



Importance of Yogic Principles of Yoga Vasistha in Stress and Anxiety Management in context of Persons with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT-

Yoga Vasistha is considered as an epitome of Indian ancient wisdom and yoga tradition having a deep impact on various yogic ideologies developed in India. It considers that this world is the manifestation of supreme consciousness and this cosmic self is above all in authority. Yoga Vasistha elaborates that Yoga is an efficient and pragmatic way to unite the inner consciousness with the supreme consciousness. The yogic principles of Yoga Vasistha are of immense importance for the persons with disabilities in context of enhancing their mental conditioning mechanism and thought pattern. The persons with disabilities constitute a significant portion of our society are stress and anxiety are the most common conditions affecting their lives. When the mind stuff receives the materialistic perceptions, the external world is perceived by inner self. The sensory perceptions related with the subjects present the emotions of sorrow and happiness. Its mechanism is affected by the traumatic experiences of disability and therefore cause stress and anxiety among the persons with disabilities. The inner self awakens with the practice of Yoga, pranayama and meditation along with attainment of equilibrium of prana and apana. This enhanced self consciousness is pivotal to gain perfection and thus success in actions along with improvement in physical and mental health. The yogic principles of selfless actions, adhi-vyadhi concept and karma yoga mentioned in Yoga Vasistha are very relevant and significant in the context of the conditions of persons with disabilities to get success and happiness in life.

Key Words- Yoga Vasistha, Adhi, Vyadhi, Karmayoga, Stress, Anxiety, Persons with Disabilities

Introduction:-

Yoga Vasistha holds a very prominent position among the great ancient scriptures in the field of yogic philosophy and spirituality. It is a widely discussed and popular yogic scripture related with ancient Indian culture and traditional system of knowledge. We find this scripture in the form of dialogue between prince Rama and his guru sage Vasistha. In the starting of this treatise, we find the sorrowful state of prince Rama who was sad after observing the pain and sorrowful conditions of this world where everything is mortal in nature. It is also important to know that this scripture was composed by sage Valmiki and it is one of the most ancient scriptures. This scripture talks about the attributes of inner consciousness and the real path of liberation from the bondages.

Yoga Vasistha advocates that the practice of yoga is open to all and any individual irrespective of his identity of country and creed can practice yoga to reap the benefits of this ancient practice. Certainly, it applies also to those persons who are suffering with the conditions of disability and the handicap caused by the consequences of disability. As per the website of Indian government ministry of empowerment of persons with disabilities, we find that, India has the population of two crores and sixty eight lakhs which is approximately 2.21 percent of country population.¹ In case of persons with disabilities, we often find that they are much prone to develop stress and anxiety issues due to the traumatic experiences of their disability related issues and handicap. In fact, it is a matter of fact that stress and anxiety are the most common conditions that are found in the lives of disabled persons and because of these stress and anxiety issues they becomes much prone for developing many psycho somatic and related disorders.

There are only a few research studies that interlink the yogic science and disability rehabilitation in context of stress and anxiety rehabilitation. It is necessary in modern times to address these issues. If we take into consideration the condition of anxiety, then we find that it is the condition of tension and worries. The psychological association of United States elaborates that it is an emotion which is represented by the feelings of tensions, thoughts of worries and the physical body changes such as elevated blood pressure and hyper heart beats rate.² On the other hand, if we take into consideration about the condition of stress, we find that it is the behavior related, mental and body related response by an individual when they perceive a lack of balance

¹ <https://disabilityaffairs.gov.in/content/>

² <https://www.apa.org/topics/anxiety>. Assessed on 08.11.2023

between the anticipatory demands imposed upon them and their ability to cope up with those demands which, with the course of time may lead to the condition of ill health that affect the overall health of an individual.³

