

An Investigation into whether YOGA has the propensity to improve the moral conduct of individuals

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Abstract:

It is common belief in ancient Indian Vedas that moral values should be instilled right from the very start of life i.e. childhood. The Indian education system endorses this by adopting yoga as part of the school curriculum. It is believed that, as the students grow older the character traits start to show marks of yoga. The students behave in a more refined and intellectually improved manner. The yogic activities make them exercise self-control and self-discipline in their day to day life. The society becomes a better place as there is enrichment of moral values and prosperity for all. YOGA is thus believed to be the catalyst to this upliftment of moral stature in human beings. This study makes an evaluation of how and where yoga makes this impression on human mind during the early childhood in school. The investigation is based on the existing knowledge on yoga and its influence on moral values.

Key words: Indian Vedas, YOGA, moral conduct, Indian education system

1. Introduction

The materialistic life-style of today has had a depreciating effect on the character of an average individual. It is considered

a big concern for the society and its well being. This is substantiated further by a sudden rise of the crime-rate by the children and adolescents. In the absence of any reformatting program, the children are easily becoming victim to deep rooted hate and anger. Ironically, the guardians also don't take any serious steps as there is lesser time available for the family. The professional lives have virtually over-powered our family-fabric. The parents don't really have the intent or the time to inculcate nobility of character in their children. In absence of any parental guidance, the children don't really get the right nourishment for their souls. Yoga comes across as the most appropriate tool for filling up this gap. The saints [rishis] made the ritual system just to make sure that moral values remain the key learning of childhood. Yoga is believed to be an enhancer of moral values as it succeeds in bringing the attitudinal changes in a person's life. If taught early, the impressions are long lasting and visible. Intervention of yoga in school curriculum is still a big challenge as a lot of educators still don't believe on yogic activities. This study is prompted by the fact that yoga is still seen for its therapeutic effects and little for the moral values it inculcates [Mukerji, 2002]. The investigation would try to unveil facts and academic findings that speak about whether yoga has the propensity to improve the moral conduct of individuals.

2. Yoga: How it Induces Moral Behavior?

Moral behavior is a concept of conscience and little the psychoanalysts can do if it is not taught from the childhood [Udhaykumar, 2002]. Donselson [1973] believes that morality is a person's intrinsically motivated resistance to temptation and from his guilt feeling that follow acts of transgression. Especially in children, moral values play a big role on shaping up this resistance early in the life. Yoga is supposed to have a refining effect as it cleanses and uplifts the element of morality.

The studies find yoga of a big role in inculcating ethical, moral and spiritual values in children. Yoga is not just about Pranayama and Asana, in fact it reaches far and influences the moral and ethical values of life. The spiritual dimension of yoga is about the development of values. The yogic activities try to evoke feeling of self-actualisation in one for realizing one's true potential. Yama, Niyama, Dhyana and Pratyahara are found to be very helpful in developing one's moral character. Meditation [Dhyana] is also believed to be an important activity of self-introspection and weeding out the irrational feelings.

An in-depth investigation of the Vedas would reveal that *Yama* and *Niyama* are the principles of day to day life and must be practiced coherently. The rishis consider them as the universal codes of conduct which are an important part of our personal and social life. Social life is governed hugely by the principles of *Yama* and Personal life is based entirely on the principles of *Niyama*; together *Yama* and *Niyama* are taught under *Ashtanga Yoga*.

