

Bahiranga Yoga: Individual Evolution for Global Harmony

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Abstract – Ever since the dawn of Industrial revolution the placid, multidimensional life of human being has given way to a frantic, monotonous and unidimensional lifestyle. Money and material possessions have become the yardstick of success. Progress in every sphere is directed towards the enhancement of the Charvaka value ethics. We need to put a pause on our pace and introspect, rethink and realign individual values with global concerns. The bhairanga yoga which is the first half of the Astanga Marg of Yoga is a journey within encompassing the ethical, physical and psychological dimensions joining each with one's inner core. Other sutras help in developing deep meaningful relationships with others. It is this inner transformation that will lead to outer effectiveness. We can combine the ageless, ancient wisdom of the past with the vibrant technology of today to build a future where every human being is equipped with the possibility of exploring one's potential to the fullest with mutual respect for each other and in harmony with nature resulting in the wellbeing of the entire planet.

Key Words:

Astanga yoga: The eight fold path as prescribed by Yoga sutras

Bahiranga yoga: The first four components of the eight fold path

Yama: Rules of prohibition for ethical training

Niyama: Rules for discipline for ethical living

Asana: Collection of yogic postures for making the body fit

Pranayama: Set of breathing exercises prescribed in Yoga

Puraka: The inhalation of breath

Recaka: The exhalation of breath

Kumbakh: The retention of breath

Metaphysics: A branch of philosophy that deals with subjects beyond matter

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Before the Industrial Revolution disrupted the dynamics of humanity, mankind all over the globe led a uniform and placid lifestyle. We called them as river valley civilizations where everything revolved around agriculture. The way of thinking, the way of life and the way of worship was dominated by religion which was seeped in rituals and traditions. Society was rigidly structured with deep fault lines on the basis of caste, community, colour, religion and most importantly gender. Family was anarchy top to bottom. As Thoreau put it, "A mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed

desperation (1)." Mankind continued to live in the same rut for centuries across the globe. The Industrial Revolution however changed everything.

The birth of cities: Machines began to produce goods in large quantities making them cost effective. The problem was they had to be sold. With local and national markets saturated an urgent need was felt to look out for new lands. A number of factors set the ball of economy rolling:

- 1) The Reformation movement led by Martin Luther dealt a severe blow to the authority of the Church. As the grip of religion on society weakened, it began to finally wake up from its anaesthesia. The dark ages ended and the Age of Enlightenment began.
- 2) The study of physical sciences based on experimentation and rational thinking found favour among the masses. The authority of the Bible was challenged. With new discoveries and inventions mankind's attention was shifted from Heaven to Earth. Instead of worrying about one's fate after death man began to think of living a better life on Earth.
- 3) The concepts of science began to be practically applied into technology. New theories provided impetus to the making of new machines which led to the rise of the factories. The factories produced a vast variety of goods. The market soon became a happening place.
- 4) Three inventions deserve special mention. The printing press by Guttenberg facilitated the rapid spread of knowledge across the European continent. A large number of universities were established and learning of different sciences and arts was encouraged. The Mariners compass emboldened the adventurous sailors who set out and discovered the world. Gunpowder was the final nail in the coffin. Armed with guns and cannons Europe soon colonised the world.

The new age has had far reaching effects on the lives of humans. The centre of economy shifted from the farm to the factory, from village to the city. A few people built them and many were employed. Working hours, working conditions and living conditions changed for the worst for majority of the people. Between the workers and the owners there was a rise of the middle class that provided a steel frame in managing their business empires. The economic dimension for man became so dominant and powerful that it engulfed all other aspects. What only mattered was money and material possessions. The physical, the emotional, the spiritual dimensions of man were pushed in the background. Since then mankind has engaged itself in this unidimensional journey and has made a remarkable progress. The kind of facilities and comfort that a modern man enjoys today were a privilege of only the kings a few centuries ago. Medical science, transport, communication, entertainment consider any field and that has been revolutionised. If one can imagine the bewilderment of our forefathers taking a tour of a modern city it will give us an idea of the extent of the progress that we have made in the last couple of centuries.

