

CONSERVATION OF ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT THROUGH YOGIC LIFESTYLE

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ABSTRACT

To fulfil self-need, human beings indiscriminately exploited ecological resources and thereby created serious ecological crisis and environmental degradation. Now, the situation has become so chronic and alarming that if sound measures are not taken, it may shortly arise the condition of extermination and devastation of human race. Fortunately, man has now, realized the vital role of ecological virginity and environmental purity for his healthy and happy existence. Hence, various conservative measures have been implemented and enacted to correct current ecological ravages. But it is to be regretted that after the enactment of hundreds of laws and introduction of environmental education and mass awareness programs; graveness of the problem has not yet been solved, though they demonstrated some degree of success. So the problem is still existing as a serious concern.

In fact, success in the protection and conservation of ecology and environment lies at the root of attitudinal change and behavioural modification of a person. An individual must be free from greed, vanity, violence and thirst for self-satisfaction and over consumption. Until these deep rooted negative traits of personality are replaced by positive ones, mere enactment of laws will not be enough solution to ecological assault. Yogic lifestyle, through its ethical values under 'Yamas' and 'Niyamas' and psycho-physical practices refine the mental state, behaviour and attitudes of an individual. At this refined state of personality, individual start believing that all the creations are divine and life is meant for adoration not for violence and destruction. He also experiences that the whole nature is just like an essential part of his body without which he cannot survive. This unified state of consciousness paves the way for conservation of Ecology and Environment. As yogic lifestyle brings forth the feeling of 'oneness' or 'ecological consciousness', it can be suggested as a vary congenial model for conservation of ecology and environment.

Key Words : Ecology, Environment, Conservation, Yama, Niyama,
Psychophysical practices.

INTRODUCTION

Man is a dominant organism of most ecosystems and like other organism, he also depends on his environment for basic amenities as well as for higher cultural needs. But in recent times, rapid progress of science and

technology and the pressure of increasing population placed burden on the naturally occurring and sustaining processes of ecosystem. Indeed, to fulfil self-need, human beings indiscriminately exploited ecological resources such as air, water, space, vegetation

and other non- human species and thereby created serious ecological crisis and environmental degradation. Now, the situation has become so chronic and alarming that if sound measures are not taken, it may shortly arises the condition of extinction, extermination and devastation of human race from the earth.

Fortunately, man has now realized the vital role of ecological virginity and environmental purity for his healthy and happy existence. This is why, various measures like environmental education and awareness programs, sustainable development and protection policies and legislation have been introduced and implemented to conserve and correct current ecological ravages. However, the conservation of ecology and environment is not a new concept. It goes back to the prehistoric period and found to be deeply rooted in the spiritual practice of religious traditions of India.

Conservation of ecology and environment through ages

Interpretation of the seals of Indus Valley Civilization unravels the fact that animals were considered as sacred and they were worshiped.¹¹ A meditative proto-yogin surrounded by a great number of animals might suggests the co-existence of men with animals which declares the close harmony of man with nature and reverence for all living beings³ in prehistoric Indus Valley Civilization. The Yajur Veda proclaims “May all beings look at me with a friendly eye, May I do likewise and may we look on each other with the eyes of a friend (36.18). In Mahabharata, it is mentioned that one should not behave to another in such a way, which one regards as injurious to oneself (XIII : 113.8). In yoga philosophy, Maharishi Patanjali advised to observe non-violence in order to alleviate enmity (Yoga Sutra, II: 35) because it develops the feeling of friendliness to all living and non-living objects. Buddhism uphold the idea that animal life should be protected.¹⁴

Great Emperor Ashoka (274 BC-232 BC) implemented several laws for kind treatment to animals by restricting meat consumption, curtailing hunting and establishing hospitals and roadside watering stations.¹³ Jainism established the idea of “non-injury” as a great vow. The saints of Digambara sect observe no digging, bathing, lighting or extinguishing of fire and fanning to protect earth, water, fire and air bodies respectively (Acharanga Sutra, 1:1).

