

Yoga: Classical and Contemporary Perspective


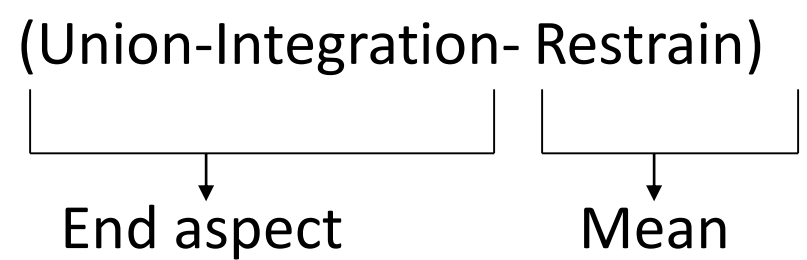
Yoga: Classical and Contemporary Perspective



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Summery of the Talk

Following points will be discussed briefly in this talk-

1. Introduction
2. The Purpose of Yoga 
 - Classical Purpose of Yoga Practice
 - Purpose of Yoga Practice in Contemporary times
3. Statement of the Problem
4. What is Yoga?
Meaning & Definitions 
 - (Union-Integration- Restraining)
 - End aspect
 - Mean
5. Schools of Yoga
6. Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali (along with its missing part in contemporary understanding and practice of Yoga)
7. What is needed?
8. Concluding Remark

Purpose of yoga

Classical Purpose of Yoga Practice:

- To understand the life and the phenomenon associated with it.
- To overcome the three-fold suffering permanently.
- To become aware of the lost link of oneness between ourselves and the Infinite.
- To regain a true awareness of oneness and to realize our divine nature is the highest **purpose of yoga**.

Purpose of Yoga in Contemporary times:

Yoga is being accepted-

- in the academic curricula for improved learning ability;
- Enhanced orderliness in thinking,
- A method of prevention and overcoming certain diseases.
- A method of Health and Healing.
- A method for increasing the efficiency in work with a view to be more productive.

Statement of the Problem

- However, in contemporary times, the perspective of Yoga has been shifted significantly wherein the deep and eternal essence of *yoga* has been misconceived/ misinterpreted and reduced to a few physical exercises undermining its other dimensions.
- The relative position of the postures (*asanas*), has been elevated, so as to lead people to believe that the term '*Yoga*' refers to physical postures only, as well as, a few breathing exercises on the name of *pranayama* and the goal of these is nothing but physical fitness.
- Meditation and so called meditation workshops on the name of yogic *dhyana* is also prevalent and considered to be very powerful technique which increases all-round performance level of people in their own field.
- The whole and the part have been reversed, terribly misleading and confusing people about the true nature of Classical Yoga.

Such groups of people claim that they give more importance to *Hathayoga*, as well as, to *ashtangayoga* but, in my opinion, this exclusive one sided emphasis on a few hathayogic practices (like asana & pranayama) need be re-thought because if hathayogic practices are not leading to Rajayoga then they will be considered merely a series of gymnastic exercises.

Therefore, there is a need to re-define the meaning of Yoga and to clarify its purpose so that the pure and pristine message of classical yoga may be understood in its true perspective.

In doing so, with the help of the etymological meaning of the term yoga, as well as, its various forms/dimensions as understood in classical literature, here an effort has been made to understand the true import of ashtangayoga in its classical perspective simultaneously drawing the attention towards its missing part in contemporary understanding and practice of yoga.

Meaning & Definitions of Yoga

Generally yoga is said to be means & methods and techniques but Vyasa states -“***Yogena yogo jnatavya..***” this indicates two aspects

- i. Yoga as ***Sadhya*** (i. e. end aspect to be achieved) and
- ii. Yoga as ***Sadhana*** (i.e. Means, methods aspect).

Let us examine the statement of Sage Vyasa on the basis of Etymological meaning of the term Yoga and different definitions thereof available in the classical literature.

The term Yoga has derived from the Sanskrit root “YUJ” which stands for:

- a. ***Yuj -samyoge*** = to unite.
- b. ***Yuj- Samadhau*** = put together or to integrate.
- c. ***Yuj -Samyamane*** = to restrain

Definitions of Yoga representing the import of a. (i.e. *Yoge or samyoge*)

- “*Samyoga yoga ityukto jivatmana parmatmanoh*” i.e. unification of individual self with the Higher Self is Yoga.