Yama teaches the 5 principles of Ahimsa [non-violence], Asteya [non-stealing], Satya [Truthfulness], Aparigraha [Non-collectiveness] and Brahmacharya [Abstinence]

Niyama teaches the 5 principles of Tapas [austerity], Shaucha [cleanliness], Swadhyaya [study of self and good literature], Santosha [satisfaction] and Ishwarpranidhana [worship of God]

Madanmohan [2008] has claimed that yoga is widely recognized as a psycho-somatic-spiritual discipline for achieving union and harmony between our body, soul and mind. The yogic activity helps in attaining the ultimate union of our individual consciousness with our universal consciousness. A regular and persistent yogic activity would unfold a unique spiritual personality for developing our personality in a holistic and integrated manner. These claims have also been studied by the scientific researchers. Kjaer et al [2002] has claimed that *Yoga Nidra* meditation causes 65% increase of endogenous dopamine

leading to a much better executive control of CNS activities. Similarly, Streeter et al [2007] have also claimed that a session of yoga leads to an increase of brain GABA levels and brings down anxiety and depression disorders. Yadav et al [2005] and Maini [2000] have made similar findings about *Sahaj Yoga*. It is claimed that Sahaj Yoga brings the stress down and makes the person more aware of the self.

The proponents of value education have also emphasized on yoga intervention for giving extensive meaning to the term moral education [National Education Policy, 1986]. Dr Kothari [1964] believed that skills through science and technology must be balanced through an equal subsistence of human values. The new tribe of educators have confirmed – the redressing of mental and physical derangement need to be encapsulated into one word – *yoga*. The NEP [1986] mentions – yoga means streamlining and unifying our psychic and physical functions with those of nature and living with constant awareness of the consequences of our activities and deeds. The policy makes a recommendation of using *Thuriya yoga* for cleansing soul and disappearing all bad imprints. The yogic activity helps in spreading eternal wisdom and reflecting each other's thoughts.

The concept of value education speaks not just about education but also about moral education [social, intellectual and emotional]. The guidelines mention yoga as the tool for shaping up human values i.e. tolerance, honesty, self-control, justice, freedom and compassion [NCERT, 2000]. *Dyan yoga* and *Karma Yoga* have been recommended for transcending conative, cognitive and psychomotor development of students.

During the early years, Dr S Radhakrishnan had said – the new policy on education should develop humility, wisdom and selflessness, based on the 5 principles of Panchashila – *Alobha, Ahimsa, Satyavachana, Brahmacharya* and *Surapannishedha*. Mukerji [2002] synthesizes yoga with value education and finds yoga essential for philosophy and spiritualism. Practicing yoga shapes up a certain behavior that

believes in right or wrong. The researcher has commented that Bhakti yoga and Karma yoga should be made part of the present education system as they promote humanity. Udhaykumar [2002] links yoga with spirituality: spirituality is an aspiration, an urgency to discover, to realize oneself, to know, to understand one's true nature. Yoga comes across as the key to open our hearts and minds to what we call humanity. Similar comments are made by Pendse et al [2002] who have opined that – Yoga promotes intellectual learning. Its different forms such as meditation, pranayama and satvik ensure that students learn self-discipline, integrity and mental focus. These findings have been substantiated by Bhogal et al [2002] in a study of 25 students who practiced yoga for a period of over 9 months. The control group in this study showed a remarkable and favorable reduction of neurotic tendencies. The students showed a much improved response on social values, aesthetic values and religious values.

3. Conclusion

The present work makes an investigation into how yoga intervention can induce moral values among the individuals and particularly school going children. It is believed that yoga helps improve the physical fitness and the health, but there is little evidence about how it improves the moral character of an individual. The question was important as the claims about yoga and moral values had to be evaluated both critically and scientifically. It was found that yoga does have a psycho-physiological reason for being an enhancer of moral values. It was found that *Yoga Nidra* meditation causes an increase of endogenous dopamine leading to a much better executive control of CNS activities. Similarly, a session of yoga leads to an increase of brain GABA levels and brings down anxiety and depression disorders. *Sahaj Yoga* was also found to bring the stress down and make the person more aware of the self. Yoga

also had a pronounced effect on intellectual learning. Its different forms such as meditation, pranayama and satvik ensure that students learn self-discipline, integrity and mental focus. A religious practice of yogic activities led to a remarkable and favorable reduction of neurotic tendencies. *Yama* and *Niyama* should therefore be made part of day to day life and must be practiced coherently right from the childhood.

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