In the mediaeval period, Mughal Emperors, especially Akbar exhibited great interest in the protection of natural resources.¹⁶ According to Akbarnama, Akbar enacted laws to protect mice, oxen, leopards, fish, horses, sheep etc.¹ But the British rulers and many Indians rulers caused ruthless destruction of natural environment during 18th and 19th centuries.¹⁶

Though in India, serious ecological hazards have been noticed since 1950, environmental management and conservation was given important attention only after 1972.⁶ Many Articles of Indian Constitution envisage environmental protection directly or indirectly. In the light of these articles, many policies and legislation have been made and implemented to manage environmental problem.

At global level, the Stockholm United Nation Conference on Human Environment in June 1972 identified the problem and stressed to save domestic environment. World Tourism Organization (WTO) held a conference at Manila in 1980 to harmonize between tourism development and environment management. In 1987, the ‘Commission on Environment and Development’ coined the term “Sustainable Development”. To save the depletion of ozone layer, Montreal Protocol was signed in 1987. Convention on climate change and bio-diversity were signed at the earth summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.⁸

But it is to be regretted that despite the enactment of hundred of laws and introduction

of environmental education and mass awareness programs, graveness of the problem has not yet been solved, though they demonstrated some degree of success. Consequently, the problem of ecological crisis is still existing as a serious concern.

Unified Consciousness : Key to Conservation

In fact, success in the protection and conservation of ecology and environment lies at the root of attitudinal change and behavioural modification of a person. An individual must be free from greed, vanity, violence and thirst for self-satisfaction and over consumption. Until these deep-rooted negative traits of personality are replaced by positive ones, mere legal aspect and intellect building education and awareness programs will not be evolved as an ideal solution to ecological assault. Spiritual practice along with inculcation of ethical values can only guide individuals by changing the core of their personality.

Spiritual practices, directly regulates and control the functions of body-mind equipment. Flow of bio-energy and body fluids become smooth and normal mind becomes tranquil and steady. Consequently, individual achieves good understanding and sound judgement capacity from which he acts rightly and becomes luminous. From luminosity, he develops total awareness of the every core of his being and achieves unified consciousness. (Yoga Sutra, II - 28). Indeed, this is the state of elevated consciousness under which one experiences 'Yoga' or 'Union' with life around oneself. Individual feels that all the animate and inanimate objects around him are one.

Unified state of consciousness is easily accessible to any one through devoted practice of yogic lifestyle (chart -1). It brings about a perfect body-mind coordination as it is correlated with maximum coherence, maximum orderliness and integration of body-mind functioning. Ethical practices and psycho-physical practices under yogic lifestyle are

sufficient to neutralize negative thoughts and attitudes and thereby promote many positive qualities (values) within the individual. In yogic lifestyle, individual starts from the point of diversity and eventually reaches to the point of uniformity.

Therefore, the objective of this theoretical research paper is to explore and examine the effectiveness of yogic lifestyle in the development of unified consciousness which ultimately gives rise ecological outlook and thereby paves the way for conservation of ecology and environment.

Justification of yogic lifestyle in the development of Unified consciousness

The lifestyles developed by the Indian philosophical and spiritual geniuses aimed to break through negative habit patterns of ordinary consciousness. Their prime goal was to liberate human beings from suffering and distress which is a product of unconscious conditioning of mind.⁵ Yogic lifestyle, which originated outside the structure of science and technology is a psycho-spiritual means of achieving elevated level of consciousness. In yogic lifestyle, an individual's daily routine activities like diet pattern, all transactions and behavioural responses are predominantly carried out in accordance with the principles of yoga.

Yogic lifestyle consists of two components. The first one is the practice of yogic ethical values under 'Yamas' and 'Niyamas'. Yamas are self-restraining practice which includes non-violence (ahimsa), truthfulness (satya), non-stealness (asteya), sexual continence (brahmacharya) and non-acquisitiveness (aparigraha). These mighty universal vows are not confined to place, time and class (Yoga Sutra, II-31). Niyamas are the rules of conduct to build up an individual's own character. It consists of purity (satya), contentment (santosh), austerity (tapas), self-study (svadhyaya) and complete surrender to God (Isvarapranidhana) (Yoga Sutra, II-32).