Here the term yoga indicates the ultimate union and thus stands for *Sadhya i.e.* END aspect of Yoga.

(Applicable to Hatha Yoga, V.S.,Y.Y., Yoga Vasistha etc.

Definitions of Yoga representing the import of b. (i.e. *Samadhau*)

1. Yogah samadhih” (Vyasa on P.Y.S. I/1)
2. “Samatvam yoga ucyate” (Gita II/48)

i.e. Integration or balance is yoga which stands for -
Total integration of human potential. These definitions
are also conveying the *Sadhya* i.e. END aspect of yoga.

3. “Yoga is integration and harmony between thoughts,
words and deeds or integration between head, heart
and hands” - Swami Satyananda (Yoga & Kriyas)

On the basis of the definitions available under a. & b. both
are representing the END aspect of Yoga either in terms of
union or integration.

Definitions of Yoga representing the import of c. (i.e. *Samyamane*)

1. *Tam yogamiti manyate sthiramindriyadharanam*
(Katha.Upa 2.6. 11).
i.e. Stability of senses is considered to be Yoga.
2. By controlling the senses concentrating the mind is Yoga
(Sveta. Upa. 2.8)
3. *Yogascittavrtti nirodhah* (PYS I/2)
Re-channalization of afflicted modifications of chitta to non-afflicted (i.e. towards integration & harmony) is Yoga.

continued..

C. Definitions of Yoga representing the import of c. (i.e. *Samyamane*)

4. *Manah prasamanopayah yoga ityabhidhiyate* (Yoga Vasistha).Yoga is a mean for quietening the mind.
5. *tam vidyadduhkhasamyoga viyoga yoga samjnitam* (Gita 6.23).Yoga is that which disassociate from pain or suffering.
6. *yogah yuktih* (Gita 10.7).Yoga is a Method
7. *Yogah karmasu kausalam* (Gita 2.50)
Perfection in action is Yoga.

continued..

C. Definitions of Yoga representing the import of c. (i.e. *Samyamane*)

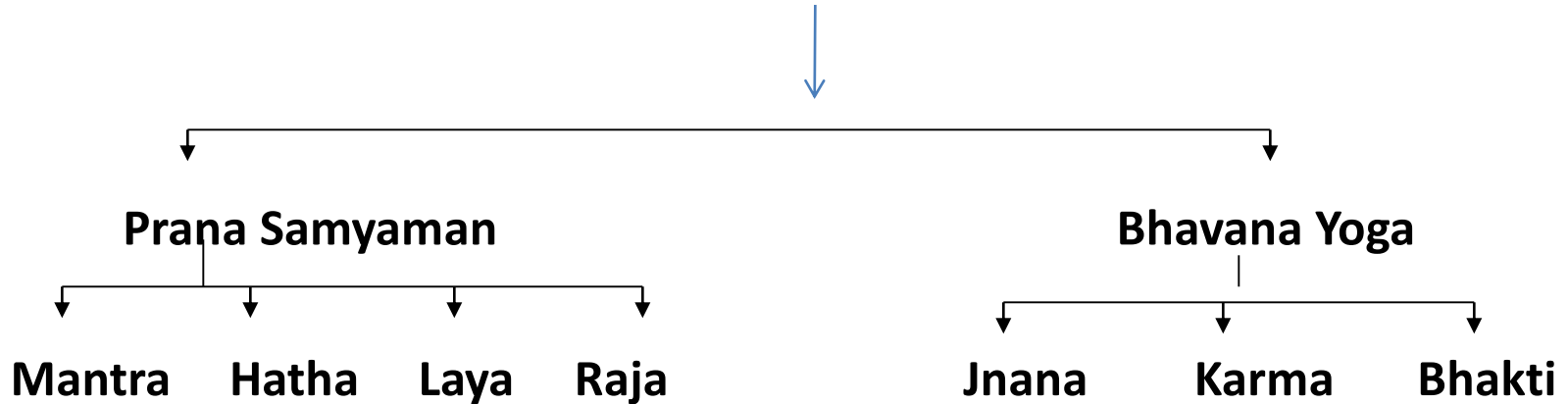
8. *Yogah bhavati duhkha* (Gita 6.17)
Yoga is a method through which one overcomes all suffering.
9. Means to develop balance in body, mind and senses (Caraka)
10. Yoga is that method through which mind gets stabilized (Shankaracarya)
11. Yoga is nothing but a process of purification of body and soul (Radhakrishnan)

