

## THE CONCEPT AND EFFECTIVENESS OF RAJA YOGA

Priyanka Sharma\*

### ABSTRACT

This study is based on the concept and effectiveness of Raja Yoga. Raja Yoga is one of the four yoga systems, the other being Jnana yoga, Bhakti yoga and Karma yoga. Raja Yoga's percepts are concerned with discipline and control of mind. It comprises a set of eight steps Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Prathyara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. Raja Yoga is also known as "the royal path" is very scientific to understand and at the same it is spiritual in its context. It focuses on concentration, relaxing, conditioning of mind and deep meditation. The underlying concept is to connect the practitioner with the basic life force and reach the highest level of existence. Studies and researches conducted on Raja yoga also strongly advocate the effectiveness of Raja Yoga in curing and healing many health problems like insomnia, neurotic disorders, headaches, depression, cardiovascular autonomic functions and hyper tension.

Key words: Raja yoga, mindfulness, concentration, meditation, awareness, health.

\* Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of Education, Panjab University, Chandigarh, India

## Introduction

Raja yoga along with Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Karma Yoga are the four yoga systems followed in the Vedanta philosophy. . The great sage Patanjali from the land of India is credited for the introduction of Raja Yoga and his aphorisms are considered as the highest authority on the subject. Raja yoga focuses on controlling and training the powers of mind and connecting it with the life force in order to attain the highest level of a man's spiritual existence. The history of Yoga is rooted in India and it is widely practiced all over the world in order to lead a healthy, happy and positive life. The ultimate aim of Yoga is to provide an easy release from the mundane physical world and head for moksha that is liberation of the soul.

The word "Raj" denotes a king, and "Yoga" connotes union therefore put together they mean to conquer the mind like a king. Swami Vivekananda differentiated Raja yoga from many religious practices that are based on faith, saying, "the science of Raja Yoga proposes to put before humanity a practical and scientifically worked out method of reaching the truth" [1] According to him it is a scientific method of understanding the universe and answering life's question and he opines that the aphorisms of Patanjali are the highest authority on Raja Yoga.

Swami Vivekananda said that "the knowledge of mind, the internal nature of man, of thought, can never be had until we have first developed the power of observing the facts that are going on within." [2] According to him there is no limit to the powers of human mind and these powers should be concentrated on the mind in order to observe and reveal its true nature. Doing so, will answer our questions about the existence of God or if we have a soul etc. Raja Yoga is the science which teaches us how to gain the power of concentration. [18]

It doesn't matter to what religion we belong or whether we are deists or atheists. We all are human beings and that is sufficient to practice Raja Yoga and the practice of Raja Yoga emphasizes on believing nothing until we find it out ourselves.

Raja yoga is based on the philosophy of **Sankhya** , according to which, " the genesis of perception is as follows: the affections of the outer objects are transferred by the outer instruments to their respective brain centers or organs, the organs carry these to the mind, the mind transfers them to the determinative faculty, from this the Purusha (soul) receives them, when perception happens next he gives the order back, to the motor centre to do the needful. With the exception of Purusha (soul) all of these are material but the mind is much finer matter compared to the external instruments. That material of which the mind is composed also goes to

form the subtle matter called Tanmatras. These become gross and make the external matter and this is the philosophy of Sankhya. Thus, the mind is a medium through which the soul catches external objects. It is constantly changing and vacillating and when perfected, it either attaches itself to several organs, to one or none. “[3]

Raja yoga is all inclusive and can be practiced by people of different backgrounds and temperaments. Mental discipline, meditation and concentration distinguish Raja yoga from other forms of Yoga. The practice uses meditation to separate us from mental obsessions and false mental states. Raja yoga is predicated on the notion that thoughts, feelings, perceptions and memories with external things, distort our true Self. Practicing Raja Yoga helps to dissolve these barriers and identify our true nature/Self, by connecting and elevating towards the life force. The yogi who practices Raja Yoga; proposes to attain the finer state of perception where he can perceive how the sensation travels, how the mind receives it, how it goes to the determinative faculty and then finally how it goes to Purusha.

