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Unfolding the Essence and Relevance of Yog: An Overview

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Abstract

The term Yog elevated in the Rigveda and was first explained in early Upanishads like the 'Svetashvatara' and 'Katha', which are called Yog Shastras or Yog texts. The teachings of Upanishads includes the main principles of Vedantic philosophy and 'Samkhya' that the Yog system uses. The Upanishads explains the themes of Yog as Om, mantra, meditation, control of the mind, knowledge of the 'Purusha', evoking of the soul is the synonym for Yog. Yog in its true sense is the process to unfold one's soul or eternal being. Sadhuguru (2017) explains 4 essential paths of Yog, that are 1) Jnana Yog or the Yog of Knowledge uses meditation for Self-realization, 2) Bhakti Yog or the Yog of Devotion seeks union with God as the Divine Father or Divine Mother, 3) Karma Yog or the Yog of action emphasizes the practice of ritual worship of the Divine and service to living beings, and 4) Raja Yog also known as Kriya Yog is the Yog of mantra and meditation. The purpose of this paper is to disclose the true essence of yog and its relationship with Bhakti from an Indian perspective and evidences of its relevance from Indian cultural heritage in an individual's overall wellbeing.

Key Words: Yog, Indian Perspective, Yog and Bhakti, Bhakti Yog.

Introduction

Yog in this fast paced life is proven to relieve stress and pressure (Semwal, Chauhan, Mishra, & Semwal, 2016). It is the recommended way to stay healthy whether it be physically, emotionally or spiritually. It is considered as the exercise of mind, body and soul. Yog in its true sense is the process to unfold our soul or our eternal being. In order to be an authentic spiritual practice, it is recommended to be done by the soul for Yog done by the ego or by only the mind is a Yog done only in the ignorance (McCoy, 2002). It is believed that Yog is a methodology of achieving the state of 'Samadhi', the level of bliss or 'Ananda', in which the mind is engrossed in God or in the Self that is its origin. Maharishi Patanjali prescribes the method of 'Ishvara Pranidhana' for the path of Yog which means dedication to Lord (Yogsutra) (Satchidananda, 2012). In Indian scriptures and texts Vedic deities are worshipped in four forms that are agni or fire, soma or moon, indra or lightening, and surya or sun. In the psyche 'Agni' or fire is represented as will, 'Soma' or moon is reflective feature of mind and emotion, 'Indra' or lightening is the power of perception or the energetic feature of the mind, 'Surya' represents awareness. Basically there are four related light centers in one's subtle body. These four energy centers explains how the subtle body and its chakra system played an important part in vedic mantras (Satchidananda, 2012).

Based on the way of practicing, Yog can be categorized into four (Adiswaranand, 2007). Firstly, the Yog in which focuses on knowledge and doing meditation for Self-realization. This type can be understood as Jnana Yog. Secondly, the Yog in which person focuses on the supreme power and devotion in the focal point of action. It seeks union with God as the divine father or divine mother. This can be called as Bhakti Yog.

Thirdly, the Yog of action or Karma Yog which emphasizes on the practice of ritual worship of the divine and service to living beings. It focuses on the dedication of an individual of doing each and every small or big deeds or actions. Fourth and the last is, Raja Yog also known as Kriya Yog. It is the Yog of mantra and meditation. Further Yog can be understood under eight different dimensions and these dimensions are generally known as limbs of Yog (Yogani, 2008). It is also be known as Ashtanga of Yog (Satchidananda, 2012), these are:

- Yama- Restraining oneself from harming others through wrong actions.
- Niyamas- Principles for one's own daily lives which comprises of purity, devotion etc.
- Asanas- Seat or Yog postures
- Pranayama- Mastering and living the life force
- Pratyahara- Inner self or reflection
- Dharana- Practice of focused attention
- Dhyana- Meditation.
- Samadhi- Freedom, liberation

The Yamas and Niyamas of Yog are a summation of vedic dharmic principles found in older vedic texts. The Yamas and Niyamas reveal the vedic idea that in order to truly approach the spiritual path one must have a dharmic foundation in daily life. The Yamas are generally used dharmic principles in Vedic texts. 'Ahimsa' or non-violence is one of a key principle of Yajna or sacrifice, and is commonly inscribed in the Bhagavad Gita and Mahabharata which

means offering everything to God. Similarly, 'Satya' or truthfulness is another main principle of Vedic thought. The text 'Yogi Yajnavalkya' explains in great detail about various forms of 'Snana' or bathing as a Yogic practice which includes the 'Mantra Snana' or using mantra to bathe the mind (Yogani, 2008).

Yog is a prevalent topic in all Hindu teachings and texts including Tantras, Puranas, Mahabharata or Vedas. The Mahabharata, which includes the Bhagavad Gita is believed to have long scriptures on Yog. Yog has its own importance in the Vedas. Yog is a term that was first found in the Vedas, where the root for Yog, 'yuj', refers to unite or connect relative to the mind and senses.

Even the presentation of the vedic chariot (ratha) is a symbol representing deeper Yog practices of controlling the mind. Ritual is defined as a way of sacred practice in which one chant name and form to approach the Divine. Ritual is believed to be the way of bringing the Brahman into action. When that ritual action is performed with pure intention, it becomes Yog. The term Yog arised in the Rigveda and was first explained in early Upanishads like the 'Svetashvatara' and 'Katha', which are called Yog Shastras or Yog texts. The teachings of Upnishads includes the main principles of Vedantic philosophy and 'Samkhya' that the Yog system uses. The Upanishads explains the themes of Yog as Om, mantra, meditation, control of the mind, knowledge of the 'Purusha', evoking of the soul and so on that are of great importance in Yog (Krishnananda, 2019).

Researches in the field of science and social sciences indicate that Yog practices are linked with better mental functioning. Practicing Yog helps to deal with the psychological challenges of an individual's life (Krishnakumar, Hamblin, & Lakshmanan, 2015). Evidences of a research study indicates that Brain's GABA level can be increased by Yog practices and various sessions. Result of this research indicates that 27% increase in GABA levels in the yoga practitioner group after the yoga session (Streeter, et al., 2007). The evidence of the Yog's relevance is prevalent not only in Eastern country but also in Western countries as well. People all over the world are accepting Yog as an integral part of their life in making there life more meaningful and better in terms of psychological as well as physical well-being. (Krishnakumar, Hamblin, & Lakshmanan, 2015). Enchanting Mantras, which is one of an essential parts of Yog helps individuals to manage the physical pain (Shukla & Vaidya, 2015). Evidences based on various researches along with the Indian Scriptures indicates that practicing Yog helps individual in innumerable ways. An individual can use Yog as one of the measures to deal with the stress related challenges and lead a life which is not negatively affected by stress and related symptoms, as it is need of an hour in today's world which is full of stress.

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