Above mentioned definitions of Yoga highlight the *Sadhana* i.e. MEANS aspect of Yoga which consist of Practical and Methodical aspect of Yoga in the form of various techniques/methods/procedures etc. leading towards the accomplishment of either **a.(Unification)** or **b.(Integration)** i.e. the END aspect of Yoga.

Deductions

- On the basis of the understanding of the term Yoga it can be said that whatever is stated by Vyasa goes in accordance with the Tradition and seems absolutely correct.
- Therefore we can conclude that the term Yoga has been used to indicate both aspects the '**END**' as well as the '**MEANS**'.
- Unfortunately in recent contemporary Times emphasis is given to the mean aspect only
- The value of yoga as a method mentioned under “c” above (here in the form of definitions) have been practiced in some form or the other by the Seers & Sages according to their own temperaments throughout the history on the name of various Yogas.
- However, the Astanga Yoga of Patanjali encompasses almost all the procedures available in other schools and can be practiced by a person of any faith and thus seems very much relevant to the modern society.

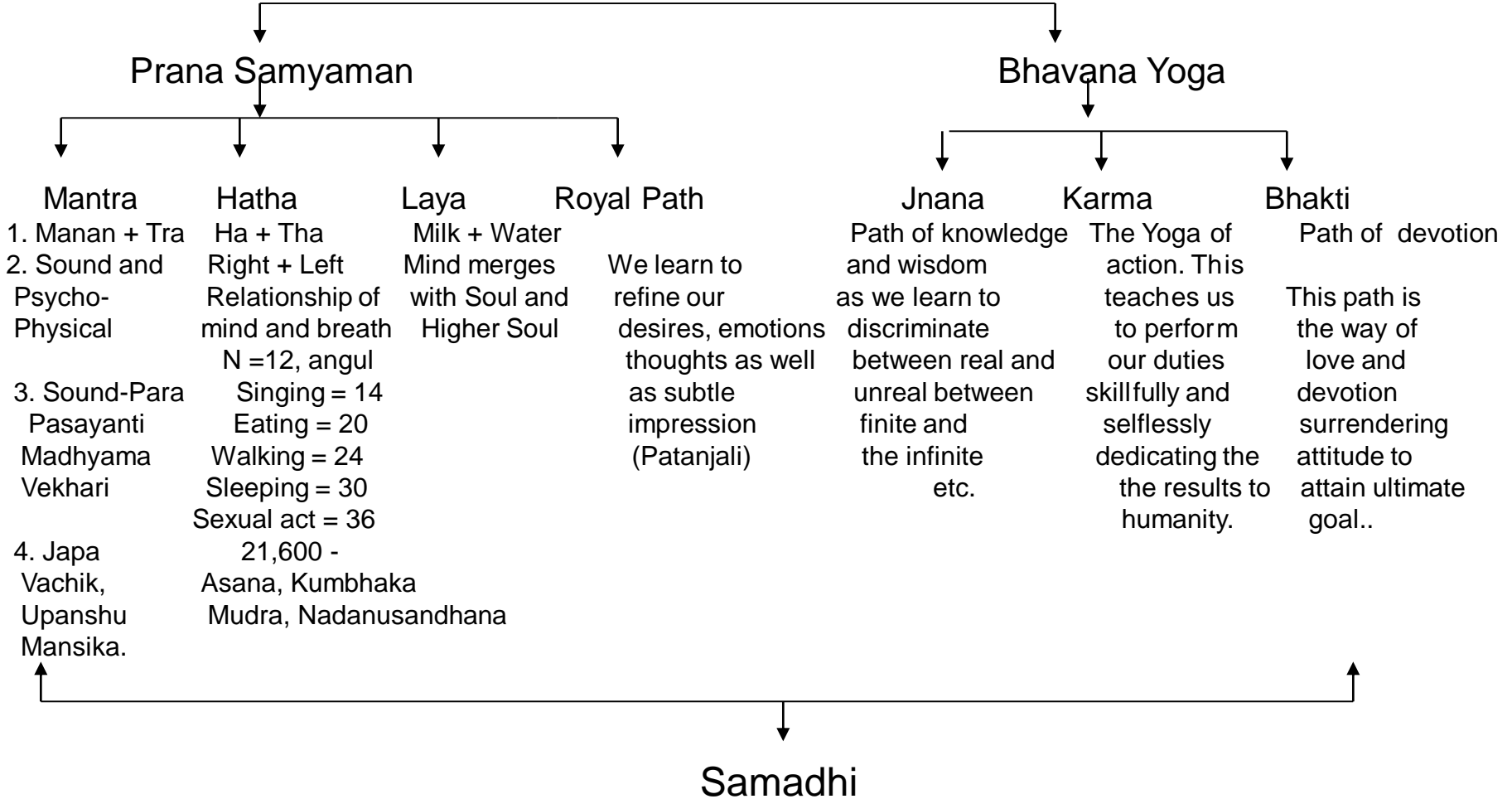
Schools of Yoga



- **Pranasamyama Yoga** - consists in attainment of Highest goal i.e. self-realization through control over Prana.
- **Bhavana Yoga** - consists in developing a particular attitude in one-self and towards world.

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SCHOOLS OF YOGA



Mantrayoga

Mananat trayate it Mantra –

- i. as a result of repeated recitation, mantra makes one free from evil thought, ensues good thoughts leading to no thoughts.
 - ii. According to Shiva Samhita Mrdu (weak) type of student should
be given Mantra Yoga.
 - iii. Mantras are based on the theory of esoteric sounds and have esoteric relationship with the various energy centers in human body.
- Sharada Tilaka Tantra associates all the vowels with ida and semi vowels and consonants with that of Sushumna. For spiritual purpose it is necessary to work on Ida and sushumna.
 - According to Mantra Mahodadhi and Mantra Yoga Shastra- there are fifteen limbs of Mantra Yoga.