The second component of yogic lifestyle is the practice of yogic psychophysical exercise, which includes asana, pranayama, meditation and relaxation.

(i) **Yogic ethical practice** : Man's selfish nature and bestial urges like cruelty, violence, covetousness etc. give him an inherent propensity to exploit others. These negative traits of personality detach an individual from attaining the knowledge of 'oneness of life'. Subjugation of these negative traits requires self-discipline and self-mastery. Key to self-mastery lies deeper in the sub-conscious strata of mind rather than conscious one.⁶ Hence, any change and reformation of behavioural traits should emanate from the depth of subconscious mind. Yogic ethical practice is such a conscious psychotherapeutic technique, which follows the principle of autosuggestion. Application of autosuggestion, sankalpa and therapeutic thinking are very ancient techniques for acquisition of desirable virtues and eradication of irrational personality traits.

Through yogic ethical practices, effort is made to sow the seeds of positive values of 'Yama and Niyama' in the deep bed of subconscious mind. These seeds will eventually manifest themselves at the conscious level and bring about changes in personality. Hence, in this section efficacy of yogic ethical values (yamas and niyamas) are evaluated in the modification of behavioural traits and there after achievement of elevated states of consciousness.

Violence is the most painful act done by human beings. Through violence he destroyed ecological balance by falling of trees and vegetation, killing of wild animals and polluting the whole environment air, water, and earth. But the practice of **non-violence** when firmly established, a person displays peace in words, thoughts and deeds and behaves with good will and love towards all. Through the practice of **truthfulness** one discovers the thread of

'oneness' or 'unity of life'. Here, truth is the unity of life and by the practice of this ethical value, one starts believing that all the creations are divine and is meant for adoration, not for destroy or killing. **Non-stealing** is against the indiscriminate looting and plundering of natural resources. When this value is firmly practiced, it brings forth the idea that like man, an animal, a tree and even a stone have equal right of living and they are equally important in the ecosystems.

Sexual continence as a yogic value bears divine connotation. It helps to accumulate psycho-physical energy within the individual which gives higher thoughts and consciousness. Through the practice of sexual continence, one experiences "Divinity in all creatures". **Non acquisitiveness** is the non-hoarding of wealth. This ethical value advocates that one should keep his requirements to the minimum and when firmly established, it enables a person to remain satisfied with whatever he possesses. This enhances mental peace and equilibrium. This relaxed state of mind is the breeding ground of higher state of consciousness.

Now five ethical values under 'Niyama' are categorically evaluated. **Purity** of body and mind is essential to achieve higher state of consciousness. Purification of physical body, mind and intellect brings the state of benevolence (saumanasya) which banishes mental pain dejection, sorrow and other emotional thought waves. This brings forth morality which forbids the gathering of garbage here and there and resulting the pollution of the earth, air and water. The value **contentment** signifies that one should feel happy in whatever condition one is living and whatever wealth one possesses. A person with dis-satisfaction and dis-content nature, normally indulges himself to illicit acts like looting and plundering to fulfil his greediness. **Austerity** burns away impurities of mind and body and ignites and sparks of divinity (Yoga Sutra, II- 48). If the virtue of austerity is practiced

honestly, body, mind and senses are perfected, consciousness functions freely and the person achieves the qualities of compassion, non-possession and non-attachment. **Self-study** is the study of the self. Through the practice of this value, one begins to realize that all creations are meant for bhakti rather than bhoga because he experiences divinity within himself as well as in other creations. This self realization becomes the basis for achieving unified consciousness. **Complete surrender to God** is the complete bhakti to God. Devotion to God enables a person to proceed in right direction of knowledge and conduct because 'I' ness or 'ego' is alleviated and one's mind fills with thought of God. Through the practice of this value individual begins to believe that all creations of this universe belong to the God. Hence they are not to the subjects of violence and killing.

