

**YOGA EDUCATION FOR ALL**

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Observation of the first International Day of Yoga<sup>1</sup> on last 21st June, 2015 is a milestone in the effort of India to accept its spiritual wisdom. December 11, 2014 is another important date for “Yoga education, as on this day, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted without vote, a resolution commemorating 21 June as the International Day of Yoga. The Secretary General of UN in his message for first International Day of Yoga observed on 2015 June 21 stated that “Yoga offers a simple, accessible and inclusive means to promote physical and spiritual health and wellbeing.”<sup>2</sup> The international acceptance of yoga as a tool for physical and spiritual health and wellbeing was the result of the request made by Shri Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India to the world body, on 2014, 27 September to accept the relevance of ancient Indian wisdom in Yoga. In his speech delivered at UN, Shri Modi said that

*“Yoga is an invaluable gift of our ancient tradition. Yoga embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfillment; harmony between man and nature; a holistic approach to health and wellbeing. It is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with yourself, the world, and the nature. By changing our lifestyle and creating consciousness, it can help us deal with climate change. Let us work towards adopting an International Yoga Day.”<sup>3</sup>*

Prior to this effort, in 1965, The Mother, the founder of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education Ashram at Pondicherry, in reply to questions of a teacher stated that

*“I would like them (the Government) to recognize Yoga as education, not so much for ourselves, but it will be good for the country.*

*Matter will be transformed, that will be a solid base. Life will be divinized. Let India take the lead.”<sup>4</sup>*

Foundation for acceptance of Yoga in the nations outside India had been laid in 1893 by Swami Vivekananda, through his addresses delivered at the World’s Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in the United States. Today, there are many international yoga organisations with headquarters in countries outside India. Some of these are: Yoga Alliance; International Yoga Federation, International Yoga Sports Federation, etc. A few national level yoga organisations outside India are: Argentina: International Society of Integral Yoga; Brazil: Yoga Integral, Sao Paulo; Canada: Canada Yoga Alliance; Chile: Integral Yoga Society of Chile; Portugal:

Portuguese Confederation of Yoga; UK: British Wheel of Yoga; Yoga Alliance, UK; US: American Yoga Federation, etc. Some of these organisations also impart training for yoga teachers. In UK, British Wheel of Yoga<sup>5</sup> founded in 1965, registered as a charity in 1973, has been organising a diploma course for yoga teacher training, equivalent at level 4 (equal to the first year of undergraduate study). Online resources indicate that schools in many advanced nations have introduced yoga as part of their physical education programme. Certain schools have also specific periods assigned for the purpose. A few schools provide yoga education, only if approved by the parents of the students.

In India, the term “Yoga” is widely associated with *sadhana* or spiritual practice. In earlier days, yoga was restricted to a few. Yogic knowledge was generally handed down to selected students, only when the yogi was assured of the ability of the concerned student. Swami Vivekananda highlighted the role of yoga in the following words:

*“The science of yoga claims that it has discovered the laws which develop this personality, and by proper attention to those laws and methods, each one can grow and strengthen his personality. This is one of the great practical things and this is the secret of all education.”*<sup>6</sup>

Sri Aurobindo said that “The field of yoga is practically unlimited and its processes and instrumentations have a plasticity and adaptability and power of expansion to which it is difficult to see or set any limit.”<sup>7</sup> He also pointed out that “It is through consciousness, by an instrumentation of consciousness only that the nature and laws and movements of consciousness can be discovered-and this the method of yoga.”<sup>8</sup>

