

A study in the search of Mental Health in Yoga Vāsistha

Virendra Singh*,

Research Scholar, Mahatma Gandhi Chitrakoot Gramodaya Vishwavidyalaya, Satna, M.P.

E-mail: yogiboythakur@gmail.com, India

ABSTRACT

The present study aims to go deep into the search of different aspects of Mental health into the greatest spiritual classics ever recorded, the Yoga Vasistha. This classical text of Yoga is a mind-blowing account of a detailed conversation between Sri Rama and his Spiritual teacher Maharshi Vasistha. The book goes into great detail surrounding the subtle intricacies of the mind, unraveling the multitude of layers to our very existence along the way. Much of the text is told through parable stories, which hold many hidden depths within them.

As the essence of Yoga is controlling the fluctuation of Mind (YogaschittavrittiNirodhah), Mind is the only instrument to do so. The ongoing theme throughout the study revolves around the notion of worldly miseries being caused by our own illusion of the world, and how whatever we perceive on the outside is merely a reflection of how we feel inside. Moving beyond these temporary illusions is the path to true enlightenment and Vasistha Maharshi goes into great depth as to how such a journey can be undertaken.

While going through this classical text it can be understood that Illusion is the obstacle in the path of achieving Mental Health. Ultimately it explains that practicing Yoga in the form of mental practice is the way to achieve Mental health.

Key words: Yoga, Maha-Ramayana, Mental health.

Article Received: 17-11-2017, Published: 10-02-2018

Conflict of interest: None declared

***Corresponding Author: Virendra Singh,** Research Scholar, Mahatma Gandhi Chitrakoot Gramodaya Vishwavidyalaya, Satna, M.P. India.

**International Journal of Science and Consciousness (IJSC): a Bio-Psycho-Spiritual approach
Published by the Research Foundation for Science & Consciousness, Uttarakhand, India**

A study in the search of Mental Health in Yoga Vāsistha

Introduction

The *Yoga Vāsistha* written by Sage Valmiki, The complete text contains over 29,000 verses¹. The short version of the text is called *LaghuYogavasistha* and contains 6,000 verses. The exact century of its completion is unknown, but has been estimated to be somewhere between 6th-century to as late as 14th-century, but it is likely that a version of the text existed in the 1st millennium.

Yoga Vasistha is famous as one of the historically popular and influential texts of Hinduism. Other names of this text are Maha-Ramayana, Arsha Ramayana, Vasiṣṭha Ramayana, Yogavasistha-Ramayana and Jnanavasistha².

The text is named after sage Vasistha who is mentioned and revered in the seventh book of the Rig-Veda, and who was called as the first sage of the Vedanta school of Hindu philosophy by Adi Shankara. The text is structured as a discourse of sage Vasistha to Prince Rama. The book deals with six major sections – 1. Dispassion or indifference, 2. Longing for liberation, 3. Origin, 4. Preservation, 5. Quiescence of mind and 6. Liberation. There are four gate-keepers at the entrance to the Realm of Freedom. They are Santi (self-control or quietness of mind), Vichara (spirit of inquiry), Santosha (contentment) and Satsanga (good company). The wise seeker should diligently cultivate the friendship of these, or at least one of them. This World-appearance is a confusion, even the blueness of the sky is an optical illusion. It is better not to let the mind dwell on it, but to ignore it³.

Yoga Vasistha teachings are structured as stories and fables, with a philosophical foundation similar to those found in Advaita Vedanta, is particularly associated with *drsti-srsti* subschool of Advaita which holds that the "whole world of things is the object of mind". The text is notable for expounding the principles of Maya and Brahman, as well as the principles of non-duality, and its discussion of Yoga. The short form of the text was translated into Persian by the 15th-century⁴.