There is an originating mechanism of stress and anxiety in the persons with disabilities that is needed to be understood in gross. We know that the persons with disabilities has to undergo a lot of traumatic experiences when there is onset of disability due to any event like accidents, diseases etc. When they think towards these circumstances, the behavioral stressors become operative and a chain of thoughts starts to emerge in mind that lead to the condition of anxiety and when this anxiety remains for a prolonged time, it leads to the condition of stress. These two issues combined together have enough capacity to damage the physical, mental and social aspects of health related with an individual. If we become able to break and destroy this chain of thoughts in the very early stage of onset then only we can conquer these problems of stress and anxiety. We know that mind and physical body, both are dependent on each other and hence when the mind is trapped in stress and anxiety, the physical body also responds negatively and we see the emergence of many symptoms related with idiopathic nature.

Yogic Principles in Yoga Vasistha:-

Yoga Vasistha is a vast length scripture and is divided into six sections or books dealing with a number of philosophical and yogic principles. This scripture talks about the perception of illusion and propounds that the external manifestation of this world is an illusion and it can only be understood by attaining self realization. A major characteristic of this great scripture is to elaborate the yogic and spiritual concepts through various fables, stories and illustrations. It also depicts the mechanism of transformation of mind stuff for attaining the tranquility of mind.

Yoga Vasistha defines yoga in a pragmatic way by considering it as a methodical way to attain the combination of soul with the god.⁴ This is a very good and practical definition that is mentioned in this great scripture. To make this union in proper manner, there is need of taking into consideration our karmas and the intelligence. If we perform the purification of our karmas then our intelligence will be purified and this becomes possible when we practice yoga and spirituality in our lives.

In modern scenarios, we see that the man is chasing the comforts and success in life and in the search of the false happiness; he becomes trapped in the bondages of pain and sufferings. Our Ancient scriptures has always advocated for pursuing the truth and dignity in our lives. Upanishad says that we should adopt the pattern of controlled and optimum consumption of resources so that to share it with others.⁵ Upanishads show us the way towards self realization to make us aware about our hidden potential. This notion is important when we take into consideration of persons with disabilities who often face difficulty to utilize their optimum potential due to the obstructions imposed by their handicap. The challenge is more in mental terms than in physical terms since the sense of dignity lies in the attitude that comes from the sense of self respect.

Importance of yogic principles in context of Persons with Disabilities:-

Modern scenario belongs to cut throat competition and show off tendencies and it is based on the pursuit of name and money trapping the mind of persons in acquirement of more and more desires of fame and money. The life style of modern generation people is subjected to unhealthy food and lifestyle habits that are making them more prone towards developing stress, anxiety and other psychosomatic ailments. In ancient times, there was the tradition of joint families and value based ethical behavior in India and the traditional Indian cultural culture believed that the whole world is a family. Mahopanishad describes that this world is a family and we should keep the feelings of fraternity and love among the members which is deemed as the supreme attribute.⁶ When an individual faces the consequences of handicap, he suffers from various obstructions due to disability and becomes more prone to lie behind in the ongoing competitive race.

In modern scenario, we see that the emergence of ailments and diseases are on the rise especially in the post covid era. In the complex emergence of various diseases, there are many diseases that are originated due to stress and other psychosomatic disorders. These are hard to diagnose and difficult to treat and it requires a lot of money and time in the treatment of these ailments in the hospitals along with a high cost of money. The persons with disabilities are found more prone to develop these ailments due to the consequences of disability. In this context, we find the principle of adhi and vyadhi as extremely important that is discussed in the Yoga Vasistha. The adhi and vyadhi are deeply elaborated in this scripture and it elucidate that the ailments are subjected to the functioning of mind.⁷ We know that our mind and body are interrelated and when the mind is affected, the body is also affected. The reverse is also true and thus when the body is affected, the mind is also affected. When the mind is calm and serene, the body remains in the state of equilibrium and when the body is in the state of calmness, we feel the stillness of mind. When an individual attains this state of equilibrium in the

³ S. Palmer(1989). "Occupational Stress: The health and safety practione",7(8), pp.16-18