The impact on mankind: Every progress comes at a price and mankind has had a big price to pay. As

pointed out by Marx the division between the Haves and Have-nots is being felt more than ever. "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman in a word oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, that each time ended, either in revolutionary reconstitution of society at large or in common ruin of contending classes (2)." It is not only a major divide but with many subdivisions in between. If there is a population that is suffering from disease because it is overfed, then there are masses of people dying of starvation. If at one place women enjoy freedom then there are places where they have no face, no choice and no voice. Man has become mean and selfish. Each one is for oneself and the other is hell. The world economic forum while making a list of the top ten threats to mankind has listed the greed of man as the topmost threat. The incessant buying of unwanted goods is wreaking a psychological havoc on the lives of people for all that are able to buy and those who are not.

All other dimensions of the life of man have also been deeply affected. The facilities and comforts have led to a sedentary lifestyle. This has affected the body. We have become weak compared to our ancestors. Stamina and flexibility have gone for a toss. To add to that we are eating food that is loaded with pesticides and fertilizers. The air that we breathe is polluted. Lack of exercise, incomplete excretion coupled with faulty eating habits has taken a toll on our body. We may boast of a longer life thanks to medical science but the quality, intensity and liveliness that comes with a fit body has been compromised to a large extent.

The emotional dimension has taken a huge hit. One must understand that man does not live on bread alone. Deep meaningful relationships lead to mental fulfilment and happiness. One doesn't mind the lack of a few amenities but having people who love you, cherish your company, those that are grateful and kind makes life worth living. On the deathbed it is not the money in the bank that counts but how many shows genuine concern and affection for you that matters. People have always regretted spending more time in office and less with people who truly matter in their lives. Given a second chance most people would like to live their lives differently. It is sad that the rat race has made us use and throw people as things. Kant's dictum which says, 'Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always the same time as an end...' has been buried in philosophy books (4:429 p.36). The core of the heart of man has been corrupted. People are alone on this crowded planet. It is like one of the sailors on the ship of Columbus saying, 'Water everywhere but no water to drink.'

Perhaps the biggest loss for mankind has been losing sight of the spiritual dimension of man. In this pursuit of making the external world better and better we ignored our inner world. Man has forgotten the purpose of his life and existence and hunts after things that give him momentary happiness leaving a feeling of tastelessness and dissatisfaction. To overcome this dissatisfaction more and more in the outside world with a same result. It only one could pause briefly and reflect within one can find abundant joy and everlasting happiness. One shall realise it is always the inner world that is reflected in the outer world as thought, word and deed. If the roots are taken care of the plant will blossom. Hence it truly justifies the subtopic: The way in is the way out.

Yoga the way: Throughout centuries across the planet whenever and wherever man has been confronted with an existential crisis, he has looked inward for answers. Numerous ways and means have been found to reach the irrefutable solace within. Those who realised proclaimed that they were blessed to be born. It was out of infinite love and compassion that they reached out to others cajoling people to undertake the journey within. Their experiences in oral or written form has always been a guiding light for all those who wish to go on this voyage. The Yoga sutras of Patanjali is one such book. Written in terse language in the form of short sutras it is a complete step by step guide to reach the innermost recesses of the soul. In today's world there are atleast four different perceptions about Yoga. For some Yoga is philosophy as it is a part of the Indian schools of philosophy. For others it is at best alternate therapy. In cases where modern medical allopathy treatment fails people come to Yoga to try their luck. For such people Yoga is all about Asanas and Pranayama. For the select minority Yoga is the pathway of spiritual practices. Men and women have devoted their entire lives living in isolated spots understanding, practicing and meditating trying to unravel the secrets of Yoga. Yoga is also India's contribution to psychology, a study that experimental and experiential at the same time. This is because the experiment is to be done on the experimenter himself. It is the study of the mind in its entirety with the primary objective of stopping the modifications or workings of the mind. Patanjali firmly believes that it is only when the modifications of the mind are stopped that the real nature is revealed and the inner journey is complete. The second sutra of chapter one says, 'Yoga is the cessation of movements in the consciousness (Iyengar. 2002, p-50).' In this article, the Yoga sutras of Patanjali will be understood from the perspective of spiritual practices and psychology. Two characteristics are quite unique to Patanjali Yoga sutras:

1) Similar to Buddha, Patanjali has not bothered himself with metaphysical questions. The first two sutras clearly mention the aim of Yoga. Our ceaseless flow of mental thoughts (modifications) are the cause of our pain and misery. Every human being irrespective of

caste, class, creed, colour, race, religion or gender is suffering due to one's own mind. The purpose of Yoga is to arrest the flow of mental modifications.