The main theme of Yoga Vasistha is that the soul is undergoing a dream from which it must awake. This dream represents our association and identification with the world. The fact that it is described as being a dream means that whatever is in it has to be false. Nothing in a dream can be true. Waking up from that dream is the ultimate goal, Self-realization. People who are interested in Self Realization can also study the more comprehensive Brihat Yoga Vasistha book and the smaller one, Laghu Yoga Vasistha. The term Brihat means great, while Laghu signifies small. The sum total of pleasures of the whole world is a mere drop when compared to the bliss of Moksha. When all the desires are destroyed, the extinction of the mind where Mind becomes "No-Mind" is Moksha. If the illusory I-ness or Ego perishes, the end of thoughts to the Maya is Moksha. Extinction of all Psychological conditioning constitutes Eternal Liberation of the Self. Self Knowledge is the realization that the Self is in reality not bound, but always pure and free. Realize that you are the immortal all pervading Self and become free. This is the goal of our life and the goal of our existence⁵.

Yoga Vāsistha:

The verses of Yoga Vasistha are structured in the genre of ancient Indian literature, called *Grantha*. In this genre, each Shloka (verse) in the text is designed to equal 32 syllables, while conveying its message. A Grantha can be sung and depending on its meter, set to specific Raga music. This genre is found in Bhakti movement literature, and Yoga Vasistha's Advaita theories and monism influenced the Grantha literature of Sikhism, whose primary scripture is called *Guru Granth Sahib*⁶.

Yoga Vasistha is a syncretic work, containing elements of Vedanta, Yoga, Samkhya, Saiva Siddhanta, Jainism and Mahayana Buddhism, thus making it, according to Chapple, "a Hindu text *par excellence*, including, as does Hinduism, a mosaic-style amalgam of diverse and sometimes opposing traditions".

The text consists of six chapters: Chapter 1: titled *Vairagya-prakaranam* (Exposition of dispassion), which opens with Rama frustrated with the nature of life, human suffering and disdain for the world. Chapter 2: titled *Mumukshuvayahara-prakaranam* (Exposition of the behavior of the seeker), which describes, through the character of Rama, the desire for liberation, the nature of those who seek such liberation, and the need for self-effort in all spiritual pursuits. Chapter 3: titled *Utpatti-prakaranam* (Exposition of the arising and birth), describes the birth of all creation as well as the birth of spiritual side of Rama. Chapter 4: titled *Sthiti-prakaranam* (Exposition of the existence and settling), describes the nature of world and many non-dualism ideas with numerous stories. It emphasizes free will and human creative power. Chapter 5: titled *Upashama-prakaranam* (Exposition of the patience and tranquility), discusses meditation to dissolution false dualism, to feel oneness and its powers in liberating the individual. Chapter 6: titled *Nirvana-prakaranam* (Exposition of the freedom and liberation), the last book describes the state of an enlightened and blissful Rama. The last book also has large sections on Yoga⁵.

The NirnayaSagar version of Yoga Vasistha manuscript has 1146 verses in the first Book, 807 in second, 6304 verses in third, 2414 verses in the fourth book, 4322 in the fifth, while the last is longest with 14296 verses, for a cumulative total of 29,289 verses⁷.

Yoga Vasistha contains a system of ancient philosophical thought unique in its kind. Those whose minds are turned away from the worldly desires and have become indifferent towards the objects of this world and those who are longing for liberation will be really benefited by this book. The nature of the stories and their deep rooted philosophies are designed to open our levels of awareness, and legend states that those who complete the book will have their spiritual growth significantly accelerated. Yoga Vasistha is the essence of all the Hindu Philosophical texts – Bhagawad Gita, Vedas and Upanishads. The nature of the ParaBrahma, Supreme God consciousness and the methods to attain Self Realization are

vividly described in this book. "This Atman (Eternal Self) is certainly different from the body, senses, mind, and prana. It is blissful, supreme, non-dual, permanent, formless, sinless, and pure. The moment this realization comes to you, you are liberated." "If you constantly think of the Atman, your mind will be purified and your ignorance will be uprooted along with the past tendencies, just as your ailments will completely disappear by your taking medicine daily. When the mind is pure, you will get unalloyed bliss." "When one realizes the truth of the unity between the Jivatma (soul of man) and the Paramatma (God) whether by instruction from the guru or from spiritual texts, that every moment the source of ignorance, along with the cause and effect, will mingle with Paramatma. The state mentioned above is called moksha (liberation). The self is ever-free."