⁴ Yoga Vasistha, Chapter 53, Nirvana Prakarna, Purvardh

⁵ Ishwasyopanishad, 1.1

⁶ <https://www.timesnow.tv/DNA-of-non-violence-engrained-in-our-society-PM/articleshow/4463308>

⁷ Yoga Vasistha, Chapter 81, Nirvana Prakarna, Purvardh

performance of action, it is regarded as the state of yoga.⁸ The similar thing is expressed in other verse of Gita which elaborates that the state of yoga is the perfectness in the performance of actions.⁹

When we see the importance of yogic principles of Yoga Vasistha in context of persons with disabilities, we find that it has profound impact on the yogic insights discussed in yogic scriptures like Bhagwad Gita that are popular among the modern generation. Yoga Vasistha discusses the practical concepts of sankhya yoga and ashtang yoga and establishes the interlinks between them.¹⁰ It elaborates that sankhya yoga is the philosophical basis of yoga based on rationality and pragmatism. The system of ashtang yoga is also based on the same attributes. These attributes are very important if we apply them in real life modern scenarios. In modern scenario, we are often not able to choose truth that is mixed with untruth and because of this we suffer with the corresponding circumstances but if we use the attributes of rationality, pragmatism and truthfulness, we can segregate the falsehood from reality and this makes us able to pick a right direction in our lives. Upanishads also elaborate that the manifestations of the world are originated from the Supreme Being and the supreme self has created all the principles and living beings.¹¹

Yoga Vasistha suggests us to follow the path of yoga and meditation in proper manner by assigning these practices regularly in our daily lives in regular pattern. The mechanism of pranayama is extremely important that is discussed in this great scripture.¹² Pranayama is basically the control of vital energy of the body and this vital energy is taken and regulated through the process of breath. The process of inhalation, exhalation and retention of breath is considered as important in yogic science and it is believed that by the regulation of breath we can control our emotions and thus it is a subtle key to control the mind. Maharishi Patanjali expresses the similar notion by saying that yoga is the cessation of mind stuff.¹³ Upanishads say that the state of stillness of senses is acquired through yoga.¹⁴ In all these principles, one thing is basic that involves the control of mind through the process of controlling the senses.

The yogic principle of Pranayama described in the Yoga Vasistha is special in the sense that it clearly interlinks it with the mental conditioning mechanism that is responsible of the controlling of physical body. In this sense, it becomes clear that the physical and mental health is attained by the practice of pranayama. Shwetashwara Upanishad states that the practice of yoga is immensely beneficial for human being since it improves all the subtle elements present in the body. The individual, who practices yoga, becomes free from all the ailments, geriatric issues and untimely death.¹⁵ Bhagwad Gita says that the individual, who follow the path of yoga, becomes able to attain the tranquility of mind.¹⁶ We can see that the persons of modern society are going behind the success at any cost and this involves the use of improper means and even after gaining the success in their actions, they feel stressed and unsatisfied since they have used the impure means to get the success. It is because of the fact that ultimately it is the truth that prevails in all scenarios.¹⁷ We can get the stillness of mind only in that scenario, in which we follow, the attributes of yoga in our action since yoga is the perfectness in the actions.

Yoga Vasistha discusses the concept of selfless actions in a very effective manner. It says that the individual has the rights only in the performance of actions and not in the results. When we become selfless in our actions and work without the craving of results, then we get rid of all the pain and sufferings that originate due to the desires of the fruits of the performed actions. Krishna regards it as karma yoga or the yogic path of action.¹⁸

Yoga Vasistha discusses every possible query that may come into our mind in the process of contemplation about the yogic principles. It aesthetically discusses the functioning of mind and the role of ignorance as the cause of bondage and sufferings. When a person has lust towards a physical accomplishment, he want to gain it in any manner and in this process his senses are deeply attached with the outside objects and any obstruction in the achievement of desires leads to anger which ultimately makes the bondage of sufferings and ignorance that is responsible for the never ending cycles of birth and death.

