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Yoga and psychology

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One who controls his mind, intellect, & ego, being absorbed in the spirit within him, finds fulfilment & internal bliss which is beyond the pale senses & reasoning". – Bhagavada Gita
Yoga is the greatest gift of India. It is the special gift of the same magnitude from the Indian location as science is from the western with this difference, however, that while the fruits of science began to be relished by people at large right from the very bright beginning, and also yoga continued to remain confined only to the selected few for aeons.

The yoga system handed down under the name of Patanjali and Presented in the slender volume of his yogasutras, has gained the reputation of being the classical exposition of yoga.

The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root-verb yuj meaning bind, join, unite, control, it is allied to the English word yoke, the German joch & the Latin jungo.

Yoga means union & control. It indicates the union of man with God, of the individual with the universal reality, of each with the all of existence.

Also the word yoga means the communion of the petty self with the higher universal self, and Psychology is the science of the Psyche or soul. After, yoga psychology signifies the science of unification of the lower self with the higher one, the union of the jivatman with the Paramatman, so to speak.

Patanjali's yoga is aimed at obtaining liberation through perfect control of body and mind. The sankhya system is accepted by him with slight variations. Instead of mahat, yoga speaks of chitta. When chitta gets imprisoned in the human body it assumes the shape and quality of that body.

Patanjali's yoga aphorism are called the Indian Practical Psychology, as they not only enunciate the laws and principles of controlling the mind, but also teach how to translate them into action.

The function of the Psychology of yoga is to prepare the mind, so as to catch a glimpse of the resplendent Atman, or to appreciate the real status and undying glory of the Absolute. The yoga psychology of patanjali discloses the secret of bringing under control the divergent modifications, of the mind, & thus, transcendental Atman, which is the fountain-head of knowledge, intelligence, and bliss.

Yoga is the science of human personality in respect of its inner growth & creative self – fulfilment.

It may be regarded as both science & art, which includes both theory & practical aspects.

The methodology of yoga includes not only introspection, self-observation but also techniques of dynamic self-transcendence, psychophysical self energizing, critical self-inquiry, altruistic love, self-less action, watchful relaxation etc.

It is not just the conscious, rational mind or the totality of conscious and unconscious mental phenomena, or as mind-body complex. It is a science of human personality in its integral unity.

Even the above vague conception of the nature of consciousness is perhaps too definite for the modern psychologist & will not be accepted generally. Most psychologist, owing to their materialistic bias, still refuse to give mind an independent status as something which is different & apart from the body & capable of existing without the body. Consciousness being considered as an aspect of mental phenomena suffers from the same lack of recognition as an independent principle in existence. It is considered generally as a by-product of life processes taking place in the physical body & ceasing to exist when these life processes come to an end on the death of the physical body.

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When even mind & consciousness, which are within our experience, are denied recognition as independent principles of existence it is too much to expect the modern orthodox psychologist to concede that there is an ultimate principle in existence to which we refer generally as Reality or God.

Reality > Consciousness > Mind > Matter

According to yoga, when chitta gets imprisoned in the human body it assumes the shape and quality of that body. The object of yoga is to restore it to its pristine glory by suppressing the rajas and tamas tendencies. The aspirant of yoga destroys the tendencies and arrests the thought waves. By doing this he makes his mind balanced. Yoga does not recognise ahankara and manas as separate from buddhi.

Though Patanjali introduces God in his system, it is only to keep in line with the popular sentiment. God is not an integral part of the yoga system. He helps the yogi in his quest, however, & is the supreme teacher. Belief in God accelerates the yogi's progress.

Yoga is restraining the thought process & making the mind serene. Thoughts are either painful or not painful & have five conditions – real cognition, unreal cognition, imagination, deep sleep, and memory. All these have to be suppressed by means of practice & desirelessness. Their suppression leads to cognitive & ultracognitive trance. Trance can also be brought about by God's grace & by the repetition of the sacred Aum.

The obstacles that distract the mind are disease, languor, vacillation, carelessness, sloth, sensuality, false knowledge, distraction, instability, pain, despair, trembling of the body, & wrong breathing. They can be overcome by realising the one truth which is God.

Yoga's emphasis is on virtuous living, constant striving, and moving according to an integrated approach to the desired end. This is the famous Eight Limbs known as Asthanga Yoga. The first five of these are external observances & the last three mental disciplines. The Eight Limbs are – Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi.

The eight accessories of yoga are restraint, observance, posture, regulation of breath, abstraction, concentration, meditation and trance.

The eight accessories are the great vows which the yogi has to take and conform to. By practising these, control of the senses and of the mind is made possible.

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