Mental Health:

Mental health is a level of psychological well-being, or an absence of mental illness. It is the "psychological state of someone who is functioning at a satisfactory level of emotional and behavioural adjustment". From the perspective of positive psychology or holism, mental health may include an individual's ability to enjoy life and create a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience⁸.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health includes "subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, inter-generational dependence, and self-actualization of one's intellectual and emotional potential, among others."⁹

The WHO further states that the well-being of an individual is encompassed in the realization of their abilities, coping with normal stresses of life, productive work and contribution to their community.¹⁰ Cultural differences, subjective assessments, and competing professional theories all affect how "mental health" is defined.

Mental health is the successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and providing the ability to adapt to

change and cope with adversity. The term *mental illness* refers collectively to all diagnosable mental disorders—health conditions characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior associated with distress or impaired functioning.

Discussion:

Yoga Vasistha is considered one of the most important texts of the Vedantic philosophy. The text, states David Gordon White, has served as a reference on Yoga for medieval era Advaita Vedanta scholars. The *Yoga Vasistha*, adds White, was one of the popular texts on Yoga that dominated the Indian Yoga culture scene before the 12th-century.

Indian freedom fighter Vinayak Damodar Savarkar has praised *Yoga Vasistha*. Quotes from his Autobiography "My Transportation for Life": "All of a sudden I fell upon the *Yoga Vasistha*, and I found it of such absorbing interest that I have come to regard it ever since as the best work on the Vedanta Philosophy. The propositions were so logical, the verse is so beautiful, and the exposition is so thorough and penetrating that the soul loses itself in raptures over it. Such a fine

References:

1. Chapple, Christopher (1984). "Introduction". *The Concise Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. Translated by Venkatesananda, Swami. Albany: State University of New York Press., pp. ix-x
2. G Watts Cunningham (1948), How Far to the Land of Yoga? An Experiment in Understanding, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 57, No. 6, pages 573-589
3. Kumar, Kamakhya (2008) *Super Science of Yoga*; Standard Publishers India, New Delhi.
4. KN Aiyer (1975), *Laghu Yoga Vasistha*, Theosophical Publishing House, Original Author: Abhinanda, page 5
5. Surendranath Dasgupta (1932, Reprinted in 1978), *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Volume 1, Cambridge University Press, ISBN , pages 231-232
6. Opinderjit Kaur Takhar (2005), *Sikh Identity: An Exploration of Groups Among Sikhs*, Ashgate, ISBN 9780754652021, page 145
7. Chapple, Christopher (1984). "Introduction". *The Concise Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. Translated by Venkatesananda, Swami. Albany: State University of New York Press., page 257- 419.
8. Kumar, Kamakhya (2013) *Yoga Psychology: A handbook of Yogic Psychotherapy*; D K Printworld, New Delhi.
9. "The world health report 2001 – Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope"(PDF). WHO. Retrieved 4 May 2014.
10. "Mental health: strengthening our response". *World Health Organization*. August 2014. Retrieved 4 May 2014.

combination of philosophy and poetry is a gift reserved only for Sanskrit poets"

"When I used to be lost in the reading of the *Yoga Vasistha*, the coil of rope I was weaving dropped automatically from my hands; and, for hours on end I lost the sense of possessing the body and the senses associated with that body. My foot would not move and my hand was at a stand still. I felt the deeper yearning to surrender it all. All propaganda, all work seemed such a worthless task, a sheer waste of life. At last the mind and the matter asserted their sway over the body and swung it back to work again"

Conclusion:

The *Yoga-vasistha* is throughout a philosophical work, in the form of popular lectures, and the same idea is often repeated again and again in various kinds of expressions and poetical imagery. But the writer seems to have been endowed with extraordinary poetical gifts. Almost every verse is full of finest poetical imagery; the choice of words is exceedingly pleasing to the ear.