



ISSN Print: 2394-7500  
ISSN Online: 2394-5869  
Impact Factor: 5.2  
IJAR 2015; 1(13): 910-913  
www.allresearchjournal.com  
Received: 26-10-2015  
Accepted: 29-11-2015

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## The psychology of Yoga

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### Abstract

Yoga psychology deals with the transformation and stabilization of the mind, not as an end in itself, but as a means to attain a higher state of consciousness beyond the mind where the purusa, or soul, imbibes its own pure nature. To attain that state, however, the support of the mind is necessary. The mind is called antar-karanam, the internal instrument. Like all instruments the mind requires sharpening to function best. To succeed in spiritual domain, one must therefore gradually mold the mind to higher forms of cognition.

**Keywords:** Prakrti, Purusa, Psychotherapy, Mind

### Introduction

Yoga psychology is the science of the embodied relationship between consciousness and mind. Yoga psychology provides a theoretical basis for yoga therapy. It describes how the idealized healthy body and mind function and how imbalance can occur leading to pathology and suffering. In its highest form, yoga psychology seeks to actualize a conscious relationship with vast cosmic forces that lie beyond socially conditioned awareness. Yoga psychotherapy plays a vital role in treatment and management of physical, psychological and spiritual conditions. This is because in this system illness can be viewed as a sacred part to higher awareness if one has appropriate knowledge techniques and support. Modern medicine is realizing that physical approach alone i.e., prescriptions, drugs or a psychological approach alone i.e. cognitive behavioral therapy delivers limited and short term benefits. Yoga psychology sees body and mind as indivisible and gives maximum emphasis to the role of cultivating self-awareness as the foundations on which improved health and well-beings built. In order to gain larger vision of the theoretical basis of yoga psychology we need to know the vision of various other Indian philosophical systems including Yoga, Samkhya, Vedanta. These traditions store a vast amount of information about the inner working of the body, mind and spirit. They give us insights into the organs of mind, how the organs of the body and mind interact with each other and various energies that animate them.

Yoga psychology deals with the transformation and stabilization of the mind, not as an end in itself but as a means to attain a higher state of consciousness beyond the mind where the Purusa, as soul imbibes in its own nature. To attain that state however the support of mind is necessary.

At this juncture it is necessary to understand that samkhya yoga system accept two realities Prakriti and Purusa. Purusa stands for soul which is pure consciousness.

In today's world yoga has received global recognition. Studies reveal that techniques like meditation and yoga have been successfully employed in the treatment of mental disorders. While these efforts have yielded beneficial results, they are criticized for this failure to do justice to the original intention and context in which yoga as a system was developed. Hence there is a need to explore that dimension of yoga, from this it follows that scope of yoga ranges from relaxation and physical health to profound realization. Most of the researches miss the original significance of yoga. This point is made by (Salagme) by asserting "contemporary thrust on meditation is like using a spaceship to lift cargo across ten kilometers distance". Yoga is a way of life for self-transformation. Thus, there is a need to understand yoga psychology. Goal of the paper is to elaborate this as well as to appreciate the fact that yoga is a Voyage to "inner space".

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This paper focusses primarily on yoga psychology and for this detailed exposition of the nature of mind is necessary.

### **The mind is malleable**

In Yoga mind is often described as supple like a clay in that it can be easily molded. Significance of describing mind as supple (Principle one) is the correlation between the shape the mind assumes and one's accompanying modes (Principle two) and that by understanding the factors by which the mind is molded (Principle three) one can influence how one feels (Principle four). By this understanding one can learn to shape the mind as a vehicle for its own transcendence and attain ultimate satisfaction (Principle five)

### **Correlation between the form the mind assumes and how one feels**

Like everything in the world mind is composed of a combination of three modes of nature- Sattva, Rajas, Tamas, Goodness, Passion and Ignorance which are in flux. These subtle strands of matter have specific intrinsic characteristics with particular effects. Thus by identifying the present mode of the mind, one can understand its influence.

