

Effect of Yoga on Emotional Health and Unconscious Mind

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Abstract: -

In today's era, somehow every person is directly or indirectly gets affected by emotions they face individually or socially. Since the increasing use of technology in our daily life have drastically changed our lifestyle. Our vision, thoughts, feelings and behaviour are directed towards outside world which as a result leads to much negative emotions than positive.

In the paper, the concept of emotions and how to tackle it from Indian psychological perception and to change the direction of emotions to inside which is yogic point of view. This is going to give a basic idea that the root cause of all our emotional turmoil is from within and is created by self. We need proper vision and guidance to know the unconscious mind and its effect towards our emotions. Also the effects of various yogic techniques from ancient texts which aims at stability of emotional health with increased awareness level of conscious mind and its root cause is in unconscious mind.

Keywords: - Yoga, Emotions, Conscious Mind, Unconscious Mind, Chitta.

Introduction: -

The word 'yoga' derived from sanskrit root 'yuj' which means harmony, balance of mind, body and consciousness. At higher level, it is the union of Atman(self) and Paramatman(supreme self), which is considered as the ultimate aim of yoga , also called as the state of samadhi, self-realization. To achieve this experiential process several yogic techniques are given by ancient sages.

There are two prominent ways Hatha yoga and Raja yoga, through which self- realization can be achieved . Hatha yogic texts includes different body cleansing processes, asanas, pranayama, mudra and bandha, etc.

Yoga sutras by sage patanjali is an exceptional scripture on Raja yoga which gives a pathways to samadhi by eight stages called ashtanga yoga.

The study and researches on emotions and its working is a new concept in western psychology ,for example - work by Antonio Damasio (1994) in emotion studies, by Joseph Ledoux (1996) in neurology, by Paul Ekman (2003) in biology and facial expression of emotions, by Daniel Goleman (1997) in emotions, medicine and health, as well as his contribution to emotional intelligence and education (Goleman, 1996) , by brain, body and emotions in candace Pert's thesis of the body as a 'second brain' (Pert,1997) and in philosophy (Robert Solomon, 2004 a, b) . More recent works in emotional awareness, the mindful brain and buddha's. All these contributions are remarkable in emotional studies. It is important to know the basic meaning of emotion to further understand how it works. The word 'emotion' comes from latin word 'emovere' which means to excite. Kelinginna & Kelinginna, (1981) said that at present 92 definitions of emotion has been given which describes different aspects and that is why differ from each other.

According to Geldard (1963) – “emotions are inciters to action” According to Baron, Byrne and Kantowitz (1980) – “By emotion we mean a subjective feeling state involving physiological arousal, accompanied by characteristic behaviours”. According to Santrock (2000)- “We will define emotion as feeling or affect, that can involve physiological arousal, conscious experience and behavioural expression”. (1)

In the above definitions we can see the concept of emotions from modern psychological viewpoint is restricted to behaviour, conscious awareness and physiological connection. We are familiar with various emotions such as Joyous, love, compassion, angry, calm, fear, sadness, grief ,etc. The emotions are neither negative nor positive in themselves but on the basis of its impact or result in our life it is considered so.

In the Bhagavad Gita (16.5), the divine character or fate (sampad) - which is contrasted with the demonic character or fate - is attributed with positive emotions like fearlessness, purity of mind, generosity, self control, rectitude, non harming, truthfulness, freedom from anger,

peacefulness, non covetousness, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness. These qualities are said to lead to freedom. By contract, the undesirable qualities associated with the demonic character are said to lead to bondage, the exact opposite of freedom. **(2)** Since modern psychology and its researches are more focused on physiology and behaviour, example -human neuro-imaging studies reveal differential activation of the amygdala in response to consciously presented facial expressions of fear versus anger (Whalen, 1998). **(3)** Indian psychology works with root cause and its approach is inner experiential method.

Sigmund Freud in his psychoanalytic viewpoint has given concept of mind with two aspects- first topographical aspect (which consists of three levels- conscious, subconscious and unconscious) and second is dynamic or structural aspect (which describes Id, Ego and Superego) as basic instincts to originate mental conflicts. Conscious mind is the smallest part of mind, we can see our emotions manifest from brain system and their interactions with cognitive processing. But in modern psychology, Freud in his various clinical researchers proved that our thoughts, feelings, behaviour, emotions are result of repressed desires, immoral and antisocial wishes in unconscious mind, which is the largest and dominating part among three. Later on, psychoanalysis developed as a therapeutic method for various mental disorders. The exploration of the Freud's theory of unconscious and its relation with emotions has its own limit.