There are various definitions of Yoga. Manoj Das, in his editorial in ‘Streams of Yogic and Mystic Experience’ brought out by Centre for Studies in Civilizations, New Delhi mentions three streams of yoga: 1. Yoga as a process and a force inherent in man, 2. Yoga as union of individual’s self with the self of All form and 3. Yoga as a system compiled and edited by Patanjali.<sup>9</sup> Keerit Joshi in his paper on varieties of yogic experience in the above mentioned publication states that “Yoga is primarily and distinctly concerned with spiritual experience, and although in its integrality, it embraces all domains of knowledge, physical and supra-physical, its means are distinctively spiritual.”<sup>10</sup> According to Sri Aurobindo, “Yoga is the practice of the Truth of which knowledge gives the vision, and its practice has for its motor-power a spirit of illumined devotion, of calm or fervent consecration to that which knowledge sees to be the Highest.”<sup>11</sup> Sri Aurobindo also stated that according to Gita, Yoga “is the true skill in works, *yogah. karmasukau’salam.*”<sup>12</sup> All great scientists are real yogis. Their academic pursuit can be called as *Jnana* yoga. Those who work their manual work sincerely are also yogis. According to The Mother, “Work done in true spirit is meditation”.<sup>13</sup>

Yoga has been considered as an effective tool for developing learning skills as it facilitates the process of controlling and refining senses. It carries out chitta *sudhi* and *nadi sudhi*. According to

Swami Sivananda<sup>14</sup>, *Chitta sudhi* is a process of mental purification that controls sexual thoughts, worldly desires, sexual *vasanas*, anger, vanity, hypocrisy, egoism, greed, jealousy etc. Improved level of yoga results in higher levels of powers of mind in form of clairvoyance, clairaudience, presentiment etc. High quality yoga makes the learning process quicker and easier by making the mind quiet and silent so that it can receive the pure knowledge directly.

*“The highest reach of the sattwick development is when one can dispense often or habitually with outside aids, the teacher or the text book, grammar and dictionary and learn a subject largely or wholly from within. But this is only possible to the yogin by a successful prosecution of the discipline of yoga.”*<sup>15</sup>

The extent to which the instruments of learning can be perfected depends on the quality of yoga pursued by an individual. Swami Sivananda stated that “Yoga in a generic sense, refers to Karma yoga, Bhakti yoga, Raja yoga, Jnana yoga, Hatha yoga, Mantra yoga, Laya yoga or Kundalini yoga. In a restricted sense, it means the Ashtanga Yoga and Raja Yoga of Patanjali Maharshi”<sup>16</sup> *The* yoga suggested by Sri Aurobindo is known as “Integral yoga”. Other forms of yoga are: Japa yoga, Karma yoga, Kriya yoga, Mantra yoga, Swara yoga, Tantra yoga, etc. Yoga, as a psychology, is involved in the process of “an examination of nature and movements of consciousness as they are revealed to us by the processes and results of Yoga.”<sup>17</sup> As a psychology, it is a more comprehensive tool than available to the literature of general psychology. It easily accesses “the hidden psychological world and its play of unseen forces”. It can discover the nature and laws and movements of consciousness<sup>18</sup> The term ‘Yoga’ to some religious leaders appears as part of Hindu religion. However, the fact remains that majority of schools, throughout the world, have prayer classes at the starting of the day’s work. These prayer classes are in fact part of ‘Japa yoga’. “At the basis of the science of *japa* is the ancient perception of sages all over the world that creation proceeds from sound.”<sup>19</sup> Getting by heart and reciting verses and even organising recitation competitions among students are generally the practice found in all high quality schools. Recitations are part of Japa yoga, which develop the power of concentration in children.

High quality yogas are spiritual in nature, above the upper limits of religions. Just as ‘Yoga’ means different things to different people, spirituality in India is a stage above religion, whereas in the west, it is not so, it is another name of religion. The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) of United Kingdom<sup>20</sup> stated that

“The spiritual development of pupils is shown by their:

\*ability to be reflective about their own beliefs, religious or otherwise, which inform their perspective on life and their interest in and respect for different people’s feelings and values;

\*sense of enjoyment and fascination in learning about themselves, others and the world around them, including the intangible;

\*use of imagination and creativity in their learning;

“willingness to reflect on their experiences.”

