

YOGA AND GANDHIAN THOUGHTS

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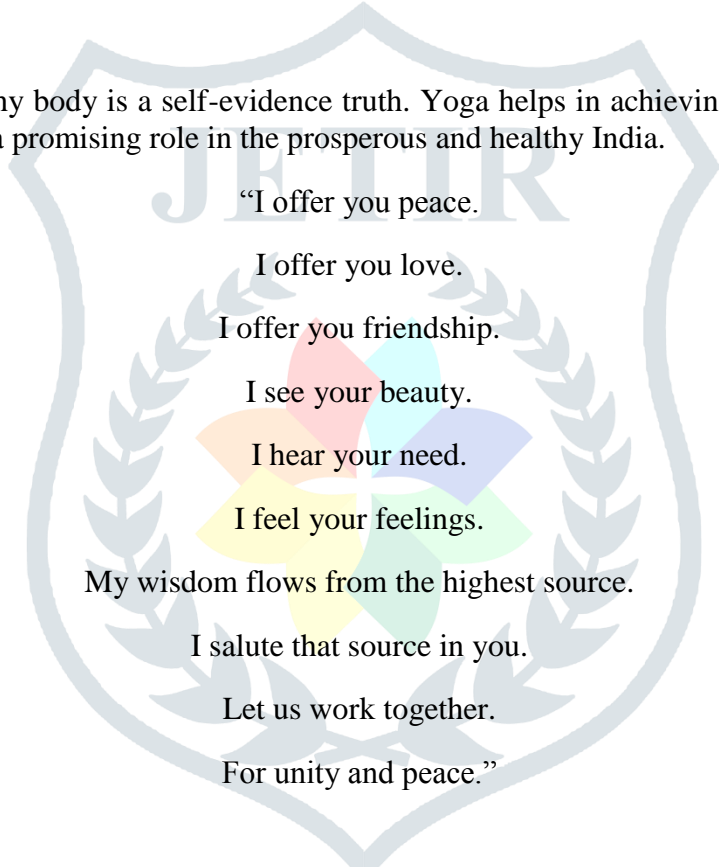
Abstract

This authenticity is what made Gandhi a great leader. He compensated for this by a nice sense of humor, but this unfortunately did not lead him to re-examine his own stubbornness. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali describe 5 Yamas: Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truthfulness), Astēya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (continence) and Aparigraha (non-coveting). They also describe 5 Niyamas: Śauca (cleanliness), Santhōsha (contentment), Tapas (austerity), Svādhyāya (self-introspection) and Īswara Pradhāna (contemplation on God). Gandhi adhered to all these prescriptions very sincerely.

Key word :- Yoga, Gandhian thought

Introduction

A healthy mind in a healthy body is a self-evidence truth. Yoga helps in achieving this through its different practices. Thus Yoga has a promising role in the prosperous and healthy India.



“I offer you peace.
 I offer you love.
 I offer you friendship.
 I see your beauty.
 I hear your need.
 I feel your feelings.
 My wisdom flows from the highest source.
 I salute that source in you.
 Let us work together.
 For unity and peace.”

~ Mahatma Gandhi

This authenticity is what made Gandhi a great leader. He compensated for this by a nice sense of humor, but this unfortunately did not lead him to re-examine his own stubbornness. Gandhi was strongly influenced by two Dharmic traditions: Vaishnavism and Jainism. The closest to a Guru that he had was a Jain monk – Shrimad Rajchandra, who unfortunately died very young in 1901, before Gandhi faced his gravest political battles. As we discussed earlier, Gandhi had a philosophical outlook that was quite similar to Daoism, but he did not sincerely practice its Indian parallel i.e Śaivism or other related Śramāna traditions. Instead, he adhered to his ancestral tradition of Vaishnavism, where his heterodoxy and abnormal spiritual practices definitely placed him in an odd position. But he did achieve a fairly high level of Yogic mastery. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali describe 5 Yamas: Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truthfulness), Astēya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (continence) and Aparigraha (non-coveting). They also describe 5 Niyamas: Śauca (cleanliness), Santhōsha (contentment), Tapas (austerity), Svādhyāya (self-introspection) and Īswara Pradhāna (contemplation on God). Gandhi adhered to all these prescriptions very sincerely. They did not remain as mere moral ideals for him, but tangible courses of action. In this regard, he was truly a Karma Yogi and was quite sincere in his

spiritual quest. But it can be argued that his lack of systematic study under a Guru produced in him a skewed perception of Dharma.

“The body is your temple. Keep it pure and clean for the soul to reside in.”