2) A human can hold onto any metaphysical position or religious belief yet one can follow the teachings and instructions of the Yoga sutras and free oneself from the miseries created by one's own mind. This makes Yoga universally acceptable and practisable.

Understanding the purpose of Yoga: The question naturally arises what is the need to stop the mental modifications? For this we need to understand the threefold preliminary classification of the mind. The first is the instinctive mind. The purpose of this mind is to ensure the survival of the organism. It controls the five automotiv systems of the body i.e the nervous, circulatory, respiratory, digestive and excretory. Apart from that it relies on food, sleep, fear and sex for its survival and continuity. The second is the thinking mind. The primary function of this mind is growth. When one consciously rises above one's instinct that growth is possible. For example, when one rises above fear that courage and adventure become possible which in turn are responsible for our growth. However, this mind is constantly on from the time we wake up till we go to sleep and even in sleep. It is this ceaseless activity that blocks the gateway to the opening of the third mind i.e the experiential mind. When this mind is opened then one realises that survival and thought processes are but parts of the mind. There is a huge area of the mind that lies beyond them which lies unexplored. The aim of Yoga is to be able to access the experiential mind and dive deep into it for long periods of time. In fact, one actually do enter this mind in our sleep every night. On waking up one is full of strength, vitality and joy. One even says that it was a nice sleep and enjoyed it. But this experience is in a state of ignorance. Iyengar says, 'Sleep gives once the glimpse of the seer, but only indistinctly because the light of discrimination, viveka, is clouded (Ibid. Pp. 60). Yoga aims at ensuring the same joy in a state of intense awareness. In this sense the experience of sleep and meditation are diametrically opposite. It also proves that the phenomena of sleep has immense spiritual significance. The Yoga sutras prescribe different ways to reach this experiential state of mind. One way that is immensely popular and can be followed by all is the Astanga Marga or the Eightfold path. Moral injunctions(yama), fixed observances (niyama), posture (asana), regulation of breath (pranayama), internalisation of senses towards their source (pratyahara), concentration (dharana), meditation (dhyana) and absorption of consciousness in the self(samadhi) are the eight constituents of Yoga (Ibid. Pp. 142). It is to this that we shall discuss in greater detail.

The Ethical foundation: Every animal lives by certain laws and never violates them. However it does not deserve credit because it obeys them by instinct. The human on the other hand is an animal with intelligence, choice and will. As Kierkegaard observes, 'Man is an animal with a potential of being human.' It is ethics that makes us human. It is one's perspective about life. Ethics are the eternal laws by which mankind is supposed to lead its life. Following the law is an inside journey that one has to undertake. Every word that one speaks, every act that one does is based on thoughts i.e the intention. Ethics is the examination and purification of intentions. It is a course correction. Words and actions will not be guided by the dualities of fear and temptation or good and bad or virtue and sin or benefit and harm but by aligning oneself with the natural laws governing human life. As Cecil B. DeMille says, 'It is impossible for us to break the law. We can only break ourselves against the law (2015).' An occasion may arise where one sees benefit in lying but the law tells to speak the truth regardless of the consequences. The law needs to be followed at all times, in all places, at all occasions and in all circumstances. It is in such testing times that character is forged. We are here talking about individual choice-based ethics and not the one that is constructed by society. The former builds character while the latter is personality based.