Yoga psychology gives vast, depth, diverse and holistic concept of mind and its relation with emotions. 'Chitta' is termed as the mind - stuff or mental substance. It is the ground floor, as it were from it proceed the three vrittis, viz, Manas, Buddhi and Ahankara. Subconscious mind is termed 'chitta' in Vedanta. Much of our Subconsciousness consists of submerged experiences, memories thrown into the background but recoverable. **(4)** Basically, all these three levels- conscious, subconscious and unconscious exist in 'chitta', which is also storehouse of samskaras or impressions.

Western concept of unconscious level of mind: -

Exceptional contribution of Sigmund Freud particularly for unconscious mind. He noted that what we consciously experience, aware of it is only minor part of our mind while a major and huge part of our mind is the unconscious. And this unconscious mind is the source of conflicts

between the structural aspect of mind which consists of Id (based on pleasure principles), Ego (based on reality principles) and Superego (based on morality principle). According to Freud, when a child is born, there is nothing except Id or unconscious and as he /she grows and comes in contact with the environment, the reality develops, they called this the sense of reality or consciousness, the ego. The reality is influenced by various taboos and constraints on the family and the society in the form of moral principles that characterize the Super ego. (5)

According to Freud, unconscious is the deepest layer and the most significant part where repressed or suppressed thoughts, memories, desires are embedded of which conscious part is unaware. The subconscious level of mind is like a thin layer between conscious and unconscious from where desires and urges occur in conscious mind with little effort but deep within unconscious, opposite nature of desires like love and hatred remains there without any resistance. These suppressed desires do not disappear but emerges in conscious mind in disguised form of dreams or psychopathologies in everyday life due to restriction of ego at conscious level.

Many cognitive psychologists' studies both explicit (conscious) and implicit (unconscious) processes. There is now a large body of evidence that our perception of the world around us is partly unconscious, although the result of the perceptual process is conscious. Many aspects of memory are unconscious, while episodic memory involves the record of conscious events in the past. With the advent of functional imaging technology, it has become possible to make careful comparisons between brain events involving conscious versus unconscious cognition. (6)

Carl Jung was another famous psychologist who was student and colleague of Freud. Jung seems to be influenced by yoga philosophy, he expanded the concept of unconscious into two parts - personal unconscious and collective unconscious. According to Jung, the unconscious is the second important part of mind where psychic processes are not related with ego. In Jung's view, personal unconscious is the upper layer of unconscious where illogical experiences are embedded as well as it also includes experiences which was never found in conscious mind. While collective unconscious is the deepest and largest part of unconscious which consists of inherited experiences of previous generations and ancestors. Contents of this level are not dormant, in fact it affects emotions, thoughts and behaviour at conscious level.

Indian or yogic concept of unconscious: -

Freud's and Jung's contribution in the field of unconscious is commendable but they had no idea that the complete integration of the unconscious could be achieved. The western psychology was lacking something which was found complete and holistic in yogic concept long ago. 'Chitta' in yogic concept is the "unconscious" of modern psychology, that is unknown. It is like 'storehouse', where person's desires deep rooted impressions or samskaras are kept. Swami Satyanand tells us- chitta means 'individual consciousness'. This is the whole consciousness of the person. It is the combination of the person's conscious day -to- day mind, plus all the deep memories, including the repressed material, plus all the subtle dimensions of the expanded mind (sometimes called 'super-conscious'). (7) Individual consciousness has no separate identity. In yogic viewpoint, that individual consciousness is part of the supreme consciousness.

Vritti (Whirlpool, thought waves) arises in the mind ocean. It operates for some time. Then it sinks below the threshold of normal consciousness. From the surface of the conscious mind where in it was uppermost for sometime, it sinks down deep into the region of the subconscious mind (chitta). There, it continues to be a subliminal action and becomes a samskaras or impressions. A conscious action whether cognitive, affective or conative assumes a potential and hidden (sukshma and avyakta) form just below the threshold of consciousness. This is termed as samskara. (8)

Emotions and its connection with unconscious mind: -

The mental processes are not restricted to conscious awareness alone but it is extended much towards unconscious part. The greater portion of the mind is of unconscious. As a person can hold one fact at a time in conscious awareness which means only a fraction of our awareness say it ten percent we carry and rest are unconscious. Emotions are inseparable and fundamental part of human survival . In yogic view , whatever emotions we see at conscious level has its root in unconscious mind, indeed the nature of emotion depends upon the nature of our samskaras. If we have good samskaras, we will have good emotions and vice- versa.