In the above statement, religion is accepted as part of spirituality. According to Sri Aurobindo, spirituality is a state of mind above limits of religion. Every individual should not limit oneself to religious experiences. One needs to be broader than the widest horizons, loftier than the highest Kanchenjunga and profounder than the deepest oceans. Highest spirituality is far above that lower stage of seeking which is governed by religious form and dogma. It lives in an experience that is unintelligible to the formal religious mind.<sup>21</sup> True Yoga education will lead to a spiritual society, in which religions will be accepted like dresses of various colours used by human beings. Highlighting importance of religious tolerance, Swami Vivekananda said that “I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal tolerance, but we accept all religions as true.”<sup>22</sup> Pravrajika Atmapran, in an essay on thoughts of Swami Vivekananda on harmony of religions and religious sects stated that religious intolerance arises due to the fact that “the popular mind, instead of sticking to the fundamentals of religion, instead of understanding true imports of its essentials, accentuates only the difference between non-essential constituents of religion, namely, ritual and mythology.”<sup>23</sup> The Education Commission 1964-66, pointing out the role of education for developing religious tolerance stated that

“In a multi – religious society like ours, it is necessary to define the attitude of a State to religion, religious education and the concept of secularism. The adoption of a secularist policy means that in political, economic, and social matters, all citizens, irrespective of their religious faith, will enjoy equality of rights, that no religious community will be favoured or discriminated against, and that instruction in religious dogmas will not be provided in State schools. But it is not an irreligious or anti-religious policy; it does not belittle the importance of religion as such. It gives to every citizen the fullest freedom of religious belief and worship. It is anxious to ensure good relations amongst different religious groups and to promote not only religious tolerance but also active reverence for all religions.”<sup>24</sup>

There are prescribed strategies for each type of yoga. Meditation is the common strategy found in each type of yoga, as it purifies and strengthens the human mind and channelises appropriately the sense organs. The University Education Commission 1948-49<sup>25</sup> suggested that

“A short period of silent worship or meditation every morning before the class work starts may well become an integral part of college life. For a few moments we may free the mind from the distractions of daily living and attend to the forces which determine the meaning and value of life. We will find the Supreme, the only Supreme, which it is possible for us to know, when we are taught to look within.”

The Education Commission 1964-66 also stated that “We would also like to lay stress on the importance of encouraging students to meet in groups for silent meditation”<sup>26</sup>. Many years ago, the author worked in a Christian missionary managed school. Students had a lunch hour break for one hour and the teachers had the break for one hour. Students of upper classes were assigned duty of making the class students observe silence during the half an hour of lunch break of teachers. In certain classes, the students had to put their head on the desk and sleep. This is in fact an exercise for developing concentration that can be extended to development of mental silence.

One ashramite of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry narrated an incident. Many years ago, a person from USSR, pointed out to The Mother, the founder of Sri Aurobindo Ashram at

Pondicherry, that his nation (USSR) following a communist ideology cannot accept the term 'God', The mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, suggested him to use the term 'Truth', instead of 'God'. India, being a secular country may need to consider introducing 'Concentration' (observing silence) for five minutes every day in the first period of every teacher. This will not have any objection from any religious group.

#### YOGA AS AN ACADEMIC SUBJECT AT HIGHER EDUCATION STAGE

Universities have been offering many courses related to yoga starting from Certificate to Ph. D. Nomenclatures of these courses are:

