

Human Mind, Mental Processes and Role of Yoga in Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

The linkage between the mind and body, particularly in reference to Yogic sciences, was widely accepted in the ancient wisdom and oriental learning, but later developed an artificial dichotomy between these two components. Modern medical science focuses, only on body as something which is apart from the mind. However psychosomatic linkages have now got its due importance by both modern medicine practitioners and therapists of Indian tradition. It has now been proverb by scientific researches beyond doubt that yoga practices brings in better balance equilibrium in the autonomic function and metabolic rate at one hand and neurohumoral functions at the other hand, so that the state of both physical and mental well being is achieved. This itself reflects that physiological and psychological conditionings go hand-in-hand and operate simultaneously.

The ultimate aim and goals of yogic sciences is not only to attend optimum physical and mental health but also to elevate the level of unconsciousness of an individual practicing it. The pathway of mechanism for attaining such goals may be vivid but one thing is very much clear that for attaining such goals one has to understand follow and nourish the body and mind simultaneously. In that way psychology of yoga has its own importance. Its basic principles need to be documented in terms modern physiology and psychology. In fact it is the need of the hour.

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Introduction

Our understanding of the human mind and behavior requires multiple approaches and involves a variety of academic disciplines. This article comes mainly from psychology and associated disciplines with approaches ranging from the biological and genetic to the social and cultural. Each has something to offer our understanding, and none in itself is complete. Rather, we get the best understanding of mind and behavior by looking at different approaches together.

The contents in this section give a brief glimpse of psychologically oriented studies contributing to our understanding of the human mind and behavior. The exploration begins with the evolution of mind. Although we are often aware of how thinking and behavior develop from childhood through adulthood and into old age, we seldom think of evolutionary forces' influence on mind and behavior. John Elliott's article introduces us to evolutionary psychology and some insights that can be gleaned from examining how behavior and thought have evolved with mankind.

Evolutionary psychology focuses on genetic relatedness and its relationship to behavior but generally does not examine individual genes. However, with rapid progress in the field of genetics, we are now able to examine the role of specific genes as they influence personality and psychological processes. Redford William's discussion of current work investigating gene-environment interaction provides a good background for the manner in which specific genes interact with aspects of environment to influence personality, emotion, and health risk, with a specific focus on genes involved with serotonin. Scientists know that this neurotransmitter plays an important role in mood regulation and in such psychological problems as depression. Genes do not operate in isolation, but their effects vary in different environments.

Although mental processes hold our interest in their own right, current research in the area of health psychology is discovering ways in which mental processes influence not just mental health but physical health as well. The article on emotions and health focuses on how emotions can affect health via physiological responses to various environmental events. Such negative emotions as fear and anger can damage health whereas positive emotions such as optimism have protective effects. A recent Singapore workshop showed the importance of these relationships: teaching people skills for dealing with upsetting situations and building stronger relationships with others can help reduce negative emotions, increase positive emotions, and decrease physiological responses to stress -- effects that can lead to improvement in physical health.

The word 'mind', especially in the psychology of the West, is used to signify a general operation of the psyche inside, including understanding, willing and feeling. The word 'mind' is a general term in Western psychology, but in the psychology of Yoga, a more detailed analysis has been made. 'Mind' is not a proper English translation of what the Yoga calls 'Chitta', especially in the system of Patanjali. The entire mind-stuff is called Chitta. It is better to use the word 'psyche' instead of the word 'mind', because the former denotes a larger composite structure than the single function indicated by the word 'mind'. Mind is that which thinks in an indeterminate manner; the intellect is that which thinks in a determinate manner; the ego is that which asserts the individuality of one's own self. There are other functions of the psyche such as memory, often associated with the subconscious level. It is impossible for anyone to be aware that something is outside, unless there is an isolated thinking or an individualising principle, known in the Vedanta psychology as the Antahkarana, and in the

Yoga psychology of Patanjali as Chitta. "Antahkarana" is a Sanskrit term, which literally translated into English, would mean, "the internal organ". That is perhaps the best way we can put it in English. The internal organ, by which we cognise or perceive things outside, is the Antahkarana. The same thing is called Chitta in Yoga psychology. We need not pay much attention to the peculiar distinguishing factors or features or connotations associated with these words in the different schools of thought. But, it is important to remember that a psychic function inwardly as an individualising principle is necessary in order to assert that the world is outside or that anything is outside.

