

Yoga and Psychoanalysis

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INTRODUCTION

The word 'yoga' is very old and occurs in early Upanishads like the *Katha* and the *Svetasvatara* as well as in *Mahabharata* but it was Patañjali who attempted for the first time to offer a complete system in his *Yoga-Sutra*. Authorities differ as regards the exact time of the composition of the *Yoga-Sutra*. According to some it was written in the second century B.C., whereas others believe that it was composed as late as the fourth century A.D.

The term 'yoga' is used in two main senses. First, in the Upanishads and the *Bhagavadgita* it is used in the sense of spiritual union with God. Etymologically the word is derived from the root 'yuj' meaning 'to yoke' or 'to bind'. The human soul in this world is said to live separately from the Supreme Soul and is subjected to all sorts of suffering because of the separation. Spiritual union with God is the way out that is advocated for getting rid of the sorrows of the world. Secondly according to Patañjali the word 'yoga' stands for method-cum-effort designed to attain perfection of personality through the control of the physical body and the mind. It is the disciplined course of action involving a mighty effort that leads to the salvation of the human soul.

PHILOSOPHY

The Yoga School accepts with slight modifications the metaphysics of the Samkhya School of Indian philosophy, according to which there are two primary realities to account for the origin of the perceptible world. One is matter (*Prakṛti*) and the other is soul (*Puruṣa*). In fact there are countless souls. According to Samkhya, matter is essentially unconscious and

motionless but the mere presence of conscious souls imparts activity and motion to matter and the evolution of the universe starts. Starting with the intellect (*buddhi*), ego (*ahamkāra*) and mind (*manas*), a number of transformations appear. They include the five subtle elements (*tanmatras*) of sound, touch, smell, form or colour, and taste. They are themselves the essences of the gross sensory elements of sound, touch, smell, form or colour, and taste. Furthermore, five senses, five organs of action, and five gross elements of ether, air, light, water and earth are evolved out of matter. Yoga does not accept the intellect, ego and mind of Samkhya theory as different entities, but treats them as three aspects of one entity and calls it 'citta' which we translate as mind. There is no place for God in Samkhya, but Yoga accepts the reality of God which is higher than matter and souls. God is conceived as directing the evolution of matter and removing obstacles in the way of souls striving to free themselves from the bondage of this world.

For Yoga and for Samkhya the soul in its true nature is essentially pure, eternal and free from pain of any kind; but having once come into this world in the form of the embodied soul it is subjected to all sorts of afflictions. In common with many other systems of Indian philosophy Yoga accepts as the central fact of human existence that the whole world is full of misery. Pains are evidently painful; even the so-called pleasures of life are in fact pleasure-coated pains. Without exception, for all in this world, there is nothing but pain and suffering. Suffering is due to the desires of the individual to enjoy worldly objects and the desires are traced back to ignorance (*avidyā*) of the true nature of the objects.

Ignorance consists, among other things, in wrongly treating as pleasant what is really unpleasant and erroneously regarding the

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psychophysical organism as the true self. Ignorance causes the individual to experience various pleasures of life and this experience in turn makes for the bondage of the soul. Yoga does not satisfactorily answer the question as to how the soul, which in essence is pure, eternal and immutable, should ever come under the sway of ignorance. The yogin brushes aside the question by saying that it is meaningless in view of the beginninglessness of the universe.

It is the tragedy of the soul that in this world it is conjoined with the mind, which is too wayward and fickle, and with the flesh, which is too weak and corruptible. The method of yoga is designed to control the vagaries of the mind and the body and to achieve a state of perfection of human personality. By successfully controlling the natural functioning of the mind one overcomes the pain of the world and escapes from the round of rebirths.

NATURE OF MIND

In Yoga the term mind (*citta*) is used in a comprehensive sense to include intellect, ego and what we ordinarily mean by mind. Like other systems of Indian philosophy, Yoga does not conceive mind as a spiritual entity but as purely a material object. It is not eternal. It develops out of matter and disappears at the time of disintegration of the human organism.

Since the mind is a material entity it is essentially unconscious, but it becomes conscious by the reflection of the consciousness of the soul with which it is associated in the human body. The mind is just like a mirror which reflects the consciousness of the soul. In its perceptions the mind is affected both by the object (external object) and the subject (the soul).

The mind synthesizes the sense data into percepts, suggests alternative courses of action, makes decisions and carries out the decisions made through the organs of action.

It is in the nature of the human mind not to stick to a single percept or concept for a long time but to jump from one idea to another in quick succession. Distraction is thought to be an important property of mind in its normal waking state.