### **The mind is swayed by the power of three main factors- one's karma, one's environment and one's actions**

The modes of nature are constantly competing within mind for influence. How each affect the mind is comprehensively described by in classical Indian thoughts.

1. The positive effect of Karma (Destiny) on consciousness is described in three basic ways:
2. By understanding the message of destiny-Each event we experience is divine in form of time (Kala) telling us something essential about ourselves to help us grow.
3. By understanding the proper response to destiny- Proper response to each circumstance ensures the healthiest development of mind.
4. Shastra describe the science of living in harmony with one's nature, which is the foundation of peaceful mind.
5. The subtle effects of the diverse forms of environment on consciousness are described by a thorough classification of the various objects of perception (sight, sound and so on) that shape the mind according to their influence. For example, music within a specific mode can move the mind accordingly, either towards lethargy or restlessness and peacefulness.
6. Similarly, subtle effects of the diverse forms of action are classified according to their motive and their influence on mind. For example if one adheres to the spiritual principals one's mind become lucid and strong in will, effects of goodness. This understanding of how actions influence the mind leads to best understanding of Dharma. Dharma is the correct choice is any circumstance to ensure the healthiest affect on mind.

### **By controlling the mode of the mind, one's can substantially influence one's desires and feelings**

All forms of therapy and self-help lead one to greater self-awareness and personal satisfaction. By accurately describing the nature of mind yoga system rather Indian philosophy contributes substantially to the science of mental transformation.

### **Full satisfaction can ultimately be attained only by rising above the mind and experiencing the real self**

As the mind is not the true self no matter how much one

transforms the mind, perfect mental satisfaction will be evaded.

Although yoga promotes an integrated peaceful mind, it is not meant to be and in itself but means to stabilize the mind to realize higher state of consciousness. Which is to be achieved through the practices of 3 core paths- Karma Yoga Jnana yoga and Bhakti yoga.

### **The fundamental nature of the mind**

To understand mind basic understanding of its functions is essential that is one should know it's a purpose in cosmos. In Samkhya-yoga, world is described as pure awareness (Purusha as Soul) misidentified with matter (Prakriti) and the immediate cause of this juncture is out of egotism when soul rejects its state of pure awareness, its consciousness is projected on a particular field of matter called body. (Which includes Mind) As changes in one's life such as death, suffering is happening in the body, and not in the true self this temporary state of identification is the root of suffering. Awakening from it is the life's ultimate objective. In context of this paradigm the mind as Chitta is the first covering of soul. It functions as an instrument where by Purusa soul enveloped in matter can either view the world to serve the false self (and suffer) or pure self (and feel fulfilled). Thus, mind can either be a friend or enemy of the soul. Yoga sutras describe thoughts born out of the mind as either healthy (Klishta) or unhealthy (Aklishta). Thus, mind in a way is fulfilling dual role and to do this mind has different functions of thought. In general, it is agreed that mind has three sensual functions of thoughts.

1. Manas- Impulsive synthesis and response received through the senses.
2. Buddhi- Reflective examination.
3. Ahankara- Relational response.

Once the mind categorizes an object through these three functions of thought. Our feeling, judgment, sense of relationship, an impression of that object is imbedded within the mind. These latent impressions are called sanskara's created both in this life and the past, determine how we feel, view and respond to the world. They are the single most important factors in our overall well-being. The first function of any system of self-improvement is thus to help one judge whether one's present thought based on this latent impression represent the true nature of things. It then helps one create a more accurate perception through the tools available from that system.

### **The healthy and unhealthy mind**

Thus, the nature of mind is sanskara's embedded within it. And because of this each of us has basic mental condition. And the conditions and events of this life foster further sanskara's. Our mental health is shaped by our formative years. Stable parents who affectionately monitors their child instill good sanskara's in this child, and good sanskara's means impressions that reflect the true nature of things and produce thought that helps one grow. Such parents provide a nurturing environment. Deep impressions of affections in mind enable one to see the world with promise and to feel secure, even in challenging circumstances. Bereft of this one is prone to depression. Parents are the most important factor in the development of strong mind. Thus to produce mentally stable generation a culture should facilitate appropriate nurturing and boundaries molded by traditions. But it should be remembered that the mind is malleable, and with the

process of transformation, mental health can be attained at any stage of life.