Limbs of Mantra Yoga

- i. **Bhakti (Devotion) -**
 - **Vaidhi Bhakti** - Prescribed devotion
 - **Ragadija Bhakti** - Devotion involving attachment
 - **Para Bhakti** - Supreme devotion
- ii. **Shuddhi (Purification) -** Internal and External
- iii. **Asana (Posture) -** Meant to stabilize the body. Two body postures have been recognized - Padma and Svastika.
- iv. **Panchnga Sevana (Serving five limbs) -** Gita, Sahasranama, Stavan, Kavaca, Hridaya.
- v. **Achara (Conduct) -**
 - **Vamamchar** - involving worldly activity
 - **Divyachar** - beyond worldly activity
 - **Dashinachar** - Renunciation of both

Limbs of Mantra Yoga

- vi. **Dharana (Concentration)** - on external or internal object.
- vii. **Prana Kriya (Breath ritual)** - placing of life force into different parts of body.
- viii. **Mudra (Gesture)** - hand gestures are used to focus the mind.
- ix. **Tarpana (Satisfaction)** - offering libations of water to the deities.
- x. **Havana (Invocation)** - calling upon the deities by reciting mantras.
- xi. **Bali (Sacrifice)** - Gift of fruit, best offering is deemed to be the gift of oneself
- xii. **Yaga (Fire worship)** - External or Internal
- xii. **Japa (Recitation)** - Vaikhari, Upanshu and Manasa
- xiv. **Dhyana (Contemplation)**
- xv. **Samadhi (Ecstasy)** - Mind dissolved into the divine or chosen deity

Hatha Yoga

- A balance between **Ha** and **Tha** is called Hatha Yoga.
- **Ha** and **Tha** balance is facilitated when one undergoes various practices such as cleansing practices and Nadi Shodhana.
- Traditionally the Hatha School recognizes eight varieties of Kumbhakas.
- Some traditions apply recitation of Pranava or Bija Mantra in the course of controlled inhalation, controlled retention and controlled exhalation.
- A careful practice of Pranayama is always suggested otherwise it is highly harmful.
 - Initially Kumbhaka should not be practiced
 - Ratio of 1: 2 must be followed
 - Puraka should be regulated according to ones capacity of Recaka
 - Ideal ratio should be 1 : 4 : 2, however, a sadhak may proceed with 1 : 1 : 2 ratio in the beginning.