Raja yoga is a **scientific discipline** and it encourages healthy self examination. In order to practice it, certain regulations of food intake need to be followed. Therefore consuming healthy and pure food (Sativik) is extremely important as it brings us good health and highest thoughts. At the same, extreme indulgence in luxury or austerity must be avoided.

Raja Yoga involves three dimensions of human interaction: physical, mental and spiritual. By following this method, balance and harmony on all these levels can be achieved and that ultimately leads to self realization.

### **Review of studies on effectiveness of Raja Yoga**

Archana Mandape et al (2015) conducted a study, “Effect of Raja Yoga Meditation on the Lipid Profile of Healthy Adults”. The aim of the study was to observe the effect of Raja yoga meditation on serum lipid profile and fasting blood sugar (FBS) levels in healthy adults and the results showed that the meditators, who were practicing Raja-yoga meditation for more than 5 years, showed lower levels of Tri glycerides, Low density lipoprotein, Very low density lipoprotein, Blood sugar and higher level of High density lipoprotein than non-meditators

Kiran et al. (2014) conducted a study “Effect of short term Raj yoga meditation on anxiety and depression” and found out that the meditators showed significant improvement in the anxiety and depression levels when assessed on the Hamilton anxiety and depression scales.

Kiran et al. (2014), conducted a study “Sympathetic Response in Chronic Tension Headache After Rajyoga Meditation” and concluded that Raj yoga meditation is effective in reducing BP in resting conditions in CTTH by decreasing the sympathetic reactivity. It also normalized cardiovascular autonomic function in stressful conditions as proved by IHG test results.

Gujjaa Radhika, D. Aruna Kumari.(2014) conducted a study “Meditation: A stress reliever”. In this study, cardiovascular parameters and respiratory functions of those practicing meditation were compared with those of non-meditators. The study showed that Raja-Yoga meditation confers significant benefits in respiratory functions and cardio vascular parameters.

Misra N et al (2013) conducted a study, “Effect of Raj Yoga Meditation on Affective & Cognitive Functions” The results of the study suggest that the group practicing Raj Yoga for longer duration had significantly less neurotic symptoms, scored higher on hope and happiness and higher on cognitive functions in comparison to the group practicing Raj Yoga for shorter duration

Sanjeev Satpathy, Aiswarya, Mishra.(2013) did a study “A Comparative Study Of Effect Of Yoga And Drugs On Pulmonary Functions And Inflammation In Bronchial Asthma” The results showed that the yoga breathing exercise used adjunctively with standard drugs significantly improves pulmonary functions and inflammation in patients with Bronchial asthma.

Dr. Venugopal P et al (2005) conducted a study “The effect of autogenic relaxation on chronic tension headache and in modulating cortisol response” and found that the Raj yoga practitioners showed significant reduction of 96 percent in headache as compared to the group that relied only on alprazolam

Sahasi S et al 1999) studied “Effectiveness of yogic techniques in the Management anxiety”. The results showed that the students, who practiced yoga performed better in academics.

Shannahoff - Khalsa, et al (1999) conducted a study, “Randomized controlled trial of yogic meditation techniques for patients with obsessive-compulsive disorder” at Children’s hospital, San Diego and the results showed that the yoga techniques were effective in the treatment of obsessive compulsive disorder.

Patel Girish (1986) conducted a study “Effect of Raj yoga Meditation on patients of addiction” on 183 patients who were taught Raja Yoga meditation. 74% patients became completely free of smoking addiction and after one year 93% smokers left smoking.

At Langley Porter Psychiatric Institute, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A), (1978), a study was conducted on “Effect of Raj yoga Meditation on brain waves (EEG)” And the investigation showed that E.E.G. of raja yogis showed total relaxation and mental harmony they have achieved. Most of the ten Raja yogis examined produced Alpha or the Ta waves not only while meditating but even while performing complicated mental arithmetic.

### Concept of Raja Yoga

**Raja Yoga** is also known as the **Ashtanga yoga** or the eightfold path. There are eight steps of Raja Yoga. The first two Yama and Niyama are moral codes.

