Yoga & Religion

Yoga is not a religion, although it stands for a religious experience which is common to all religions. It contains an enquiry which is highly religious in so far as it grasps the basic religious urge of man – the urge to lead a virtuous life culminating in self-knowledge and self-control. At the same time, its techniques are amenable to scientific scrutiny. In a sense, Yoga is an applied science. It can establish the lost balance in human affairs caused by the one-sided growth of science. Unlike religion it does not clash with scientific knowledge and unlike science, it does not remain silent on the issue of the goal of human life and the way to achieve it. Yoga can thus overcome the shortcomings of both science and religion, and can fulfil thereby the much felt need of establishing harmony, balance and peace in the life of man – a need which has arisen from the rapid progress of science in the wake of inner poverty and backwardness. By enriching our minds, by giving rise to wisdom, and by controlling our savage animal instincts Yoga can make us better suited to our scientifically developed, complex external world.

Aim of Human Life:

Is Human Life on earth a matter, fundamentally of misery and sorrow? This is a problem which seems to have engaged the minds of the Indian thinkers since ancient times. The answer to this question, as most of them appear to believe, is in the affirmative. It is an important business of philosophy, according to the Indian traditions, to seek to attain a state which is completely free from the clutches of misery and sorrow. This state has been variously spoken of as *Moksha*, *Mukti*, *Kaivalya*, *Apavarga*, *Nirvana* and so on, by the adherents of various schools of philosophy in India, and philosophy is, therefore, truly called *Tatvajnana*, or *Darshana*. Whether all these words signify one and the same state, but the fact of a complete cessation of suffering applies equally to all of them.

Human Suffering:

Human suffering is traditionally supposed to be divided into three main types as follows:

- The bodily and mental conditions of an individual, such as ill health, disease, and emotions like, hate, fear, passion etc.
- Suffering imposed on an individual through harmful behavior of other human beings, animals, insects, and so on.
- Suffering which cannot be attributed to other beings, which is largely beyond the control of an individual e.g. earthquakes, floods, famines, epidemics and the like.

Beaten by the three fold impact of suffering in the above manner, an individual is motivated or induced to think or act in such a way that he would ultimately succeed in overcoming the suffering. Naturally, the first response of an individual springs from the experiential field, and is based on common sense

considerations. For example, one works at one's job in order to avoid starvation, takes medicine to get rid of diseases, constructs buildings, business industries, centers of production etc., to foster good living conditions for the members of a society. In addition to this, an individual tries to belong to various organizations, parties, sects, blocks and groups, in order to overcome fear and the feeling of insecurity.

Besides these common sense measures and especially when these are found inadequate or ineffective, one turns to religion, to the gurus, to the spiritual guides and masters and indulges in prayers, devotion, faith and the like. It is found, however, that both these ways lack the power of wiping out sorrow completely and in a once-for all manner. For example, one may temporarily become physically fit by taking medicine, but some other disease may crop up after some time; the religious organizations and practices may not give full satisfaction, and one may have to run from one spiritual teacher or book to another. It is argued sometimes that science, with its tremendous technological advances, can eventually make for human happiness. The problem is really not of obtaining mastery over the outer nature or the surrounding environment, but rather of obtaining mastery over oneself over one's passions and ambitions, emotions and conflicts. For that, however, something much more profound than what our modern scientific techniques have to offer us, is needed. Only then the present human crises all over the world can be resolved. To bring about peace in the world, one must himself be peaceful first. Peace, within and about oneself, has perhaps been the greatest mark of yoga. It is, therefore, that Yoga can be of utmost utility to an individual to attain peace and happiness. Yoga has rightly been held in very high esteem by all the systems of Indian philosophy including Jainism and Buddhism. It is indeed looked upon as a panacea for human misery and sorrow.

In what way can Yoga do this, one may ask? For instance, can Yoga be a cure-all? Can it solve or help to solve all our problems? In other words, is Yoga a panacea? This question, it would seem clear, must be answered in the negative. But that would not in any way reduce the importance or usefulness of Yoga.