Sage Vasistha in Yoga Vasistha shows us a practical way to get rid of all the bondages and sufferings of this materialistic world by following the path of yoga which is available for all irrespective of any barrier. This great scripture says that the man is the maker of his own destiny. This notion is very practical for the persons with disabilities who are often regarded as less privileged. They have to understand that they can make their own destiny even after acquiring the handicap with their conscious efforts. Krishna in Gita says the same when he describes that man is the dearest friend of his own self.¹⁹ In Yoga Vasistha, lord Rama wanted to leave all the material things for the sake of attaining renunciation from the worldly suffering and pain but his mentor sage Vasistha motivated him to think and follow upon the yogic principles that are eternal and beneficial for all.

Yoga Vasistha elaborates the mechanism of attaining the supreme bliss that is gained through the union of individual spirit with the supreme spirit and this notion also appears in Yoga Sutra where Patanjali says that in the state of supreme bliss, the persons becomes situated in his own real self.²⁰ Vasistha

⁸ Bhagwad Gita, 2.48

⁹ Bhagwad Gita, 2.50

¹⁰ Yoga Vasistha, Chapter 69, Nirvana Prakarna, Purvardh

¹¹ Mundakopanishad, 2.1.7

¹² Yoga Vasistha, Chapter 25, Nirvana Prakarna, Purvardh

¹³ Yog Sutra, 1.2

¹⁴ Kathopanishad, 2.3.11

¹⁵ Shwetashwar Upanishad, 2.12

¹⁶ Bhagwad Gita, 2.71

¹⁷ Mundakopanishad, 3.1.6

¹⁸ Bhagwad Gita, 3.7

¹⁹ Bhagwad Gita, 6.6

²⁰ Yoga Sutra, 1.3

also declares that the soul is eternal and immortal and it cannot be destroyed by any means.²¹ Only those individual can know the nature of soul who walk on the path of yoga and self realization. If we follow the path of yoga with dedication, we gradually become able to perceive our thoughts with clarity and it makes us aware about our ongoing thoughts that are very critical in the understanding of our mind. Krishna says that our mind is very restless in nature and it is always active with the ongoing thoughts.²² This playful mind can only be controlled when we take into consideration the yogic means of pranayama and meditation in our daily routine. The practice of pranayama not only gives us the improved level of concentration but also it gives many physical health benefits. The practice of pranayama makes our bodies more stable and improves the organ systems in the body. It has a profound soothing effect on sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems and prevents us from the ailments related with stress and anxiety. Through the practice of pranayama, we can control the prana and apana.

Sage Vasistha in Yoga Vasistha elaborates the importance of meditation and regards it as a mean to control the mind stuff so as to attain the stillness of mind. This involves the concentration of mind on a predefined imagery that is useful in the cessation of thoughts along with guiding them towards an aim. The persons with disabilities who often suffer the traumatic experiences can get rid of the negative emotions by thinking positive through the practice of meditation. This practice of meditation is pivotal in the development of high willpower and mental clarity that is beneficial to get success in the worldly actions. When we follow the yogic principles in our lives, we get the harmonious relationship between the physical, mental and social dimensions of human life.

Conclusion:-

Yoga Vasistha holds a very revered and prestigious position among the yogic scriptures of ancient India. The yogic principles mentioned in this scripture have immense importance in the context of persons with disabilities who are prone to face issues in the modern world of competition and desires. The yogic principles of Yoga Vasistha are immensely helpful in enhancing the mental conditioning mechanism and thought patterns of persons suffering with disabilities. The principle of selfless actions describes the proper way to indulge in the actions and simultaneously to get rid of pain and sufferings related with actions. The concept of adhi and vyadhi, the concept of pranayama, the yogic principle of destruction of ignorance, all these principles are pivotal for human being to get worldly success in life along with the attainment of good physical health and attainment of happiness of mind.

²¹ Yoga Vasistha, Chapter 55, Nirvana Prakarna, Purvardh

²² Bhagwad Gita, 6.34