There are three components to emotions–

(a) Neurological.

(b) Physiological and expressive.

(c) Experiencing emotion.

(a) Neurological components of emotions- these are generated in the brain and occur at two levels-first is sub cortical emotional responses from the lower levels. These occur automatically suddenly and quickly mainly in the area of the limbic system in the midbrain the so called 'mammalian brain'. They especially defend the individual against harm by creating a sudden action of fight or avoidance. Second is cortical responses, which use the higher centres of the neo- cortex the modern, human part of the brain. These create a more advanced quality of the emotions for use in more complex situations and subtler interpersonal relationships.

(b) Physiological component - It is related to autonomic nervous system and the endocrine glands. They prepare the body to respond in the appropriate way to the emotion and thus deal with the event that triggered the emotion.

Expressive component- These are the expressions of emotion and their counterparts in our posture. They express themselves especially through the facial muscles such as smiling or looking angry.

(c) Experiencing emotions- This is the aspect of our emotions and feeling with which we are most familiar -the way we feel – joyous, angry, calm , loving and all the others to well known to us . Blocked emotions may become repressed into our unconscious mind and cause trouble for the rest of our life. (9)

Yogic techniques:-

- In Hatha yoga, techniques are given for purification of Nadis (flow of prana & energy channels), where sushumna is the nadi through which spiritual energy or the Kundalini energy is awakened .
- Hatha yoga is a science of controlling the mind by controlling the prana and for this various asanas , pranayama are practiced to remove blockages where prana flows freely which leads to physical, mental and emotional stability.

- Chitta having desires and will is a vicious circle, there is creation of impressions or samskaras when it flows outside through sense organs with memories formation. At the highest state of samadhi, these samskaras has no effect, they become inactive. **(10)**
- Sage patanjali has given every aspect of mind and its union with higher consciousness in patanjali yoga sutras which comprises four chapters called pada- samadhi, sadhana, vibhooti and kaivalya with total 195 sutras. In the second sutra of first chapter – ‘yogaschitta vritti nirodhah’, patanjali describes about yoga as removal of fluctuations of mind in chitta, here chitta includes conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind. Vritti is the circular pattern of modes of mind which includes five kinds- pramana, viparyaya, vikalpa, nidra and smriti. And nirodhah is the removal of blockages. So yoga is the evolution of consciousness. Patanjali describes different means to achieve this state of samadhi – abhyasa and vairagya, ishvarapranidhana, ashtanga yoga (yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi) . **(11)**

Researches on effect of yoga on emotional health and unconscious mind:-

1. **Yoga nidra** – It is the deep relaxation with inner awareness. This technique was developed by swami satyananda saraswati. Yoga nidra results in enhancement of emotional and mental health with increased awareness level of conscious mind.
In Hatha yoga pradiipika, swami swatmarama referred yoga nidra as the state of turiya, which is supreme consciousness.
2. **Nadi shodhan pranayama** – This pranayama is the alternate nostril breathing. It improves autonomic function and normalizes the brain waves patterns. Swami swatmarama in hatha pradiipika states that with regular practice of nadi shodhan for 3 months leads to purification of nadis.

Conclusion: -

The term 'unconscious mind' now is not unknown. Modern psychology explores the unconscious 'from outside' and clinical approaches which has its own limit. While in this field, Sigmund Freud's work introduced a new insight. Carl Jung expanded the concept of unconscious into individual and collective unconscious but Jung, like Freud, did not reach to the depth of unconscious. The deepest layer and the unexplored part of the unconscious was certainly

experienced by Indian psychologists and sages. According to yoga psychology, 'chitta' is the root cause of emotions which is connected to samskaras. But we also see how emotions appear from brain system and cognitive activities to conscious level.

Yoga texts of patanjali yoga sutras, hatha yoga pradipika, elaborates the concept of mind (chitta), and its fluctuations results in emotional and mental turmoil . These aspects can be balanced, stabilized and harmony of mind-body-spirit can be achieved with its highest state of consciousness with practice of yogic techniques.

Since the inception of emotions are from 'chitta' or 'unconscious'. All these are not separate, independent or have any distinctive processes. The unconscious mind communicates with conscious mind through the medium of emotions and as we become more aware of unconscious, it becomes conscious and in yoga, the ultimate goal is to know the unknown (which is unconscious) and purify all the emotions stored in it to achieve higher consciousness and contribute to greater social harmony and world peace.

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