### **Attaining mental health**

Although sound mental health was integral to traditional Indian society and therapy as a specialized field was virtually nonexistent, still within yogic knowledge we find in-depth information on the workings of mind and knowledge applicable to restoring mental health. This knowledge can be of immense help in modern society which relies on specialist in therapy and self-transformation to attain good mental health. Some of this was referred to, when basic principles of yoga psychology were described that is the three factors by which the mind is swayed our Karma (Destiny), the environment and our actions.

### **Karma and the mind**

Karma is a powerful factor in influencing the mind. What comes to us in our daily lives by destiny is often disconcerting. Powerful mental states may also arise as a result of past actions. Due to Karma we are born with a set of mental nature, which conditions the mind. All classical Indian schools of thoughts accept destiny as an eternal moral order, a force to keep us grow provided we comprehend the message it contains and responds properly. Shastra contains lessons on how to understand the respond to various circumstances. According to yoga psychology optimum mental health cannot be achieved without some connection to a tradition of knowledge that teaches one to understand and respond to each situation in life in a way that mold's one's mind towards goodness. Optimal mental health is thus very hard to achieve without understanding one's nature

### **Environment and the mind**

Bhagvat-Gita confirms the importance of environment in molding the mind towards goodness, by referring the modes of nature. Traditional Indian culture was itself influenced by this knowledge. Thus, just living in a society where many aspects of life were guided by the knowledge, from the object of sound (music) and sight (art) to moral behavior was therapeutic. Even today everyone has at least some control over his or her immediate surroundings. For example the part of the day that are in different modes are usually within one's rule. Thus if we simply wake up early around sunrise which is the time of the day substantially in the form of sattvaguna, the mind will be given a significant boost towards goodness. Even such a simple adjustment will give rise to peacefulness and clarity of mind in this way everything can be molded in a way to influence the mind to a higher state of well being.

### **Actions and the mind**

There are three groups of actions geared for positive transformation: actions with an innate spirit of attachment, but restrained by regulations (Karma Yoga),restrained actions (Jnana) and dedicated action(Bhakti).For understanding how actions affect the supple mind, actions are divided into four categories. These group of actions will be explored within these categories:

1. Dharma
2. Programming
3. Spiritual practice in general
4. The path of devotion (Bhakti)

Actions have a very influential effect on the condition of the mind and, inspire positive mental transformation when they

are in response to a solid understanding of the world. All four categories of actions are thus based on producing healthy imprints related to an understanding of the true nature of objects and situation.

### **Dharma**

As discussed knowledge of nature of things and responding to the world based on that understanding creates the best disposition of mind. The Science of doing this is called Dharma. Thus, dharma is correct choice in every circumstance to ensure the healthiest effect on mind. Dharma is subtle because it is prescribed according to one's individual nature, which varies from person to person. Dharma is always done in consideration of one's individual nature, although certain actions are more universal prescription, such as Yama of the Yoga sutra, mind is favorably transformed by carefully doing one's duty. An important application of this model of action is the choice of suitable work. Occupation is an activity that occupies most of our day and thus a key element in how the mind forms itself. When our work is lined up with our inborn nature and done in proper way, when it is dharma, the mind is positively transformed. When it is not, one is frustrated day after day tolerating freedom or frustration due to occupational work against one's nature can easily activate either strong desire for unwarranted indulgence in sense pleasure or excessive inactivity. Classical Indian society was so structured, that is not only supplied suitable psychophysical occupational and social engagement, but to free one's time and energy for spiritual practices geared for direct mental transformation. Modern society is not particularly structured to support mental health or spiritual growth, and one often finds oneself in stressful occupational and social situations, one seeking to maximize mental and spiritual development cannot neglect holistic approach, one that seeks as for as possible to align one's social and occupational life with one's psycho physical nature.