Thus, this yogic ethical values under 'Yamas' and 'Niyamas' broaden the vision and increased the level of consciousness which ultimately enhances ecological sensitivity.

(ii) **Yogic psycho-physical exercises:** Yogic psychophysical exercises i.e., asana, pranayama, meditation and relaxation act as an integrated system for complete development of personality at physical, vital, mental, intellectual and spiritual levels. It is a conscious effort towards achieving the unified consciousness by unraveling the latent potentialities in an individual. As immediate effect, it regulates and harmonizes the neuro-muscular, neuro- hormonal and other biochemical functions and thereafter calm down the turbulent state of mind.

The state of unified consciousness cannot be gained unless the nervous system become completely peaceful and mind goes into deep relaxation. Yogasanas are special physical postures congenial for calming down the mind and for developing stability of nervous system.¹⁰ Pranayama, through slow and deep breathing, smoothens the of flow of prana in nadis. When the flow of prana becomes smooth and regular,

mind also attains the state of tranquility.⁷ Meditation is a direct technique of calming down the mind. During meditation, the mind enters into the sphere of subtle level of thought, naturally it becomes more collected and more steady. The relaxation training helps to break the vicious cycle of emotional stress and anxiety by de-conditioning and lowering the arousal of sympathetic component of Autonomic Nervous System (ANS), and also reduces the secretion of nor-adrenaline which initiates excitement.

If the mind is more steady and calm, it is in a better position to experience higher thoughts and ideals. As on the calmer surface of water the sun reflects more clearly, so a calmer mind receives a clearer reflection of bliss-consciousness. Calm mind fathoms finer fields of thinking and the metabolism is markedly reduced. This establishes the nervous system in a degree of ever changing peace. In this peaceful state, the conscious mind becomes more powerful because it turns the attention from the surface of the conscious mind to the inner core and self-realization becomes more easier. Thus, an appropriate and integrated practices of yogic psychophysical exercises provide a very simple tool to attain elevated state of consciousness.