The first moral code **Yama** lays a set of five things to abstain from: injuring, lying, stealing, sensuality and greed.

**Niyama** comprises of five things to observe: mental and physical cleanliness, contentment, self control, studiousness and devotion.

The third step is **Asana/posture**: For this posture one has to sit erect and hold the spinal column free and hold the three parts-the chest, neck and head in a straight line..

In Raj yoga there are two types of asanas: meditative postures and postures that ensure physical well-being. A stable meditative posture helps to create a serene breath and a calm mind. It should be comfortable, stable and ensure that the head, neck, and trunk are erect and in a straight line. The second kind of posture is practiced to perfect the body.

The next step is **Pranayama or control of Prana** --To practice Pranayama, the nerves have to be purified at first. To start that the right nostril is pressed with the thumb of the right hand and air is filled in through the left nostril according to capacity then it is exhaled through the right nostril closing the left one with the first two fingers of the right hand. To complete the cycle the air is inhaled through the right nostril and then ejected through the left according to capacity. Practicing this cycle three to five times a day for fifteen days or a month is the first step in Pranayama. The breath is described as the fly wheel supplying and regulating the power to everything in the body. Breathing is just one of the many exercises of Pranayama and absolute practice is needed in it. The Prana has been described most vividly in Raja Yoga as compared to other steps.

**Prana**, is described as the infinite, omnipresent manifesting force of life and the universe. It is the Prana that is manifesting as motion, gravitation, magnetism, nerve currents, thoughts,

feelings, actions of body etc. Prana is the sum total of all forces mental or physical, when resolved back to their original state. The Prana represents our own energies and is the vital force in every being. Thoughts are the finest form of Prana. The control of this Prana is what is called Pranayama. The most obvious manifestation of Prana in human body is the motion of the lungs. In English, sometimes Prana is wrongly associated with the word breath. It is by the Prana that real curing comes. The man who has controlled the Prana has the power of bringing it into a certain state of vibration, which can be conveyed to others, arousing in them a similar vibration. “The whole **scope of Raja yoga** is really to teach the control and direction in different planes of the **Prana.**” [16]. “When a man is meditating he is also concentrating on the prana.” [17]

#### Understanding Prana

According to yogis, there are two nerve currents in the spinal column, the left is called ida, the right Pingala and a hollow canal Sushumna runs through the centre of spinal cord. The canal is closed at lower end which is situated near what is known as the sacral plexus. The different plexuses that have their centers’ in spinal canal can be understood for the name lotuses used by yogis[18]

The yogi conceives of several centres beginning with the basic Muladhara, manipura (lotus of navel) and ending with Sahasrara (lotus of the brain). The aim is to arouse the coiled up power in Muladhara called, the Kundalini. “Rousing the Kundalini is the one and only way to attaining divine wisdom, super conscious perception, realization of the spirit.” [19]

After Pranayama, the next step in Raja Yoga is **Pratyahara**, or withdrawal and control of the senses. When awake, the mind is involved and occupied with experiences, and objects of the external world through the five senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. So, the mind constantly gathers sensations through these senses and reacts accordingly to them. To attain inner calmness, the student or yogi needs to develop the ability to control his senses and voluntarily control distractions of the outer world. Those who succeed in attaching or detaching his mind at will succeed in Prathayara, which means freeing the mind from the thrall of the senses. [20]

After Prathayara the next step is Dharana

**Dharana**- means holding the mind to certain points to feel certain parts of the body to the exclusion of other. [21] In Dharana, the scattered power of the mind is coordinated and focused on an object through continued voluntary attention. This requires a conscious effort of the will, and is developed through consistent practice. Through concentration, a scattered, weak mind is

focused and made more powerful. Dharana is fixing attention on one thing and excluding everything else. The goal of each soul is described as freedom, freedom from slavery of matter and thought, mastery of external and internal nature.