Ethics in Yoga is divided into two parts, Yama i.e the don'ts and Niyamas i.e the do's. Just as a river needs to accept the limitation of the banks so that it can flow, similarly one needs to accept the limitations of the Yamas if life has to function in a certain manner. The Yamas are five in number. Sutra 30 of chapter 2 says: Non-violence, truth, abstention from stealing, continence and absence of greed from possessions beyond one's need are the five pillars of Yama (Iyengar. 2002, p-142). They are meant to discipline and regulate life. The first Yama is Ahimsa or thou shall not kill. Negatively it refrains from taking life and positively it is absence of jealousy with love and affection for animal and human life. The second is Satya or always speak the truth. It inculcates courage in a person and is the basis of trust in every relationship. The third is Asteya or thou shall not steal. It is the conquest over one's temptations and selfish desires. The fourth is Brahmacharya or abstinence from sex. It is aimed at mastering one of the most powerful instincts in humans in a step by step process. It is also to develop an understanding that sexual energy when directed inwards leads to a tremendous possibility of power and will in a person. Boxers are known to refrain from sex for a period of three to six months before a fight. The last is Aparigraha or non-possession of material objects. It is aimed at simplifying life and making oneself truly independent. The Yamas or the don'ts as they are generally understood are very vital. It is the ability to say no to things that builds a strong will that gives confidence and taste the joy of independence.

Next in line are the Niyamas. They are the do's of Yoga. As Yamas are for discipline, the Niyamas are

for direction. Sutra 32 of chapter 2 says: Cleanliness, contentment, religious zeal, self-study, and surrender to the supreme Self or God are the Niyamas (Ibid. Pp. 144). The first is Saucha or cleanliness. It is to be worked upon at three levels: the body, speech and mind. Keeping the body clean externally and internally makes it necessary to give the body attention and respect that it deserves. Bodily cleanliness makes one feel nice and positive about oneself. Cleanliness in word and mind is the beginning of self-awareness. As one starts observing speech one realises how much hurt one causes. The harm caused by words is due to the defilements of the mind. The mind is full of anger, hatred, resentment and craving and all our outer actions are a consequence of what is within us. It is only the inner cleansing that leads to outer refinement and pleasantness in words and deeds. One also realises the importance of good, positive, inspiring and spiritual thoughts in our lives. The second is Santosh or contentment. It is a very important perspective to be inculcated in times when we are living in a world where there is an explosion of material objects around us. One cannot help but fall prey to temptation. It is this fatal attraction that has turned all into dollar worshippers. Our existence has been taken for a ride. It is only in old age on the deathbed that one realises that all this pursuit for objects was a colossal waste of time and energy but then it's too late. The perspective of contentment helps us come out of this vicious circle. As Gandhiji said, 'The world has enough for everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed (Gandhi, 2015).' It will also restore the environmental imbalance and the concept of sustainable development can become a reality. The third is Tapas or the strength to bear difficulties and overcome challenges. Working on our inside world is like walking on the razor's edge. One continues to fall time and again. The call of the outer world is too tempting to ignore. Tukaram says, 'Night and Day the battle rages both inside and outside.' Covey also says, 'The greatest battles are fought in the silent chambers of our heart'. The strength to remain steadfast in our inner journey is Tapas. The fourth is Swadhyay or introspection. One needs to constantly reflect on one's thought and life process. It is rightly said, 'Eternal vigilance is the price for freedom'. Fifth is Ishvarapranidhan or the acknowledgement of the existence of God. The concept of God in Yoga is not a religious entity with name, form and qualities to be appeased by rituals. Patanjali talks about the source of energy and intelligence within us that can be accessed and needs to be accessed. This source serves as a torch light in our inward journey.

Man is also a social being. There is also a need of developing a perspective in our interaction with others. Patanjali provides four approaches in dealing with people. Verse 33 of chapter 1 says: Through cultivation of friendliness, compassion, joy and indifference to pleasure and pain, virtue and vice respectively, the consciousness becomes favourably disposed, serene and benevolent

(Iyengar. 2002, 86). For those who are like us one must cultivate Maitree or friendship. For those who are inferior us one must develop Karuna or compassion. For those who are superior to us one must inculcate Mudita or appreciation. Finally, for all those who are downtrodden one must have Upeksha i. e. the readiness to go near them, observe them and strive to elevate their lives. These four approaches are very popular in Buddhism and are called as Buddha viharas. The Yoga sutras provides paradigms for one's own life and also for interacting with others. It is with these foundations of ethics that one can delve deeper into the nature of one's existence.