Yoga considers three states of consciousness from the point of view of validity and objectivity of sense data. The first is that of hallucinations, illusions and dreams, which though undisputedly psychological experiences yet are devoid of objective data. The second is the sum total of normal psychological experiences. These are real from a strict psychological standpoint, but are nevertheless false from the metaphysical point of view. Then there is the third and the highest state of consciousness, which when attained opens new vistas to the individual and reveals objects in their true nature. This state can be brought about by the yogic technique of moral and mental discipline.

Concentration is thought to be the general characteristic of consciousness and yoga mentions five conditions of consciousness distinguished on the basis of the degree of concentration involved in them. The first is a condition of restlessness in which the mind indulges in feverish activity in the pursuit of worldly objects that appear to yield pleasure. The second condition is one of sloth and inertia. The third condition is obtained when one fixes one's attention for a while as in the case of solving an arithmetical problem. The fourth condition is one of fixating one's attention on a single point to the exclusion of all other ideas. The fifth condition is that of complete concentration wherein the mind can be fully restrained for any length of time by the individual. The yogin holds that even the first two conditions mentioned above are not entirely devoid of concentration and have some element of concentration in them.

Yoga further holds that apart from the state of consciousness attained in 'samadhi' all other states of consciousness are emotionally unpleasant to the individual.

The question, much discussed in modern psychology, whether one can divide one's attention has been considered by yoga thinkers who emphatically declare that division of the attention is an impossibility and that the mind cannot attend to more than one activity at one and the same moment of time.

Yoga makes a distinction between the conscious and the unconscious, and the concept of 'samskaras' designates the unconscious elements

that condition the personality of the individual and affect behaviour in important ways. Satisfaction of desires and passions, which are conscious experiences, leave behind certain impressions or residua in the form of unconscious tendencies in the mind which at some appropriate later time give birth to conscious desires, passions, interests or further experiences. These new desires and passions when re-experienced and satisfied again leave behind unconscious impressions and potentialities to be actualized at some future date. Thus the process continues and the soul remains in perpetual bondage.

The mode of being of 'samskaras' is that in which the dynamism of the unconscious potentialities forces their manifestation and actualization in acts of consciousness. Thus according to Yoga psychology, besides the conscious mind there is an unconscious but psychologically active region which tends to make for perpetual bondage of the soul; and one who intends to attain the goal of freedom is required not only to prevent the development of new unconscious forces in the mind but also to destroy the already accumulated unconscious forces.

Yoga, like psychoanalysis, recognizes the effect of unconscious forces on the conscious behaviour of the individual. It is said that an individual, even if he has several years of yogic practice to his credit, remains in danger of defeat by the invasion of a powerful current of psychomental eddies produced by the underlying stream of the unconscious. It is for this reason that whereas the yogic technique is recommended to arrest the development of new unconscious forces, a life of austerity is called for to annihilate the unconscious forces already present in the mind as a result of past conscious experiences.

Patañjali tells us that normal human consciousness is not the highest stage of consciousness. Mind has hidden powers to know the secrets of the earth and analyse the mysteries of heaven. Besides his perceptive and rational faculties a human being can develop faculties of a higher order. For example he can acquire the power of seeing and knowing external objects without the aid of external sense organs. A disciplined and trained individual transcending the barriers imposed by space can

apprehend objects on the other side of the wall or objects miles away—a phenomenon that is beyond the reach of ordinary human consciousness. It is further assumed by the Yoga school that there is a much richer and wider world around us than the one that is open to ordinary senses.

The higher mental powers can be acquired by every normal individual only if he is willing to pay the price in terms of moral and mental discipline. Yet the acquisition of these powers is not regarded as the true aim of the yoga discipline. Since human existence in the world is in essence painful Yoga sets the condition of freedom of the soul from matter as the highest end of life. The yogin is not satisfied with anything that falls short of the goal of complete liberation of the soul from the shackles of matter.

TECHNIQUE FOR MIND CONTROL

The embodied soul is subjected to all sorts of unpleasant emotions in the world because of the indulgent mind which is ever eager to enjoy worldly pleasures. Pleasures once experienced leave behind unconscious tendencies which later assume the form of new experiences, which in turn leave behind new tendencies, and so on. Patañjali sees the way out of this vicious circle in severing the relationship of the soul and the mind. Since mind is the source of all trouble, he asks us to deal with it firmly. The mind's normal activities must be suppressed and set at naught. The task of mind control, however, is not a simple and easy one, and Patañjali offers us an eightfold method of which the first two steps constitute ethical preparation which is considered necessary for the attainment of the control of mind. The eight steps are as follows:

1. *Refraining from certain bad acts (yamas)*

One should refrain from inflicting injury on sentient beings, falsehood, theft, incontinence and avarice. The act of refraining from inflicting injury on others (ahimsa) is regarded by Yoga as the chief virtue of the above noted acts. Yoga attaches great importance to continence or sexual purity. Sexual activity tends to dissipate the most precious energy of the human mind, debilitates it and makes the

task of concentration difficult. Sexual purity on the other hand acts as an aid in concentration. It should, however, be added that sexual purity does not merely mean abstinence from gross physical acts but complete control and absence of carnal desire.

