

ROLE OF ASHTANGA YOGA IN BUILDING POSITIVE INDIVIDUALS AND POSITIVE SOCIETY

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Abstract: India has the largest population of youth in the world. 2011 Census shows that around 41 percent of India's population is below the age of 20 years. This population boon can become a bane if their potential is not channelized properly. The future of the country and also the world lies in the hands of these people. In the era of hypermedia and contradictory messages, there is every possibility that the youth get misled and end up indulging in violence and socially destructive acts. To acknowledge the diversity-linguistic, religious, racial, ethnic, cultural- of this planet, it is necessary to inculcate the spirit of oneness in the youth. Ashtanga yoga with its eight pronged path addresses not only individual development but also focuses on building a healthy society. Initiation of the youth to yoga practice by teaching them the yamas which are the ethical principles necessary to building a healthy society, niyamas for individual discipline, asanas for culturing the body and mind, pranayama for regulating the breath, prathyahara for regulating the senses, dharana to increase concentration and dhyana the art of being in the present will help in integrated development of youth who can contribute to world peace and prosperity. The paper discusses how ashtanga yoga, a secular practice can engineer self and society.

Key words: Ashtanga yoga, Holistic development, Secular Practice, Youth

Introduction: India has the largest population of youth in the world. 2011 Census shows that around 41 percent of India's population is below the age of 20 years [1]. This population boon can become a bane if their potential is not channelized properly. Present paper examines a strength based conception of youth i.e. positive youth development, which is advanced from developmental systems theory. Positive youth development refers to intentional efforts of all around to provide opportunities for youth to enhance their abilities, interests and skills. Developmental systems theory is a comprehensive theoretical perspective on biological development, heredity and evolution [2].

In the current century there is an increase in intolerance among the youth. Especially the number of youth getting radicalized is a cause for concern. Terrorism, which was confined to a few countries earlier has spread to many countries across the globe. Socially isolated, disenchanted young men turn to extremism in their search for identity, acceptance and purpose which they are unable to find in the community more often concerned with wealth accumulation rather than healthy relationship-building [3].

One of the eastern models for building healthy individuals and healthy society is Patanjali's Ashtanga yoga. Present paper makes an attempt to examine how ashtanga yoga can contribute to positive youth development. Yoga is a spiritual form which mentions about the culmination of individual life force with the universal energy, thus making it a spiritual and not a religious practice. Yoga literally means integration at all levels of one's existence. It is both a state and a process. As a process, it is a means to integration. As a state, it is a psycho-physiological balance [4].

Yoga is experiential and transcendental in nature. As the name itself indicates ashtanga yoga refers to the eight fold path advocated by sage Patanjali. The entire practice and principles of yoga are explained by sage Patanjali in the form of 196 aphorisms. In none of the aphorisms is there mention of any specific deity, thus making it a spiritual practice. The eight steps of ashtanga yoga are: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, prathyahara, dharana, dhyana and Samadhi. The first four steps are necessary for bahiranga sadana or outer quest and the next four are necessary for antharanga sadhana or inner quest. Yama and niyama are the solid foundation for the observance of the next six limbs of ashtanga yoga. Yama talks about universal moral commandments to be practiced by all in the society, the niyamas are individual observances, asanas are the postures for disciplining the body and mind, pranayama is the science of breath, prathyara is the withdrawal of the senses from excessive sensual pleasure, dharana is the art of concentration, dhyana or meditation is the art of being in the present. Samadhi is a transcendental state. In building a positive society it is necessary that people live in harmony, have a sense of brotherhood, responsibility, care, concern and empathic understanding of fellow human beings. The yamas are the codes of conduct i.e. the virtuous thoughts and actions that people need to follow. The yamas are designed to harmonize one's social interactions [5]. The five yamas are ahimsa, sathya, astheya, brahmacharya and aparigraha.

Ahimsa (Non-violence) is the feeling of non-hostility towards others. Violence arises out of fear, weakness, ignorance or restlessness. Violence is bound to decline when men learn to base their faith upon reality and investigation rather than upon

ignorance and supposition. With the feeling of non-hostility come *abhaya* i.e. freedom from fear and *akrodha* i.e. freedom from anger [6].

According to Patanjali, Non-violence not only means not killing but also applies to non-violence in thoughts, feelings and deeds. On the positive side careful cultivation of *ahimsa* leads to a spontaneous, all-encompassing love [7].

Satya: Satya or truth is the highest rule of conduct or morality. It is commitment to truth i.e. being truthful at the level of thoughts, words and deeds [8].

Reality in its fundamental nature is love and truth and expresses itself through these two aspects. Truth is not limited to speech alone, it also pertains to avoiding the four sins of speech—abuse and obscenity, dealing in falsehoods, calumny or telling tales and lastly ridiculing what others hold to be sacred. Truthfulness in thought and conduct is necessary for clarity and peace of mind and for creating social interactions that establish trust and eliminate conflict [6].

Asteya: is the desire to possess and enjoy what another has. From this desire spring the urge to steal and the urge to covet [6] *Asteya* means internal honesty, simplicity and sincerity. It means not cheating or manipulating people for our own gain [8].