Doctorate in Human Consciousness and Yogic Science and M. D. (Yoga & Rehabilitation);  
M. A. (Yoga/ Yogic Science/ Applied Yoga & Human Excellence);  
M.Sc. (Yoga / Yogic Science / Yoga Therapy / Yoga & Consciousness / Yogic Science & Holistic Health);  
M.A./ M. Sc. (Yoga Science / Human Consciousness & Yogic Science / Yoga & Science of Living);  
BNYS (Bachelor of Naturopathy & Yogic Sciences);  
B.Sc. (Yoga & Education / Yoga & Consciousness / Yoga Therapy);  
B. A. (Human Consciousness & Yogic Sciences / Yoga Philosophy);  
Yogic Science as a subject in B.A./ B. Sc. courses;  
PG Diploma ( Yoga / Yoga Education / Yoga Education & Philosophy / Yoga Science / Yogic Science / Human Consciousness and Yogic Sciences / Pancha Karma /Yoga Therapy / Yoga Therapy & Stress Management / Preksha Yoga Therapy / Yoga, Health & Cultural Tourism ;  
PG Diploma in Yoga Therapy for (Doctors) PGDYT;  
Advanced Diploma in Yoga;  
Diploma in (Yoga / Yoga Education / Yoga Education (SAP) / Yogic Education / Foundation of Yoga / Yoga & Naturopathy / Naturopathy &Yoga therapy / Yoga Science (for Graduates) / Yoga Education & Human Science;  
Certificate in (Yoga / Yoga Science / Yoga Science for Target Group / Yoga Studies / Yogic Science Programme / Yoga and Alternative Therapy / SOL PM and Yoga Education;  
Introductory Course in Yogic Science – I (1 month) / Yogic Science – II (Advanced) (One month).

There are also teacher training courses such as B.Ed. (Yoga) and Yoga Instructor Certificate Course (3 months), Certain institutions also run 10 / 15-day special courses. These courses offer a wider meaning to yoga, which is not limited to Asana and Pranayama. They give an awareness of varieties of forms of yoga.

#### ORIENTATION TO YOGA AT HIGHER EDUCATION TAGE

At the higher education stage, during 10<sup>th</sup> plan period, University Grants Commission, started a scheme for Promotion of Yoga Education and Practice and Positive Health in Universities, under which, for yoga programmes had a grant of Rs. 1, 00, 000/- for equipment/furnishing and Rs. 1, 80, 000/- for honorarium to two instructors.

#### TEACHING YOGA TO SCHOOL STUDENTS

Recent initiatives at school stage include development of a syllabus for teaching of yoga in Kendriya Vidyalayas (Central Schools).<sup>27</sup> The syllabus states that the purpose of yoga education in primary classes is “to develop physical and moral values through simple *sukshma vyayama* and interesting stories based on *yama* and *niyama*.” Practical work for classes VI - X has 5 components- *Shatha Karma*, 2. *Sukshma Vyayama*, 3. *Asanas*, 4. *Pranayama* and 5. *Concentration*. *Bandhya* has been added for classes XI and XII. National Council of Educational Research and Training has taken introduction of programme of yoga in schools as a component of the scheme on quality improvement in school. Its PSS Central Institute of Vocational Education at Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh has brought out a Guidelines<sup>28</sup> document for training of teachers of govt. and govt. aided schools by yoga institutes. The training programme states that “Yoga is the science and art of integration of our body, mind and spirit; to enable us become integrated & holistic human beings.” It covers knowledge about Patanjali Yoga including secular concept of *Ishwar*, *bahiranga yoga*, *antarang yoga*, *yama*, *niyama*, *shuddhi kriyas*, *neti*, *jal neti*, *kunjan kriya*, *tratak*, *kapalbhati*, *pranayama*, basic concepts of *chitta* -*chitta bhumis*, *vrittis*, *vikshepa*, *vitarka*, *chitta prasadana* etc. *mudras*, *bandhas*, *kleshas*, *panchakoshas-annamaya*, *pranamaya*, *manomaya*, *vigyanmaya* and *anandamaya*.

#### ISSUES RELATED TO TEACHING OF YOGA IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

There are various issues related to yoga education. Yoga education as part of physical exercises, as found in certain nations outside India, may not be a problem. If there are objections from religious groups, this can be made voluntary with written permission from parents. Those who do not join yoga classes may be asked to do physical exercises as per their parents’ wishes. Schools may be motivated to engage appropriately skilled parents to act as teachers.