Continuous abstinence from the above acts tends to produce serenity of mind.

2. *Positive practice of certain acts (niyamas)*

One should observe cleanliness of body and mind, be contented, practise austerity (tapas), study scriptures and be devoted to God.

The practice of these virtues on the part of the individual produces passionlessness or freedom from desire for the objects of this and the next world and further promotes serenity that is conducive to concentration of mind.

This ethical preparation is considered necessary by Patañjali, and without this nothing can be gained by the individual in the pursuit of development of higher levels of consciousness and freedom of the soul.

The individual who has set his mind on the goal of freedom often faces obstacles put forward by his lower self. The attraction of mundane objects being too strong, his impulses try to carry him off the track. In such a situation the individual is advised not to make a direct attack on the problem, as it would be of no avail. Rather he is asked to concentrate on the opposite quality of what is troubling him. If his sex impulse has become uncontrollable he is required to think of the beauty of celibacy and the glorious future of the celibate life. This thinking of the contrary is regarded as a great strategy in the battle on the ethical plane which an individual has to fight against himself.

Besides ethical discipline one has to be careful about diet. Food that excites the mind should be avoided as it causes interference in the process of concentration.

3. *Convenient posture (asana)*

The individual is required to adopt a convenient posture before he begins to meditate. The posture must be firm, pleasant and easy to aid concentration.

4. *Regulation of breathing (pranayama)*

The fourth step is the regulation of breathing,

but this is regarded as optional by Patañjali. If one has achieved serenity of mind through cultivation of virtues then one need not practise it. Breath control like the practice of virtue has a steadying influence on the mind.

5. *Withdrawal of senses (pratyahara)*

Sense control or withdrawal of the senses from their natural outward functioning is the fifth step in yoga. One closes one's eyes and attempts not to attend to outside noises. The mind is resolutely closed to all impressions from without. One is required to drive away the impetuous impulses and insistent thoughts from the mind.

6. *Fixing attention at a particular point (dharna)*

The next step is the fixing of the mind at a particular spot. It is steadfastness of mind. Ordinarily trains of ideas pass through the mind one after the other but the vagaries of mind have to be arrested by fixating it on a single point. The yogin compares the mind to the stone of a grinding mill which grinds into flour the grains put under it. But if we put nothing under it, it goes on grinding until it totally grinds itself away. When the mind does not get its normal perceptions and ideas to indulge in, its workings cease, it comes to a state of complete passivity. Such a state is the condition of development of higher consciousness and a state of complete joy for the soul.

7. *Meditation (dhyana)*

Meditation is the resulting state of an even current of thought undisturbed by others.

8. *Higher concentration (samadhi)*

In course of time and after sustained practice, meditation culminates in a higher state of concentration known as the first stage of samadhi wherein the sense of identity is lost, body and mind become dead, as it were, to external impressions and only the object of meditation, whatever it may be, remains shining out in consciousness.

At this stage extraordinary powers, such as reading the thoughts of other individuals, disappearing from the sight of others, and seeing through closed doors are developed by the

individual. If one concentrates on muscular power one acquires an elephant's strength. These super-normal powers, however, are not ends in themselves, but are merely the by-products of concentration. They are compared to the tempting beautiful flowers which one happens to find on both sides of the path leading to the goal of liberation. One is warned not to fall a victim to the temptation of these powers and forget the real aim of Yoga discipline. If one gets interested in these magical powers one rapidly goes downward from the road to perfection. One is urged to resist these temptations and move straight to the goal of freedom of the soul.

Emotionally the first stage of samadhi is a state of extreme joy. In the next sub-stage of samadhi the feeling of joy passes into a stage of equanimity. When this stage is achieved everything is achieved by the individual, and he develops intuitive insight into the real nature of things. This intuitive insight is seeing with the eye of the soul. The intuitive knowledge simultaneously embraces the past, the present and the future, with all their states into one whole and leads to liberation of the soul.

PSYCHOANALYSIS *vs.* YOGA

There would seem to be some agreement between the modern psychoanalytic doctrine propounded by Freud and the ancient Yoga theory put forward by Patañjali. For both of them mind is a mysterious phenomenon, a store-house of varied and diverse forces. Mental life is not equated with conscious experiences; much of it remains underneath and obscured from ordinary consciousness. Both for psychoanalysis and for Yoga, unconscious elements in human nature determine the day to day conscious life and personality of the individual. In their own ways both systems aim at unravelling the mysteries of the mind. Lastly, psychoanalysis and Yoga regard the integration of human personality as the end worthy of attainment.