As discussed before that really things are not outside. As such, our persistence that things are outside poses a big mystery. Obviously, the functions of the mind are a blunder. What we call the mind is clearly a miscalculated affirmation. A terrible catastrophe has befallen us in the shape of our persisting in an error which is contrary to the truths of the universe. If the universe or the world is not really outside us, and if we are not seeing nothing but seeing externality, we are surely in a world of blunders. We are perpetually committing mistakes after mistakes, with the result that our entire life may be regarded as a heap or a mountain of mistakes, all mistakes being the consequences of our original self-affirmation called variously as the mind, the Chitta, and the Antahkarana. It is easy enough to appreciate why the mind is to be controlled. The mind is to be controlled, because it is the essence of mischief-making, because it is the root cause of all the troubles in life. The mind is the central mischief in the individual personality. It is the great dacoit, as Acharya Sankara calls it, the thief who robs us of all wealth and makes us paupers, looking beggarly in the eyes of all people. Why should the mind be controlled? Why should there be a need felt to restrain the Antahkarana? Because the mind is the principle

of mistakenly asserting the existence of an externality which is really not there. The nature of things is such that the mind's functions, as they are being carried on now, are uncalled for, unwarranted, and thoroughly erroneous. We do not see things as they are, and therefore, we cannot act also correctly, inasmuch as action is preceded by thought, and thought is a mistaken movement of ourselves.

Now comes Yoga with a great message to us. Our life being a movement in the wrong direction, landing us in repeated problems and rebirths, it is necessary to station ourselves in the true position in which we essentially are, and not lose our own selves. Loss of self is the greatest of losses. We have lost ourselves in imagining that we are not the thing that we actually are in relation to the nature of the universe. We have lost ourselves in imagining that we are isolated persons - men, women and children and many other things - in relation to the nature of the universe. In order that we may be freed from this turmoil or sorrow called Samsara, or life in this empirical world, Yoga comes as a rescue, as a message of hope and solace, telling us that there is no hope for humanity, that there is no chance of peace prevailing anywhere, if self-restraint is not going to be the law of life. Self-restraint, in a way, is the same as mind restraint, because we are practically the same as the mind. We do not make much of a difference between self restraint and restraint of the mind. Because, for us Jivas, empirical individuals the mind itself is the sorrow. What we are, as we appear now, is just the mind operating. The need for self-control or control of the mind arises on account of the need for perfection which is the goal of everyone. We do not wish to be suffering like this. Our final ambition, aspiration or desire is redress of grief and attainment of freedom which we have not seen with our eyes in this world. None has seen really what freedom is. Everyone is bound in one way or the other. When we imagine that we have got out of a

bondage and entered a state of freedom, actually we have entered into another kind of bondage in the name of freedom, a fact which we will realise sometime later. There is no such thing as real freedom in this world, because freedom is the same as attunement with the state of ultimate perfection, or at least, a degree of perfection. If we are far away from even the least percentage of what perfection can be, and our ideals and ideologies in life pursue a phantasm, we cannot hope to have peace in this world by any amount of technological progress. People today are carried away by gadgets and instruments, and researches in the field of externalised technology. This is not an achievement. If by science is meant the logical knowledge of the nature of things, science is wonderful: it is unavoidable in life. But, if by science is meant technological inventions, setting up of factories and industrial organisation, science is a bane on human life. It will not help us, because it carries us further away from the centre of reality, and compels us to affirm more and more that the world is outside us, rather than the fact that we are inseparable from the world.

Yoga plays a greater role in the management of mental health. The science of Yoga, is a psychology of a philosophical nature. The very introduction of the system of Yoga by Patanjali is by way of an instruction that the mind has to be controlled - *Yogas chitta-vritti-nirodhah*. Patanjali does not go into the details of the philosophical background of the necessity to control the mind, the background that comes in Samkhya and Vedanta. Yoga is control of the mind, restraint of the mind-stuff. Yoga is *Chitta-vritti-nirodhah*. The moment we hear this, we begin to get excited. Yoga is control of the mind. Therefore, we have to control

ourselves. We begin to close our eyes, hold our nose, and become nervous and tense in our system! That is an unfortunate result that often follows from an over-enthusiasm, emotionally aroused in ourselves by hearing the very word Yoga. We should not be stirred up into an emotion, just because we listen to the word Yoga mentioned by somebody. A calm and sober understanding is Yoga. Yoga is not emotion. It is not stirring oneself into any kind of made-up or artificial individuality.

Now we know what 'union' actually means in the language of Yoga proper. It is a complete transcendence of our finitude. A separatist tendency persists in us, and Yoga is nothing but overcoming the barriers of this individuality by entering into the oceanic expanse of our true nature, which is also the nature of everybody. When the mind is restrained in this manner, *Chitta-vritti-nirodhah* is affected. This false feeling that we are different from others, that things are constituted of isolated particularities, leaves us; and we get established in our essential nature, which is the community of existence in all things, and not an isolated individuality. This establishment of one's own self in one's own true nature, in universal character, is the aim of Yoga.

When the person who has restrained the mind-stuff has realised that the things are not outside himself, the object ceases to be, and with it, the inside also goes. So, no more is there such a thing as subjectivity or individuality for that person. It does not exist anymore. Thus from the restraint of the mind or the control of the mind follows a re-installation of one's own self in one's own true nature. All negative emotions can be eliminated through various practices of Yoga. Practice of Yoga brings a positive attitude in life.

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