Initial health checkup is essential for any organised physical education programme including learning of asans. Certain yogic asans may be harmful for certain students. Hence, before subjecting a student to practice of yoga asans, expert approval is necessary. As evident from statistics released by the National University of Planning and Administration, New Delhi<sup>29</sup>, the nation has inappropriate and inadequate school health services. In 2013-14, at the all India level nearly 37% schools having only primary classes did not have any health check-up for their students. Worst situation was reported for Manipur (90%), followed by Arunachal Pradesh (79%), Nagaland (70%), Tripura (69%), Assam (68%), Meghalaya (64%), Mizoram (63%), Bihar (59%), West Bengal (56%), Uttar Pradesh (54%), Odisha (48%), Kerala (43%). It is therefore, essential for the education system to improve school health services first, before going for yoga education at school stage.

Teaching of yoga at school stage requires every teacher to have appropriate knowledge and skills in yoga. It may take a few years to get appropriate knowledge and skills developed in the teachers, as part of in-service programme that can only be given at intervals. Hence, haste in introducing yoga education at school stage may ricochet and give a bad name to yoga.

Teaching about yoga as an intellectual pursuit is difficult. Teaching about religion, suggested by the University Education Commission 1948-1949 has not yet been introduced perhaps out of the fear that certain teachers may highlight their own religions. Similar situation may crop up in case

of teaching about yoga, which comes under Hinduism. There are differences among yoga gurus. Just as teaching about religions can only be appropriately taught by bias free teachers, similarly, teaching about yoga can be appropriately taught by teachers, who are yogis, in true sense and are above the limits imposed by dogmas, rites and rituals including superstitions perpetuated by lower level yoga gurus. Again in case schools in which parents of students approve teaching of yoga, the teachers may not be really capable to teach it, on the basis of their bookish knowledge, unless they are real practitioner of yoga and are broad in their outlook to teach impartially various types of yoga, without indicating preference for any particular yoga form, leaving the decision for each student to decide his/ her preferred yoga. Again just as unguided naturopathy may harm a human body, similarly unguided asans may harm the students. Although initial teacher training programmes, are expected to train their teacher trainees through their prayer classes, unfortunately many teacher training programmes, even in Regional Institutes of Education of NCERT and Departments of Education of many universities do not have such prayer classes. Before introducing yoga in schools, it may be appropriate to make physical education including yoga a daily compulsory activity in all types of initial teacher training programmes and Concentration for a few minutes in their theory classes. The central government through its NCERT may consider imparting training to all teachers about essentials of yoga. It may also develop a teachers' manual and give a copy of this manual to each teacher covering all stages of education. The manual may need to be made available in state languages.

The Government as part of its effort to teach Yoga in schools and colleges may consider introducing a few minutes of concentration at the starting of the first class taken by every teacher in every class. It may contribute to strengthen mental powers. Concentration may be also introduced at the higher education institutions. The Government of India may first introduce it in its own central universities and other institutions being run by it, which may motivate the states to introduce it in their own universities and government higher education institutions.

## **CONCLUSION**

In recent times one comes across many individuals who use the 'Yoga' to have a band of followers who under the assumption that they got certain financial benefits because of the grace of their own yoga gurus espouse their yoga gurus, who may sometimes be behind the bars because of their criminal activities. Utilising 'Yoga' for bad motives, is common both in and outside India. There are many individuals who use 'Yoga' as a means of living. No doubt the present successful effort of current Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi in making UN pass a resolution to observe International Day of Yoga is an international acceptance of the ancient Indian wisdom and will motivate people to do yoga. However, in order to make "Yoga' retain its high academic position, should the programme of 'Yoga education' in colleges and schools be renamed as 'Ancient Indian Exercises for Body and Mind'? While introducing yoga education, following ideas of Sri Aurobindo on state controlled education may need consideration of the authorities.

“A national culture, a national religion, a national education may still be useful things provided they do not interfere with the growth of human solidarity on the one side and

individual freedom of thought and conscience and development on the other; for they give form to the communal soul and help it to add its quota to the sum of human advancement; but a State education, a State religion, a State culture are unnatural violences.”<sup>30</sup>

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