The physical culture: One of the most unique contributions that Yoga has made for one's inner journey is that the attention and work on the physical body is a necessary condition to reach the core. Sutra 46 of chapter 2 says: Asana is perfect firmness of body, steadiness of intelligence and benevolence of spirit (Ibid, 157). There are four reasons for the same:

- 1) A sound mind resides in a sound body. This means the state of the body decides the state of the mind. The fitter the body the stronger the mind to undertake strenuous spiritual practices. Yoga aims at developing a physique that is very strong, utterly flexible with a tremendous stamina. The inner journey is a long one and one needs a body that is healthy for a long period of time.
- 2) The yoga sutra mentions that the posture that is steady and can be sustained with ease is attained. What is known that if the mind is steady then the body is steady. Asanas aim for the exact opposite. As one attempts to steady the body the mind starts becoming steady. To have a steady mind is a valuable asset that one can possess.
- 3) It should never be the case that the inner journey is hindered due to the limitations of the body. In fact, the body should aid in this venture. Hence it needs to be moulded in such a way that the body is always enthusiastic in new ventures and is able to complete them without loss of energy.
- 4) A human being is the only animal on this planet with a vertical spinal cord which opens our possibility of accessing our inner source. The body needs to be built in a way that it can hold to the vertical position for long periods of time. The perfection of the body thus becomes a necessity.

The magic of breath: The control over breath is the control on the mind and further to the immense source of vitality locked within. Even simple breathing exercises have a soothing effect on the mind. The system of Yoga is a detailed work into different breathing exercises and its effect in controlling the

various systems of the body and thereby gain access and control of the mind. Sutra 49 of chapter 2 says: Pranayama is the regulation of the incoming and outgoing flow of breath with retention. It is to be practised only after perfection in asana is attained (Ibid, 161). The word 'ayam' means controlling breath. The yogis discovered wonderful possibilities by controlling the breath and also by taking breath in numerous ways. Breathing done unconsciously has two aspects. Puraka and Rechaka i.e. inhalation and exhalation. If one were to breathe consciously it is possible to voluntarily stop breathing at two places. One can inhale and stop and hold the air within the body or one can exhale and hold the breath outside the body. Holding the breath in yoga terminology is called Kumbakh. The yogis discovered that the secret of Pranayam was in Kumbakh or Retention. The retention of breath altered the dynamics in which the entire body functioned. Systematic pranayamas were developed specifically for retention and it increased the energy and vitality of the human body exponentially. Swami Vivekanand says, "In this body of ours the breath motion is the silken thread, by laying hold of and learning to control it we grasp the pack thread of nerve currents and from these the stout wire of thoughts and lastly the rope of Prana controlling which we reach freedom (508)."

The final stages: As one delves deeper into the mind the connection with the sense organs is broken. Once that happens the world ceases to exist. The mind then goes through the different stages of absorption, concentration and meditation and is able to connect with the source of creation and intelligence within. When one comes out of such an experience one interacts with the outside world with the core of one's inner being. As Epictetus says, "Some things are within our control and somethings are not. It is only when you learn to distinguish between what you can and can't control that inner tranquillity and outer effectiveness becomes possible (11)."

Conclusion: The world today is passing through testing times. It has become a global village but each human being is alienated. All advancements in the world outside have come at the cost of peace and joy inside. Mankind has lost touch with its inner core. If there is struggle within there is going to be war outside. It is time mankind took stock of the situation and realised that the outer world is a projection of what is contained within. The way outside is only through the way inside. It is only when fundamental attitudinal changes will be made within that the external world will be perceived, enjoyed and shared with all making life worth living. It is not only human life but also animal and plant life that are very much a part of this planet. Peaceful coexistence is only possible when man is at peace with himself. Peace gives birth to sensitivity and creativity; to show and share concern for life and find proactive solutions

progress and reverence for life meet at a golden mean. Survival of the fittest is the law of the jungle. Live and let live is being aloof and unconcerned. Fitting the unfit to survive is in its real sense being human.

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