

Chapter 16

Common Features Between Findings in Traditional Texts and Contemporary Science: Yoga Texts and Contemporary Science

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ABSTRACT

Yoga is a lifestyle and is also a system of therapy. The status of Yoga in modern times and in the masses has been established and enjoys great acceptance only as a system of therapy to upkeep good health. People join Yoga classes to lose weight, to get relief from diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma and to get rid of various diseases. A profound 'law of Nature' is at work which, through certain Yogic practices, can be approached for gaining good health. Any system of medicine of therapy which does not try to understand this law of nature and its style of working will always remain inadequate. One may like to criticize such a stand on the basis that these sound too idealistic, unattainable and also impracticable. But the fact remains the same that unless fundamentals are acquired with, and also integrated in life, a system of therapy of medicine would seldom cure a serious or chronic problem. As a desperate attempt to locate the unknown causes of diseases, varieties of systems have been developed over a long period of time. The aim of the ancient literature of yoga is to spread the authentic message to the masses so that the practitioner will be guided for complete eradication of sufferings and achieving eternal life. So considering this guideline most of the ancient texts throw some lights on the concept of diseases and its remedies. 'Hatharatnavali' is an important text of Hathayoga written by Srinivasa but not widely known as 'Hathapradipika'. The salient features of the text include clear conception of yoga, description of ashtakarmas, 84 asanas and elaboration of mudras. While describing the yogic techniques, the author also refers to some of the diseases such as dehaanala – bodily fire, jatharaagni – gastric fire, dvipa – bodily constituents, humours, phlegmatic disorders, and urinary acidity.

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TRADITIONAL YOGA TEXTS AND CONTEMPORARY SCIENCE

Yoga is the panacea for those who are tormented by travails of life. In other traditional schools of thought, life is called as '*bhava-roga*'— participation in the process of life is the 'dis-ease'— a very big discomfort. Life is the cause of all diseases and sufferings. Coming into the very human life again and again is considered to be a disease itself (*bhava*- life, *roga*- disease). It causes suffering on all two planes of physical and psychic. The ancient scriptures suggest development of an attitude of surrender to the Supreme Lord to overcome '*bhavaroga*'. In the *BhagwadGita* there are repeated suggestions for surrender to Lord for prevention of all future coming to life to avoid consequent suffering—'One who surrenders to me, does not come back to this transitory world full of suffering. They indeed are great who attain the Supreme State'. – *Bhagwad Gita*. Chapter 8. Verse 15. To develop an attitude of surrender to the Lord, taking the name of God is an easy way out as suggested in this scripture. So, *svasthya* is very ancient concept. It is variously discussed in all ancient traditions. It is well-known as '*sva-stha*' ('*svasthya*' meaning 'good health' has been derived from this word) to be established in one's own self which is free from all forms of 'dis-eases'. Through a natural process, a man is produced by the Nature who lives in the lap of Nature with aids provided by the Nature to finally merge in the Nature itself. Individuality is a sheer misnomer. Philosophically it is illusion. An individual nature, thus is actually an universal Nature. Even then, due to certain reasons, an individual commits some acts which are generally considered 'unnatural' without fully knowing the course of universal Nature, thus creating a scope for consequent illness. To make a comparison, animals seem to be close to the Nature in their way of living. Therefore they hardly fall sick, since they follow the law of Nature, particularly in eating, drinking and cohabitating. Man has been equipped with reasoning. With this faculty in man, he can argue against and also ignore his signals sent by 'instincts', which spring from Nature indeed. Thus, he can neglect the instructions issued by the Nature for his wellbeing. Consequently, he can misuse and abuse his organism inviting troubles. Nature finds such as an unworthy. Knowledge of Nature, its anatomy and physiology, its way of functioning would be a very powerful tool to prevent and combat a disorder in an individual. From the moment of conception until last breath, consciousness flows without any breach. Since consciousness is eternal and absolute, it continues even before and after the body comes into being or falls on death. However, an ordinary individual may not be able to experience consciousness before birth and after death, provided one is evolved fully as a spiritual person. This issue of consciousness continuing for ever has been very well addressed in the *Kathopanisad*. In case of continuation of *caitanya* (Consciousness) during sleep state, it is quite evident from the fact that there is no discontinuity. Had it been so, one would have not expressed the experience of sleep to be a sound one or otherwise. This substantiates the view that consciousness is eternal and absolute. There is no doubt that in recent times modern science of medicine has made spectacular advancement in developing new drugs and highly sophisticated machinery to detect and diagnose many diseases on their very onset itself. Early detection has helped tremendously in preventing many widespread diseases which some years back would wipe out a huge chunk of population in one swift move. Certain diseases otherwise considered to be dreaded and therefore difficult to alleviate and also which have been practically crippling the humanity, have also been very much eradicated successfully. These are commendable achievements. And the medical science was taking a sigh of relief. However, Nature has had something else in store. A set of modern ailments broke out silently and steadily. This was to the very surprise of the men of medicine. These are the diseases psychosomatic in nature which could not be so very easily diagnosed and overcome by even the most modern machines and drugs. Side effects of various drugs proved to be more

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