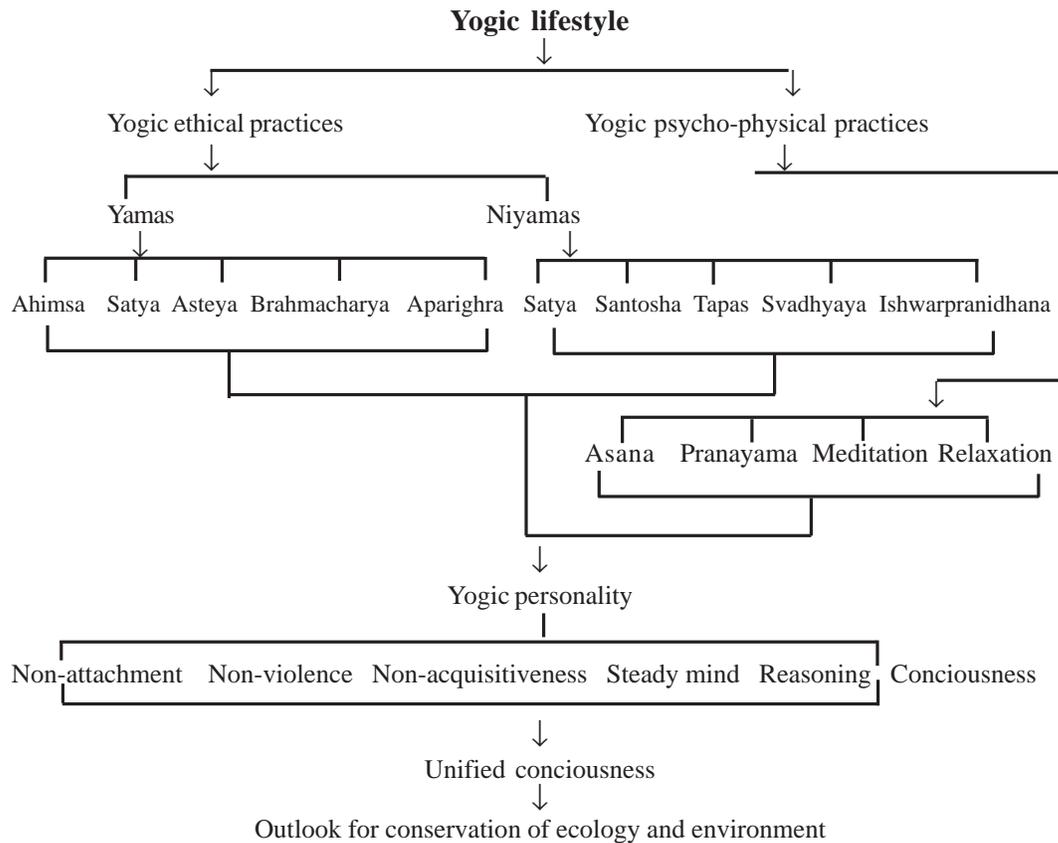
DISCUSSION

The aim of this theoretical research paper was to examine the role of yogic lifestyle' in the development of unified consciousness within the practitioners and thereby paves the way for conservation of ecology and environment. An individual adorned with unified state of consciousness begins to understand the mystery of infinitely diverse multiplicity of all the material creations i.e., entire universe. He perceives them as a single whole body and also feels their close and eternal connectedness with the unified source i.e., the unmanifested 'Supreme Self'. This psycho-spiritual upliftment abstains an individual from destruction, violence and killing

of both non-living and living objects and thereby he acquires the preservative and conservative tendency to natural and cultural resources as

well. Keeping in view these potent attributes, ‘Yogic Lifestyle’ was hypothesized as key to the conservation of ecology and environment.

Chart 1 : Yogic lifestyle and development of unified consciousness



After the analysis of theoretical data, it has been confirmed that yogic lifestyle through its ethical values under ‘Yamas’ and ‘Niyamas’ contributed in producing desirable moral and spiritual values and eradication of psychological distortions and thereby reformed the mental states, behaviour and attitudes. Yogic psychophysical exercises regulate and harmonize physiological and psychological functions by effecting neuro-muscular and neuro-endocrinal and other systems of body. These harmonized functions of body-mind equipment helped to get freedom from physical disabilities and mental distractions. The

passionate internal vibrations are removed and individual attained freedom from anguish and infatuations. Now consciousness detached it from irrational thought waves and emotional upheavals and assumed the quality of reasoning consciousness (viveka chetna) which is devoid of personal and material identity. Now all the three e.g., body, mind and consciousness are blended into one and the individual achieved yogic personality which is adorned by the qualities of non-attachment, non-violence, non-acquisitiveness, friendliness and reasoning consciousness (Chart 1).

Having acquired the characteristics of

yogic personality, he feels that his Self (Atma) abide in all beings and beings are in his own Self - "Atmanam Sarva Bhutesu". He is now filled with serenity, insight and truth and experiences 'Yoga' or 'Union' with all lives around him. This altered state of understanding broadened the vision and makes a man see beyond the mundane and limited sphere of life and rised above selfish end. This growing universal outlook enriched by many ethical values like universal friendliness, love, and kindness made him a man of unified consciousness who always feels the whole universe as one. He begins to deal with each and every creature with outmost care and love because now he realized that nature is just like an essential part of his own body without which he cannot survive. This ecological outlook paves the way of conservation.⁴

CONCLUSION

Yogic lifestyle is predominantly a psycho-spiritual technique of achieving unified state of consciousness which considers both human being as well as non-human beings as a single whole entity and thereby moderates the anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism approaches of environmental ethics. Through the practice of its ethical values and psychophysical processes, all the ripples of thoughts and irrational instincts are removed and man's level of understanding changed. This purified state of consciousness makes an individual more sensitive, kind and preservative to all living and non-living objects of this universe. Therefore, yogic lifestyle can be suggested as a very congenial model for conservation of ecology and environment. The present study is not free from limitations, yet this psycho-spiritual technology, if honestly followed will surely evolved as a most potent means towards the solution of current ecological ravages and therefore may enrich

the newly emerging field of environmental ethics.

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