

Raja Yoga and Its Role in Spirituality

Dr. Pratibha Bharti*

*Department of Biotechnology, Shaheed Udham Singh Group of Institutes, Mohali, Punjab, India
E Mail: bharti_pratibha@yahoo.com

Abstract

Raja Yoga is sometimes referred to as "royal Yoga", "classical Yoga" and "aṣṭāṅga Yoga". Raja Yoga is also referred to as Mental Yoga, or the Yoga of the Mind, because of its emphasis on awareness of one's state of mind. It is through this practice of concentration that one learns to calm the mind and bring it to one point of focus so that we direct our attention inwardly, towards our true nature, which is Divine.

Aim: Raja Yoga thus aims at attaining higher levels of spiritual awakening. Spirituality brings lasting and meaningful change to our lives through inner transformation. As we change, the universe changes around us. With this change, there is nurturing of the inner qualities. All aspects of our life must be spiritualized so that they can be directed towards attaining the goal of God-realization. This is the highest path, to God-union.

Conclusion: In raja Yoga meditation we use our mental powers to realize the 'Atman' through the process of psychological control. According to Bhagavad Gita: "When, through the practice of Yoga, the mind ceases its restless movement and becomes still, the aspirant realizes the Atman". The mind is cleansed and made tranquil through the repeated practice of "meditation and moral virtues", both of which are crucial in spiritual path. There is no way to practice raja Yoga meditation without practicing moral virtues in tandem.

Key words: Atman, Astanga, moral virtues, Raja Yoga, spiritual.

Introduction:

Yoga essentially consists of meditative practices culminating in attaining a state of consciousness free from all modes of active or discursive thought, and of eventually attaining a state where consciousness is unaware of any object external to itself, that is, is only aware of its own nature as pure consciousness.^[1]

Raja Yoga

Rāja (Sanskrit root): means "chief, best of its kind" or "king"^[2]. Rāja Yoga thus refers to "chief, best of Yoga". Raja Yoga is sometimes also branded as or referred to as "royal Yoga", "royal union", "sahaj marg" or "classical Yoga"^[3]. Raja Yoga, sometimes called the "Royal Yoga" is inclusive of all Yogas, and its philosophy goes beyond the boundaries of the many styles of Yoga today^[4].

Essential components

In some modern literature, Raja Yoga is considered one of the four paths. The other three are: Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga^[5]. You can achieve this by following the eight-fold path of raja Yoga, which includes observation of the following^[4]: Yamas (Abstentions)^{[6],[7]}: Ahimsa (non-injury), Satya (truth), Asetya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (chastity), Apragraha (non-greed) Niyamas (Moral Observations)^{[8],[9]}: Susha (purity), Santosha (contentment), Tapas (austerity), Svadhaya (study of the scriptures), Ishvara Pranidhana (surrender to God) Asana^[10]: Steady pose, posture or seat Pranayama^{[11],[12]}: control of vital energy through breathwork Pratyahara^{[13],[14]}: Withdrawal of the senses Dharana^{[15],[16]}: concentration of

the mind Dhyana ^{[17],[18]}: Meditation Samadhi ^[19]: Enlightenment, union with the Divine

Yama purifies the mind, the Chitta. To attain success in Yoga Niyama or regular habits are observed. Purification of the mind by truth, and by all the other virtues, is what is called internal purification. Both are necessary. It is not sufficient that a man should be internally pure and externally dirty. When both are not attainable the internal purity is the better, but no one will be a Yogi until he has both. Worship of God is by praise, by thought, by devotion. The next is Asana (posture). The only thing to understand about it is leaving the body free, holding the chest, shoulders, and head straight. Then comes Pranayama.

Prana means the vital forces in one's own body, Ayama means controlling them. There are three sorts of Pranayama, the very simple, the middle, and the very high. Pranayama is divided into three parts: filling, restraining, and emptying. There is a Mantra called the Gayatri. It is a very holy verse of the Vedas. "We meditate on the glory of that Being who has produced this universe; may He enlighten our minds." Om is joined to it at the beginning and the end. In one Pranayama repeat three Gayatris. In all books they speak of Pranayama being divided into Rechaka (rejecting or exhaling), Puraka (inhaling), and Kumbhaka (restraining, stationary).