### **Programming**

One can learn to program or condition the mind to give up bad habits and develop good ones-In Yoga Sutra this is described as supplanting bad Sanskaras with good ones. To understand how programming works, one should first understand the duality between pleasure and happiness, that Sanskaras that give momentary pleasure, such as intoxication and fault finding, also simultaneously mold the mind towards distress. Understanding this duality one can then program the mind to supplant the Sanskara's impelling one to indulge in bad habit by associating it with the one's that highlight the suffering it causes, For example one may give up smoking by regularly visualizing the distress caused by it. Such as long disease and the lack of character such addictions reflect, so that eventually a healthy Sanskara's of aversion(smoking is bad) supersedes the unhealthy imprint of attachment (smoking is good).

As one can displace the root of a bad habit by creating a distressful imprint in the mind, one can also uproot a bad habit by nurturing another attachment that gives one more pleasure, but sits in opposition to that tendency. For instance one can be attached to be truthful and then view to never smoke. Every time one then desires to smoke, the desire for truthfulness is activated, overpowering the craving to smoke. Thus to transform the mind it must be reconditioned. Yoga psychology, by describing how the mind works offers a working model of how to positively program the mind.

### **Spiritual Practice (Sadhna)**

The objective of yoga psychology is not just to stabilize the mind, but to perfect it and in Yoga psychology transformation is not an end in itself but a means to attain a higher state of consciousness beyond the mind where the purusa or soul imbibes in its own nature. For this support of mind is necessary. The mind is called Anta-Karnam, the internal instrument like all instruments it requires sharpening to function best. To succeed in spiritual life one must gradually mold the mind to higher forms of cognition. For transforming mind proper structuring of environment and adhering to moral actions in day to day life is must. To achieve optimum transformation and ultimate transcendence however it is of utmost importance to reserve time and place to exclusively engage with mind for the purpose of transforming it. Such a prescribed exercise is called Sadhna or spiritual practice. Foundation of Sadhana is meditation.

### **Bhakti**

Till now discussion was confined to transformation based on individual effort. The path of bhakti adds aspect of grace, help beyond individual effort. Grace thus implies the conviction in a supremely potent and omniscient soul, a being with total power to direct the laws of nature and thus cleanse one's mind simply by grace. Bhakti as a process of transformation is thus the act of giving oneself to God in devotion and petitioning that grace. Patanjali in the first chapter, describes Ishvra-Pranidhana (surrender to lord) as an optional method of meditations and also outlines its main practice, chanting mantra such as AUM, which are non-different from lord and full of spiritual potency. By repetition of the lords name and thinking of their meaning devotion arises in the heart. Imbued with devotion, lord is naturally felt everywhere until thoughts of devotion pervade and the mind. The lord in reciprocation, naturally bestows his grace upon the devoted soul by awarding him or her Samadhi. Thus the process of Bhakti works through transformation of the material mind as other processes do.

### **Conclusion**

Ancient texts of yogic philosophy are full of psychological wisdom. Their rich insights can help deepen our understanding of mental health and the practical psychological guidance describe centuries ago, may enhance positive mental health and stabilize us in happiness. Yoga psychology gives a practical and holistic paradigm for transformation, which thoroughly explains the effect of one's nature, actions, environment and heartfelt devotion on the development of healthy mind. As a spiritual discipline Yoga help us to go beyond the current understanding of mind through modern psychology, to explore expand and experience the range of our psychological potential and awareness. Most of the recent researches our contended with demonstrating therapeutic efficacy of yoga. By this they make yoga body centered. Whereas yoga psychology in its original is "Soulful yoga". Therefore we need a paradigm which is 'Soul centered'. Without a new paradigm, we cannot understand much of what Patanjali has said.

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