It would be necessary to point out at this stage the various areas in which Yoga has been found to render help. To begin with, let us enunciate the basic viewpoint of Yoga regarding the individual and his life. It is given in the Kathopanishad (I.iii. 3-9) as follows:

"The human body is like a chariot in which the individual (more precisely, the soul) travels. The buddhi is the charioteer and the manas forms the reins. The sense organs are the horses, the objects of experience being the ground traversed. The reins holding the mans of the unwise one keeps the reins tight so that the sense organs behave like trained horses. Such a wise man can, indeed, travel smoothly to the ultimate goal of the journey, which is emancipation."

The words buddhi and manas are used here to denote two segments of the mind. The mind is called antahkarana (inner organ) in Yoga terminology. It is supposed to have three segments, namely, buddhi, forms judgments, remembers things and is the seat of emotions, passions, knowledge, and beliefs. It stores past experience in the form of traces called smskaras. Manas is that segment which receives experience through the sense organs. Ahamkara is that segment which provides the feeling of ego or individuality.

The above verses describe in a nutshell how our various problems in life arise and how they can be overcome. According to Yoga, the root of most of our problems lies in an unbalanced, uncontrolled state of the mind, and therefore to remove the problems we must learn to regain the lost balance and control. Balance and control is the essence of the very meaning of Yoga. This essence is what most of those who take to the practice of Yoga seek to arrive at.

The modern-day practitioners of Yoga may be divided into three groups. First of all, there are those who take it very seriously as a way of life and as a philosophy of renunciation and emancipation. They are the people, who have turned their backs on worldly life, its pursuits and achievements. Such persons are always too small in number, live in various ashrams. The second group includes those men and women, especially of the younger generation who are fed up with the existing conditions and norms of society and the established patterns of social behavior. Many of them are former drug addicts, disenchanted with the affluence and wealth produced by science and technology. They come to Yoga to find a new way of life. They come to India from many countries of the world in search of peace and the meaning of life. They change their dress and food habits, meditate, sing devotional songs, and try to find a new purpose in life. It is through their patronage that many Indian gurus have flourished in recent times.

Perhaps the most widespread group of people taking to Yoga is formed by those who are interested not much in its deep philosophical implications or in a new way of life, but who want to introduce Yoga in their daily life in order to be in a position to enjoy it more. They are by and large satisfied with their lot, but want to get rid of certain health problems like insomnia, strain, nervousness, lack of appetite, and so on. Such persons are often advised to take to Yoga for health purposes. Their number is growing very fast, because many of our present-day ailments are more amenable to treatment by Yoga than by drugs. Nobody who believes he can be cured by taking drugs thinks of practicing Yoga. Even those who turn to Yoga for cure of their ailments do so only after unsuccessfully trying other means. However, the number of Yoga enthusiasts for health purposes is growing very rapidly.

Misconceptions about Yoga and their solutions

The word Yoga is associated by and large with the acquisitions and exhibitions of supernatural powers. It is customary to look at yoga as curious ancient art which combines a set of religious beliefs with a strange and mysterious practical discipline. It has become fairly common these days, to come across news about somebody claiming to be a yogi, performing miraculous feats like walking on fire (or even sometimes on water), passing a road roller on the chest, or drinking concentrated acids and so on. There seems to be a belief in the minds of many, that yoga is concerned mainly with such extraordinary phenomena. It is also supposed that yoga is not for the common man, and that only those who can get away from daily life in society and retire in solitude for years with a view to undergo rigorous discipline of the body and mind, are the fit persons to indulge in yoga.

It is supposed to be a very risky and dangerous path, of which a common man should keep clear. It is an amazing fact that such superstitious ideas are widespread even in the land of yoga. The difficulty, however, is that the field of yoga is, at present, largely in the hands of lesser men, who are not properly

educated and who turn to yoga, mainly because they are not likely to succeed elsewhere. Dishonesty, insincerity and hypocrisy are thus rampant causing frustration in the minds of sincere students of Yoga. This sad state of affairs will be changed only when educated, intelligent men having a strength of character will be attracted towards the field of yoga in sufficient numbers.

Secondly, not much is as yet scientifically known about the various processes of yoga. Some scientists are of late showing interest in this area, and it seems that much valuable information can be gathered through applying the modern techniques of research to the field of yoga.