The Indriyas, the organs of the senses, are acting outwards and coming in contact with external objects. Bringing them under the control of the will is what is called Pratyahara or gathering towards oneself. Fixing the mind on the lotus of the heart, or on the centre of the head, is what is called Dharana. Limited to one spot, making that spot the base, a particular kind of mental waves rises; these are not swallowed up by other kinds of waves, but by degrees become prominent, while all the others recede and finally disappear. Next the multiplicity of these waves gives place to unity and one wave only is left in the mind. This is Dhyana, meditation. When no basis is necessary, when the whole of the mind has

become one wave, one - formedness, it is called Samadhi. Bereft of all help from places and centres, only the meaning of the thought is present. If the mind can be fixed on the centre for twelve seconds it will be a Dharana, twelve such Dharanas will be a Dhyana, and twelve such Dhyanas will be a Samadhi ^[20].

Mastering the Mind

The modern retronym for raja Yoga was introduced in the 19th-century by Swami Vivekananda to differentiate it as the form of Yoga that includes the Yoga of mind. Raja Yoga is also referred to as the Mental Yoga, or the Yoga of the Mind, because of its emphasis on awareness of one's state of mind. It is through this practice of concentration that one learns to calm the mind and bring it to one point of focus. It is at this point that we direct our attention inwardly, towards our true nature, which is Divine ^[4]. The basic premise of raja Yoga is that our perception of the divine Self is obscured by the disturbances of the mind. The minute we stop thinking one thought, another jumps in with equal force. Most of the time we remain unaware of the mind's erratic movements because we are habituated to giving our minds free reign: we've never seriously attempted to observe or train the mind. While we may have grown accustomed to living with an uncontrolled mind, we should never assume that it's an acceptable, if not inevitable, state of affairs ^[21].

As a king maintains control over his kingdom, so can we maintain control over our own "kingdom"—the vast territory of the mind. In Raja Yoga it is the mind that we use, it is the mind that we master ^[22] and use our mental powers to realize the Atman through the process of psychological control. Says the *Bhagavad Gita*: "When, through the practice of Yoga, the mind ceases its restless movements, and becomes still, the aspirant realizes the Atman".

Thus we can master the mind and, through repeated practice, we can make the mind

our servant rather than being its victim. The mind, when trained, is our truest friend; when left untrained and reckless, it's an enemy that won't leave the premises. When the mind is pure and calm, the self is no longer hidden from view.

Says the *Bhagavad Gita*:

“Patiently, little by little, spiritual aspirants must free themselves from all mental distractions, with the aid of the intelligent will. They must fix their minds upon the Atman, and never think of anything else. No matter where the restless and unquiet mind wanders, it must be drawn back and made to submit to the Atman alone”. ^[21]

The roles and interplay between mind, intellect and personality are understood through a process of self-observation. The meditator learns to quiet and control the mind, allowing the conscience to be clearly heard. Understanding the relationship between acquired values and innate values and between values and virtues is emphasised, along with the importance of reviewing and renewing one's values at the deepest level of one's life. Conscious awareness of the soul is thus developed, allowing full understanding of the self ^[1].

2. Spirituality

“Spirituality is the science and the art of remembrance”

As we invest ourselves in our spiritual growth our understanding develops, our capacity for growth expands, and we experience greater energy and enthusiasm for meditation. We begin to look forward to our spiritual practice and to anticipate its nourishing benefit. Eventually, it becomes a natural and indispensable part of our existence. Spirituality internalises the search and directs the mind to the heart of man where the search really should commence. The end of spirituality is the beginning of Reality and the end of Reality is the real Bliss. When even that has disappeared we have reached the goal.

The call of spirituality, sometimes referred to as ‘the still, small voice within’, is subtle and quiet. Here we come to the wisdom of following a daily meditation practice. When we make time to nurture our spiritual development, the inner Self responds with a lightness of heart and a deeper feeling of peace and calmness ^[22]. True spirituality is transmitted: only pure, unselfish teachers who have achieved some level of spiritual awakening can enliven our own dormant flame. It's helpful to have a regular time for meditation in order to create a habit; it's also helpful to have a regular place for meditation that is quiet, clean, and tranquil ^[8]. With an improved level of self-understanding comes the awareness of how behaviour and a spiritual lifestyle – which comprises a balanced blend of meditation, spiritual study, vegetarian diet, responsibilities and relationships and spiritual service – can complement and enhance spiritual development in daily life ^[1].