–B.K.S Iyengar

Yoga is the most perfect lifestyle module as it is comprehensive and holistic in its nature. Yogic principles of lifestyle help to strengthen and develop positive health enabling us to withstand stress better. This Yogic “health insurance” has achieved by normalizing the perception of stress, optimizing the reaction to it and by releasing the pent-up stress effectively through the practice of various Yogic practices. Yoga is a holistic and integral science of life dealing with physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of an individual and society

Lifestyle is the way people live and this has immense influence on the status of health or disease an individual. Since one’s lifestyle has developed early in life, it is advisable to cultivate healthy lifestyle in early childhood. Many factors determine one’s lifestyle. Economic status determines incidence of under-nutrition in poor and obesity in the rich. Cultural values of the society dictate the dietary preferences in the population. Sedentary life is a major factor for coronary artery disease while personal habits like smoking and alcoholism determine the incidence of heart disease and cirrhosis of liver. Exercise, healthy diet, rest, and relaxation are important components of lifestyle.

Using Yogic principles and practices for healing is called “Yoga Therapy”. Yoga for therapy purposes is a ‘by-product’ of the Yoga Sadhana. According to Yoga Sūtra of Patanjali, the practice of Yoga leads one to realize his true state: “tadā drañōuū svarūpe’vasthanam”- “Then (when yoga is practiced) the Perceiver resides in its true form”.

Gandhi justified his ideas through aphorisms in Hinduism such as “Ahimsa Paramo Dharmah”. This sentence is from the Mahabharata, appearing in the discourse of Bhishma to Yudishtara from his death bed. This is typically translated as “Non-violence (Ahimsa) is the highest Dharma”. But this is a mistranslation. Tellingly, Ahimsa was not termed as ‘Uttama Dharma’ (highest Dharma) – it is not possible to rank the different Dharmas in a hierarchy. Dharma is based on Rta, which is the cosmic order that is visualized as the movement of a wheel. This eternal circular motion is Dharma, which is centered on the experiencing self (Purusha), but which naturally varies in direction depending on local context. The word ‘Parama’ refers to the most essential aspect of this motion, which is the stillness of the Purusha at the center. Since this Purusha is common (Samāna) to all beings (Jīvas) in the universe, this ‘Parama Dharma’ is also shared by all beings as the Sāmānya Dharma. At the Parama level, there should be no violence, as there is neither any desire nor any ego to engage in violence. But very few people reach this ideal in their own lifetimes. In order to live in their bodies, they have no recourse but to engage in violence.

Gandhiji said, 'It is better to enjoy through the body than to be enjoying the thought of it. It is good to disapprove of sensual desires as soon as they arise in the mind and try to keep them down, but if, for want of physical enjoyment, the mind wallows in thoughts of enjoyment, then it is legitimate to satisfy the hunger of the body.

Yoga Sadhana is considered panacea for a meaningful living. Its orientation to a comprehensive health, both individual and social, makes it a worthy practice for the people of all religions, races and nationalities. Yoga has promising role to play in missions ‘Swachha Bharat’ and “Swastha Bharat” through its basic principles and practices.

Reference

1) The various references of “Ahimsa Paramo Dharmah” in Hindu texts are discussed in Hindupedia. I disagree with the translation of Parama as “the highest”, as pointed out in this article.

- 2) <http://www.yogamag.net/archives/1983/joct83/gany2.shtml>
- 3) <http://healthyindiachronicle.in/dr-ishwar-v-basavaraddi-director-mdniy-role-yoga-make-prosperous-healthy-india/>
- 4) Chip Hartranft, *The Yoga-Sutra of Patanjali: A New Translation with Commentary*, (Bostn, Shambhala Publications,2003), Swami Venkatesananda, *Enlightened Living, The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali*, (Elgin,Cape Province, S.Africa, The Chiltern Yoga Trust, 1975. Electronic edition - 2008) are some of the authentic translations cum commentary on Yoga Sutra. There is a plethora of literature on yoga most of which are amateurish. Some of the authentic studies are (1) B.K.S.Iyengar, *Light on Yoga*, (New Delhi, Harper Collins India,1979), (2) B.K.S.Iyengar, *The Art of Yoga*, (Boston, Unwin, 1985), (3) I.K.Taimini, *Glimpses*
- 5) wami Satynanda Saraswati, *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*, (Munger, India, Bihar School of Yoga, 1969), B.K.S.Iyengar, *Light on Pranayama:The Yogic Art of Breathing* (New York,Crossroad Publishing Co., 1995) are two of the most widely acclaimed books on pranayama