Yoga is a very ancient discipline. It is recognized as one of the most important and valuable heritages of India. Today, the whole world is looking to yoga for the answer to various problems modern man is facing. At no time in the past has yoga attracted so much attention from people in so many places in the world. In spite of this fact, no field is so grossly misunderstood as yoga, even in India. If we were to take a cross section of society and make a general survey of the public's opinion about yoga, we would find many misconceptions about yoga, the most common of which are:

- Yoga is not meant for the ordinary person, the house-holder but is only for a select few.
- Yoga is associated with the idea of the supernatural or linked with miracles.
- Yoga is equated with mysticism, black magic or various types of mortification.
- Yoga is a system of therapy which can cure all diseases.
- Yoga is a system of philosophy dealing with metaphysical theories about the universe.
- Yoga is just as system of exercise.
- All these misconceptions indicate that most people are unable to see yoga as whole concept, but are only aware of a fragment of its potential.

Concept and Meaning of Yoga:

The word Yoga is perhaps older than the system of philosophy which goes by that name. The oldest use of the word yoga as found in the Vedic literature, (e.g. Rigveda X,114 9;Atharvaveda VI,91,1) indicates a union of various things, especially the horses or the bullocks. This is derived from the Sanskrit root *Yujir*, meaning to unite or connect. In the later times, however, another technical meaning came to be associated with the term and this is derived from the Sanskrit root *Yuj* indicating control of the mind. Both the meaning seems to be fairly common in the Sanskrit language even today. This does not of course, mean that while the word Yoga was being used (in the time of the Vedic Aryans) to denote simply a union, the facts about controlling and steadying the mind were themselves unknown. In the Vedas we find clear indications that the rishis and the seers were quite familiar with the highest state which is the goal of yoga. They used to achieve this through procedures described as dhyana, diksha, tapas etc.

Definitions of Yoga:

The definitions of yoga as found in ancient Indian literature are too numerous and our purpose may be served by mentioning only a few typical ones out of them.

The Kathopanishad (II,3,10-11) defines yoga as a state of steadiness and control of the senses as well as the mind and the intellect which when attained, makes an individual completely faultless and unoffending. Our minds are usually swayed away by the objects of enjoyment. But the mind of a yogi is not taken away by his senses, because it becomes free of the process of desire, and hence remains

steady in the highest state of yoga. How his state of steadiness is to be achieved, is a problem which we shall discuss later on.

In the Shvetaashvatara Upanishad (II,12-13) the qualities of a yogi, whose body shine with the fire of yoga are described and it is said that disease, old age and death do not come to him and further that his body becomes supple and healthy, his mind devoid of greed and full of peace and satisfaction. There are many other references in the yoga text where these and other similar qualities of highly developed masters of yoga are found mentioned. These descriptions show clearly that yogi is a person whose body and mind both become pure by the practice of yoga. This fact can be experienced, though to a limited extent by everyone, who practices faithfully the physical and mental exercises, as we shall describe later. It is due to this fact that we argue that yoga is not only for the chosen few or the superior few but in fact it can be of immense benefit to everyone, learned as well as lay, rich or poor, who cares for his physical and mental health.

In Yogavasista (VI,13,3), Yoga is mentioned as a device that makes for reaching the other shore of the stream of sorrow. It is indeed true that a yogi is a person who is eternally free of cravings and sorrow. That is because he comes to overcome ignorance once for all.