Brahmacharya : Brahmacharya should not be interpreted as repression of sensual urges—repression leads to frustration. Brahmacharya means control of and freedom from all sensual cravings [7].

Aparigraha: *Parigraha* means hoarding or collecting. To be free from hoarding is *aparigraha*. It is thus but another facet of *asteya*. One should not hoard or collect things one does not require immediately. By the observance of *aparigraha*, a person can make his life as simple as possible *Aparigraha* does not mean depriving oneself of all material possessions. It means not being addicted to, or dependent on one's possessions rather than the outward denial of them [7]. According to the report of Oxfam International one percent of the population owns almost half of the world's wealth [9]. Nature's resources are limited and if some hoard so much of wealth they will be depriving others of even basic necessities. This leads to inequitable society. History is replete with examples that such inequalities are the harbingers of violence and revolution. Along with abstinences, which are restraints, yoga recommends the practice of observances or *niyamas*.

Niyama: These are the rules of conduct that apply to individual discipline while *yamas* are universal in their application. These are principles of personal practice both for self-healing and self-development.

Saucha: purity; purity of body is essential for well-being. While habits like bathing purify the body externally, *asana* and *pranayama* cleanse it internally. The practice of *asanas* tones the entire body and

removes the toxins and impurities caused by over-indulgence it also implies cleansing the mind of impure thoughts. Purity and cleanliness also refer to purity of heart and mind. We must be free of mental and physical toxins in order to function with full vitality and capacity. A clean mind, free of neediness, avarice, fear, and other emotional impediments creates clarity and wisdom [10]

Santosa: *Santosa* or contentment has to be cultivated. Contentment is being happy with what one is and what one has. Contentment and tranquillity are states of mind.

Tapas: *Tapas* means discipline, referring to a steady application of the will to achieve a meaningful goal, which implies being able to sacrifice lesser pursuits along the way. To continue to work toward and achieve a higher consciousness we must remain steady in our exercise of *tapas* [10]

Svadyaya: *Sva* means self and *adhyaya* means study or education. It is analysis and knowledge of one's own personality i.e. becoming aware of one's strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs [8].

Isvara pranidhana: Means surrender to the divine or cosmic will. It means to sublimate the ego and its needs to the higher consciousness working through life and governing this vast universe. With the ego integrated it is possible to experience the whole rather than remain trapped in the small I [10].

The third limb of yoga is *asana* or posture. *Asana* brings steadiness, health and lightness of limb. A steady and pleasant posture produces mental equilibrium and prevents fickleness of mind. *Asanas* are not merely gymnastic exercises; they are postures. By practicing them one develops agility, balance, endurance and great vitality. The main objective of *asanas* is to promote and maintain perfect health. They re-establish the harmonious functioning of the body and mind as one integrated whole

Pranayama is the fourth limb of yoga. *Prana* means breath and *ayama* means length, expansion, stretching or restraint *pranayama* thus connotes extension of breath and its control. It is a conscious prolongation of inhalation, exhalation and retention. *Pranayama* is the science of breath. *Pranayama* is a process by which the mind is controlled by voluntary regulation of the breathing [11]. The science of *pranayama* is intimately connected with the functions of the autonomic nervous system and its techniques are aimed at bringing those functions (normally considered involuntary) under voluntary control. *Pranayama* is a complex and highly developed science.

Prathyahara: The fifth step of *raja yoga* is *pratyahara* or withdrawal and control of the senses. The practice of *prathyahara* requires the individual to voluntarily draw the senses inward and thus isolate himself from the distractions of the world outside. Most *pratyahara*

methods consist of withdrawing from external sensory overload and accessing the peace and silence within ourselves [10].

Dharana: Dharana is the sixth step in raja yoga. In concentration all mental energies are brought to bear on one object or idea [7]. Dharana is the concentration of the mind and Swami Vivekananda rightly said that concentration is the best power we have.

Dhyana: Dhyana refers to meditation which is a sustained concentration or deep reflection of a particular object of thought. Through holding a one-pointed attention, we can arrive at a deep understanding of the reality of whatever we meditate on [6].

Samadhi: In patanjali's school of raja yoga, it is mentioned that prolonged concentration leads to meditation, and meditation expands the mind into the superconscious state called Samadhi [7]. We live in a multicultural, world. It requires a lot of wisdom to accept this diversity. One thing that human beings need to realize is that multiculturalism is the order of

the day. A narrow, sectarian or radical thinking will not lead us anywhere. To live harmoniously in this society, it is very necessary that we adopt a secular stance and accept that diversity is nature's way and once we accept this diversity, we can adopt the principle of live and let live. In its practical aspect yoga affirms that the simultaneous development of the intellect and the moral sense is essential for the harmonious and integrated development of personality and that this could be achieved only through the restraint of the cognitive affective states of the mind. According to Patanjali, deeds should be deemed to be virtuous or wicked according to whether they involve doing good or harm to others. Hence the moral basis of any action, whether of an individual or the state, has to be judged by the extent to which it contributes to human happiness or suffering [12]. From a social perspective, it is anticipated that yoga can transform people to be socially sensitive; hence, it may increase the likelihood of children and young people engaging in civic activities and shaping a better society [13].

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