**Dhyana and Samadhi** is the seventh step of Raja yoga. Dhyana is a level of mastery of total concentration and deep meditation. There are two planes in which human mind works. First, is the conscious plane, in which all work is accompanied with the feeling of ego and the other is the unconscious plane, where there is absence of ego. In the lower animals the unconscious plane is called instinct. In higher animals and in man, the conscious plane prevails but there is a higher plane upon which the mind can work. It can go beyond consciousness. Just as, unconscious plane is beneath the consciousness, so there is another plane which is above consciousness. It is also without the presence of ego. When the mind goes beyond this line of self consciousness, it attains Samadhi or super consciousness. In this state one reaches the higher self and transcends all imperfections. The Samadhi is the fourth state of consciousness which transcends the three states of waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep. Samadhi means total absorption. It is achieving the supreme bliss of enlightenment and uniting the self with Brahman, the sacred power, source and sustainer of the universe.

In order to understand the super conscious state in a scientific manner, it is necessary to pass through the various steps of Raja Yoga. "After Pratyahara and Dharana comes the stage of Dhyana. When the mind is trained to remain fixed on a certain or external location, it attains the power of flowing in an unbroken current towards that point. This state is called Dhyana. When the power of Dhyana becomes so intensified that it rejects the external part of perception and meditate only the internal part, this state is called Samadhi." [22]

"If the mind can concentrate upon an object, is able to continue concentration over a length of time and dwell on the internal part of perception, then everything comes under the control of such a mind." [23] This meditative state is the highest state of existence and this awareness is said to be the practical and real goal of Yoga.

Thus meditation must begin with gross objects and slowly rise to finer levels until it becomes objectless. The mind should first be employed to perceive the external causes of sensations, then the internal motions and then perceive its own reaction. When it succeeds in perceiving the external causes of sensations, the mind acquires the power of perceiving all fine material existences, all fine bodies and forms. When it succeeds in perceiving the motions inside, it will

gain the control of all mental waves, in itself or in others, even before they have been translated into physical energy. When he will be able to perceive the mental reactions, the yogi will acquire the knowledge of everything as every object and every thought is the result of this reaction. Then he will realize the very foundations of his mind and will keep them perfectly under his control.

### Discussions

Scientific nature of Raja Yoga has also been strengthened by the various studies conducted on it. Studies show that practice of Raja yoga reduces headache and modulates Cortisol response [4] decreases anxiety and depression [5] it also manages anxiety disorders, cures obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizophrenia and is helpful in the treatment of psychosomatic disorder precipitated due to stress [6]

Raja Yoga also lowers level of Tri Glycerides, Low density lipoprotein, Very low density lipoprotein and Fasting Blood Sugar [7] It also significantly reduces neurotic symptoms and improves cognitive functions. It brings development of personality and improves levels of concentration.[8] Studies also show that Raja Yoga improves pulmonary functions and reduces inflammation in Bronchial asthma.[9] It reduces Blood Pressure and normalizes cardiovascular autonomic functions in stressful times[10] improves respiratory functions and cardiovascular parameters.[11] It brings improvement in academic performance by enhancing concentration and reducing stress[12] Raja yoga techniques also regulate breathing [13] heart rate and Blood pressure.[14] Raja Yoga relaxes brain and harmonizes EEG and helps in producing of alpha or ta waves even in stressful conditions[15]

### Conclusion

Raja yoga is one of the four yoga systems. The goal of Raja yoga is to have release from the mundane physical world by cultivating the mind. At the same the spiritual essence of Raj Yoga can be understood in a very scientific and introspective manner by using the mind as an instrument of research. Raj-Yoga proposes that every person has two aspects of personality – body (outer sheath) and an entity which is metaphysical or spiritual. It is this essence of existence that understands, reflects and has emotions. Mind is one of its component and its control machinery. Regular practice of Raj Yoga brings in attentiveness, awareness and



consciousness. It frees oneself from illusions of material consciousness, panic of the unidentified, gives clarity regarding all that lies beyond the perceivable world. Studies and researches conducted on Raja Yoga have proved that neurotic diseases like obsessive compulsive disorder, depression, insomnia etc can also be cured effectively by regular practice of Raja Yoga. Raja Yoga can also be practiced for maintaining sound health, development of personality, etc. and for living a healthy life.

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