We find Yoga defined at three different places in the Gita which is perhaps the most popular among the authoritative treatises on Yoga. According to the first definition (Gita,II,48) Yoga signifies a state of equipoise where in opposites like success and failure make little difference. This is something which looks rather strange to many thinkers. They ask as to what kind of existence it would be, if one looks equally upon success and failure. And what can be the significance of a Person to the members of his family or society if one does not bother about success and failure? How can he live in the present day society which is full of competition conflict? In another definition, in Bhagwad Gita (II, 50-51), it is stated that a yogi, who renounces the concern with the consequences of his deeds (that is remain concerned only with action and not with the consequences), overcomes bondage forever. This means, for example, that a student should study very hard, according to his capacity, but should not be troubled, in the least, by the idea that he must beat his rival in the examination. Most of us are largely concerned in life with pleasant imaginations of the good consequences of what we are engaged in. We always aspire for an improvement in our status and position; we always desire to be important and advanced in our society. But a yogi is not instigated to act by any such motive. He can, therefore, remain undisturbed even in the wake of the severest misery. In other definition, Yoga is defined as a state of separation from sorrow. (VI,21-23). The Gita declares that when that state of happiness par excellence is achieved, there remains nothing else to be achieved, which may be greater than it; not even the greatest misery can ever disturb that state. It is said also that such a state of yoga is to be attained with a high resolve. In the definition given by Patanjali in Yoga Sutra (I,2) which is supposed to be the most important text of yoga philosophy, defines yoga as a state in which there is complete elimination of the thoughts and modifications of the mind.

In Bhagwad Gita (VI,35) and Yoga Sutra of Patanjali (I,12), it has been said that the above final goal of yoga can be achieved if one fulfills the minimum condition of Abhyasa and Vairagya. An individual can attain the goal of yoga, only when he has these two qualities to begin with. Vairagya means lack of ambition; it is the opposite of raga, which means attachment. The absence of the process of desire is

what is meant by Vairagya. It is only through vairagya that one can succeed in getting rid of the tendency of the mind to run after various objects of enjoyment. Such a mind can be made steady. Abhyasa is the process of steadying the mind. This can be achieved in various ways, according to one's temperament.

Integration:

The term "Yoga" is used in the literature both as an end as well as means. As an end yoga signifies "integration of personality" at the highest level. One of the meanings of yoga derived from the root "Yuj" is SAMADHI. It is a comprehensive term really means "integration" and includes in it all other meaning. This is the meaning of yoga as an end.

In order to help the development of such integration, various techniques are employed. These techniques or practices are mentioned in the yogic literature and are also referred to collectively as yoga. Thus we find various individual practices coupled with the term yoga like Netiyoga, Laulikiyoga, Dhyanyoga, and so on. When various practices are systematized and formed into a discipline employing such practices, these systems are known as schools of yoga like Bhakti yoga, jnanayoga, karmayoga, Hathayoga, Layayoga and so on.

The discipline of yoga passed through several stages and in the course of time different schools emerged which had evolved a variety of techniques and practices. Every school of yoga emphasized specific practices, but their aim always remained the same: the highest level of integration through the control of the modifications of mind. Some schools use practices that deal with the mind directly and some use indirect means through the body to tackle mental processes. All the yogic practices may be classified as i) Asanas, ii) pranayamas, iii) Bandhas and Mudras, iv) Kiryas, v) Meditation and vi) Attitude training practices.

About Prof. Dr. Ganesh Shankar



- *Born on 11.02.1958 in Khurja District of Utar Pradesh, India*
- *Professor and Head- Yoga, School of Educational Studies, Former Dean of School of Education, Dr. Harisingh Gour Central University, Sagar (Madhya Pradesh), President of the World Council for psychotherapy (Asian Chapter), Founder President of the Asian Federation for Psychotherapy (AFP), Hon. Gen. Secretary of Yoga & Psychotherapy Association of India, Former Director, Central Council for Research in Yoga & Naturopathy in the Ministry of Health, Government of India, Ph.D, D.Litt. (Yoga Psychotherapy), Qualified Yoga Psychotherapist (WCP)*
- *Prof. Dr. Ganesh Shankar has more than 40 years teaching and research experience, 15 books and more than 60 research papers in the reputed journals. He has more that 20 years research guiding experience and more that 20 research scholars guided & awarded Ph.D degree in Applied Yoga.*
- *He is member of many high-level committees in the university and Government in India & Abroad. He has organized many national, international conferences and seminars on Yoga & Applied sciences. Attended more than 80 national and 60 international professional events as a Keynote speaker and Chairperson.*
- *Academic achievements in Yoga and Applied sciences: Prof. Dr. Ganesh Shankar recieved 25 national and 10 International awards. Academic visits in more than 25 countries: China, Japan, Russia, Austria, Portugal, Morocco, Italy, Finland, U.K., Serbia, Iran, etc.*