However, there are essential differences between the two systems. Yoga differs from psychoanalysis in making certain positive assumptions as regards the nature of the mind. Extreme distractibility is conceived as an important

characteristic of the mind. It is in the nature of the mind to shift from one idea to another and not stick to a single concept for a long time. But this does not mean that the mind is devoid altogether of concentration. Every state of consciousness, however unstable it may appear, contains an element of concentration and the power of concentration of mind can be greatly enhanced by practice. Again Yoga holds that there are three levels of consciousness while psychoanalysis postulates only two levels, the conscious and the unconscious. Yoga believes in the third level of consciousness which we can call 'superconscious' and this is regarded as much higher than the ordinary level of human consciousness. Closely related to this is the Yoga belief that a human mind is a store-house of hidden supernormal powers—a belief that is not shared by Freud.

Patañjali and Freud differ sharply with respect to their attitude to sex and the role it plays in the life of the individual. Freud attaches great importance to the sex urge. Sex frustration is thought to lead to various abnormalities of personality. For Freud sex is a biological necessity and its satisfaction is as essential as that of hunger. Patañjali's position in this matter is diametrically opposed, and for him conservation of generative power is an important factor in the attainment of higher levels of consciousness and perfection of the personality. Chastity and continence are demanded of the one who is to practise Yoga. Rational control of sex is regarded as prerequisite for unravelling the mysteries of the mind.

The unconscious is differently conceived by the two thinkers. For Freud, unsatisfied socially forbidden desires form the content of the unconscious. For Patañjali every experienced desire whether satisfied or unsatisfied and every conscious experience whether pleasant or unpleasant produce unconscious dispositions (*samskaras*); but it is chiefly the unconscious dispositions left by the satisfied desires or pleasant experiences that clamour for re-experience and which a human being has to deal with since they offer real obstacles in the path of liberation. The unconscious of Freud's conception leads to various abnormalities of human behaviour and causes neurosis—a condition

of mental ill-health. Nothing of this sort is assumed by Patañjali. For him unconscious dispositions, unless destroyed by an austere life, result in rebirth after rebirth—with attendant unpleasant emotions indeed, but in the setting of the normal mentally healthy personality.

Freud and Patañjali substantially differ in their methodology. Freud advocates the method of free association in which the neurotic individual is encouraged to bring forth idea after idea with the hope that in this way he will finally hit upon the repressed idea that is a source of his neurotic state. On the contrary, doing away with the train of ideas is the method adopted by Patañjali who regards Yoga as the suppression of activities of the mind.

Through the psychoanalytic method of free association one comes to know of unsatisfied wishes, unsolved problems and unresolved conflicts and this knowledge is considered instrumental in helping the mentally abnormal individual to recover. On the other hand through the use of Yogic techniques a mentally healthy person gains the highest state of human perfection. Thus whereas for psychoanalysis the ultimate aim is the state of normal mental health, for Yoga the ultimate objective of human life is the achievement of a state of the soul whereby it is freed for ever from all the suffering of human existence.

We may also compare psychoanalysis and Yoga in their attitude towards God and religion. God finds an honourable place in Patañjali's system and devotion to God is considered an aid in concentration. We are all familiar with Freud's attitude to religion which traces the origin of God to the Oedipus Complex and conceives of religion as nothing more than the universal obsessional neurosis of mankind.

In conclusion we can say that whereas psychoanalysis puts undue emphasis on instinctive and unconscious forces in human nature, Yoga, while not minimizing the importance of the unconscious in human life, accords supremacy to rational elements in human nature. It is the rational self that is supreme according to

Yoga, as can be judged by the fact that unconscious elements in human nature are required to be controlled and annihilated by the activities of the rational self. The aim of psychoanalysis, namely the attainment of mental health by the unhealthy person, though commendable is still a much lower aim than Yoga's lofty one of freedom of the soul. Whereas an analyst diving down in the deep ocean of the human mind comes across here and there a fixation, a complex or a defence, the Yogin in his quest of reality soars in the high heavens, comes to acquire powers of a high order and finds a vision of an entirely new world open to him. Starting with mind psychoanalysis does not rise above the workings of the mind; Yoga taking mind as the stepping stone goes beyond it and finds entry into the spiritual plane. It will be a truism to say that the resemblance between Yoga and psychoanalysis is a superficial one; their difference is much more fundamental.

SUMMARY

A simplified account is given of the philosophy and metaphysics of Yoga, and of the view which results of the relation between man and the world in which he lives. Yoga, like psychoanalysis, recognizes the effect of unconscious forces on conscious behaviour, and suggests methods by which they may be controlled. Both Yoga and psychoanalysis aim at the ultimate integration of human personality. But while the two systems consider both conscious and unconscious levels, Yoga believes in a third or super-conscious level, in which hidden powers become available and the soul is freed from bondage. In recognizing a spiritual plane of existence, Yoga transcends the limitations of psychoanalysis.

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