3. Relation between Raja Yoga & spirituality

Raja Yoga is the noblest of all Yoga and can be practiced systematically by anyone, regardless of current spiritual status or type of personality. Similarly, spirituality is the essence and the common denominator that unites all faiths and beliefs in one human aspiration towards mergence with our divine source.

In essence, “spirituality” makes it possible for aspirants to seek, and to experience, the divine within themselves. The mystic or spiritual journey is an inner journey of the heart. Spirituality focuses attention on the divine effulgence created by the presence of divinity in the heart. Spirituality is the need for an inner existence. *“Highest Bliss is located in one's own Self.” - Mandukya Upanishad* ^[22]. The mind is cleansed and made tranquil through the repeated practice of meditation and through the practice of moral virtues. Popular wisdom aside, there is no way to practice meditation without practicing moral virtues in tandem ^[21].

Benefits of Raja Yoga & spirituality

Raja Yoga is a science, art and a path in life to enhance,

enrich and strengthen our spiritual focus. As per spiritual master-Walt Baptiste “Raja Yoga emphasizes the benefits of meditation for spiritual self-realization and the purposeful evolution of consciousness”^[41].

Raja Yoga is, an essential component of all other spiritual paths since meditation is involved in the loving recollection of God, mental discrimination, and is an essential balance to selfless action^[21]. It is Raja Yoga and Raja Yoga alone that can lead you to the Ultimate Goal, or the highest point of human approach. No other practice can bring forth such results. It is, therefore, essential to have recourse to this science if one aims at the highest point^[22].

In historical context, it was the ultimate stage of Yoga practice, one nearing Samadhi. The following is a summary of Raja-Yoga freely translated from the Kurma-Purana^[21]: “*The fire of Yoga burns the cage of sin that is around a man. Knowledge becomes purified and Nirvana is directly obtained. From Yoga comes knowledge; knowledge again helps the Yogi. He who combines in himself both Yoga and knowledge, with him the Lord is pleased. Those that practice MahaYoga, either once a day, or twice a day, or thrice, or always, know them to be gods. Yoga is divided into two parts. One is called Abhava, and the other, MahaYoga. Where one's self is meditated upon as zero, and bereft of quality, that is called Abhava. That in which one sees the self as full of bliss and bereft of all impurities, and one with God, is called MahaYoga. The Yogi, by each one, realises his Self. The other Yogas that we read and hear of, do not deserve to be ranked with the excellent MahaYoga in which the Yogi finds himself and the whole universe as God. This is the highest of all Yogas*”.

Oneness with the supreme

According to Swami Vivekananda and the Bhagavad Gita, “this is the highest path, to

God-union”. Raja Yoga teaches meditation as the ultimate means for realizing God, and incorporates the highest essentials from all other forms of Yoga^[23]. One of the great tenets or principles of all religions has been that God resides in the heart of the human being. Spirituality focuses our attention on the divine residing in our own hearts. Spirituality invokes no names, confers no attributes, demands no subservience to any artificially created gods of the human mind, and focuses our attention on the infinite, ultimate source of all beings, which is nameless, formless and attribute-less. This approach to the Ultimate can bring together people of all cultures and all religions. When we worship an external God, there can be a sense of distance, separation and even alienation. This reveals God in a new light, of proximity and intimacy. Being within us, such an entity is readily accessible. All that spirituality seeks is oneness with God or Self, urging us to focus the mind inwards and to approach this inner presence with love. Love is God. A new understanding of our inner Self reveals a longing to return to a condition of oneness with God, and with all life^[22].

This doesn't mean that in order to realize God a person must totally renounce the world and live in a cave, monastery or convent. What it *does* mean is that all aspects of our life must be spiritualized so that they can be directed towards attaining the goal of God-realization^[21]. Spirituality says that God is within us, and that we can realize Him by the inward practice. Our communion with the Ultimate should be an inner communion with Him. Spirituality does not say that God does not exist outside us (Fig. 1). What it says is, why should you take all the trouble and expense to go to the places of worship when He is right inside you.

If the Yogi refuses the external powers he will come to salvation. So the eight petals of the lotus are the eight powers, inside of that lotus think of the Golden One, the Almighty, the Intangible, the Inexpressible, surrounded with effulgent light. The fire of Yoga burns the

cage of sin that is around a man. From Yoga comes knowledge; he who combines in himself both Yoga and knowledge, with him the Lord is pleased. Those who practice MahaYoga, regularly, know them to be equivalent to gods.

Conclusion

Raja Yoga as called the highest of all Yogas, emphasizes on attaining the mastery over oneself. It is the stepping stone for attaining higher realms of spirituality. In Raja Yoga, the Yogi cleanses one's mind of unnecessary waste thoughts. When the mind is pure and calm, the self as well as the supreme is no longer hidden from view. It is now that one is able to decipher the spiritual and moral values within which further helps in establishing a relationship with God. This spiritual state brings a state of stability, awakening and bliss.



Fig. 1 Spirituality begins where religion ends ^[22]

References:

1. Bryant, E. (2011). *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* IEP. Rutgers University.
2. Raja Monier-Williams' Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Cologne Digital Sanskrit Lexicon, Germany.
3. Birch, J. (2013). RajaYoga: The Reincarnations of the King of All Yogas. *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 17(3), 401–444.
4. Nazari & Hebert. Retrieved from Online website: <http://www.rajayogis.net/content/raja-Yoga>.
5. *Yoga in Hinduism - Ways to the Goal*, The other three are: Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga.
6. Dhand, A. (2002). The dharma of ethics, the ethics of dharma: Quizzing the ideals of Hinduism. *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 30(3), 347-372.
7. Desai, B.P. (1990). Place of nutrition in Yoga. *Ancient science of life*, 9(3), 147-153, PMC 3331325.
8. Sawai, Y. (1987). The Nature of Faith in the Śāṅkaran Vedānta Tradition. *Numen*, 34(1), 18-44.
9. Cole, W.O. (1991). Moral Issues in Six Religions. *Heinemann*, 104-105. ISBN 978-0435302993.
10. Burley, M. (2000). *Hatha-Yoga: Its Context, Theory, and Practice*. Motilal Banarsidass, page 198 ISBN 978-8120817067.
11. Āraṇya, H. (1983). *Yoga Philosophy of Patanjali*. State University of New York Press, 230-236. ISBN 978-0873957281.
12. Jha, G.N. *The Yoga-darsana: The sutras of Patanjali with the Bhasya of Vyasa* (Translator); *Harvard University Archives*, 90-91.
13. Iyengar, G.S. (1998). *Yoga: A Gem for Women*. 29-30. ISBN 978-8170237150.
14. Bajpai, R.S. (2002), *The Splendours and Dimensions Of Yoga*. Motilal Banarsidass, 342-345. ISBN 978-8171569649.
15. Bouanchaud, B. (1997), *The Essence of Yoga: Reflections on the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*. Rudra Press, page 149. ISBN 9780915801695.
16. Bell, C. (2007). *Mindful Yoga, Mindful Life: A Guide for Everyday Practice*, Rodmell Press, 145-151. ISBN 978-1930485204.
17. Tatyā, T.R. (Translator), with Bhojaraja commentary. *The Yoga Philosophy*. *Harvard University Archives*, 94-95.
18. Leggett, T. (1983). Shankara on the Yoga Sutras. *Routledge*, 2, 283-284. ISBN 978-0710095398.

19. Desmarais, M.M. (2008). Changing Minds: Mind, Consciousness And Identity In Patanjali'S Yoga-Sutra. *Motilal Banarsidass*, 175-176, ISBN 978-8120833364.
20. Cockrum, R. Raja Yoga by Swami Vivekanda, *Shards of Consciousness*. Retrieved from Online website: <http://www.shardsofconsciousness.com>.
21. Vedanta. Retrieved from Online website: Org: <http://vedanta.org/vedanta-overview/what-is-Yoga/the-path-of-meditation-raja-Yoga/>
22. *Sahaj Marg*. Retrieved from Online website: <https://www.sahajmarg.org/raja-Yoga>
23. Raja Yoga by Brahmakumaris. Retrieved from Online website: <http://www.brahmakumaris.org/whatwedo/courses/fciry/topics.htm>