Laya Yoga

- Etymologically it means complete absorption
- It includes the essence of Mantra Yoga, practice of Pranayama and one pointed attention of mind, it can be Chakras or even Bhrumadhya, Nasagra or jihvagra.
- Laya proceeds with control over five sense organs - which is usually known as **Pratyahara**.
- Concentration on various Chakras result into arousal of Kundalini - which passes through the seven Chakras and reaches to Sahasrara and unites with Shiva. This is called Mahalaya.

Raja Yoga

- Final state of Yogic attainment.
- Rajayoga is also known as synonym of Samadhi.
- Patanjali's Yoga has been identified as Raja Yoga.
- It is interesting that Patanjali's Yoga contains the germ of almost every variety of Yoga.

Jnana Yoga

Jnana Yoga consists Four Principal means for attaining the goal.

- i. **Viveka** - Understanding of what is right or what is wrong, what is good and bad, what is pure and impure, what is permanent and impermanent
- ii. **Ihamutra-phalabhoga Viraga** - Detachment from pleasure seeking attitude not only in this world (iha) but also world beyond (amutra).
- iii. **Shama-dama-adi shat sampat-**
 - **shama** - Tranquility
 - **dama** - Sense restraint
 - **uparati** - Cessation
 - **titiksha** - Endurance
 - **Samadhana** - Mental collectedness
 - **Arurukshu** - Total acceptance of Transcendental reality.
- iv. **Mumukshutva** - Ardent desire for emancipation.

Bhakti Yoga

- Bhakti as an independent and important method is available - in Narada Bhakti Sutra and Shandilya Bhakti Sutra. Lord Krishna has elaborately discussed Bhakti in Gita.
- Bhagavat Purana describes Nine stages of Bhakti.

Four Types of Bhaktas are :

Arta,

jijnasu,

artharthi and

Jnani

Bhakti Yoga

Navadha Bhakti :

- **Shravana** - Listening
- **Kirtana** - Chanting
- **Smarana** - Remembrance
- **Pada Sevana** - Service of the feet
- **Arcana** - Ritual
- **Vandana** - Prostration
- **Dasya** - Slavish devotion
- **Sakhya** - Feeling of friendship
- **Atma Nivedana** - Self surrendering

Karma Yoga

- The germs of Karma Yoga are available in one of the important systems of Indian philosophy known as Mimamsa Philosophy. But its elaborate understanding which is popular among common man is available in Bhagavad Gita - this Karma Yoga is known as **Nishkama Karma Yoga**.
- In **Patanjala Yoga Sutra**, we find a combination of *jnana-bhakti-karma-yogas* in the practice of **Kriyayoga** wherein *karmayoga* can be counted under *tapas*, *jnanayoga* under the *svadhyaya*, and *bhaktiyoga* under *Isvarapranidhana*.

Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali

- The Sutra Treatise of Patanjali, divided into four chapters, is a psychological exposition of Yoga. Its field of action is to refine the activities of *chitta* (the whole psyche of man) and thereby getting absolute mastery over it.
- The whole treatise deals with the means and ways to achieve this end.
- Thus, keeping this theme in mind, Patanjali defines Yoga as- “*chitta - vritti - nirodha*”. It does not mean that a sadhaka becomes ‘mindless’ being, rather he is left ‘conscious-full’ with a transformed mind which due to its transparent (*sattvika*) nature can function to actualize the Self, as well as, the not-self.

Yamas & Niyamas

- This state can be achieved in and through dedicated and determined practice (*abhyasa*) and dispassionate *objectivity* (*vairagya*).
- Patanjali, as well as, all *above* mentioned schools of yoga develop a process of self- transformation wherein moral (***yamas***) and ethical (***niyamas***) purity is the foundation and considered to be indispensable for this journey.
- One can't allow himself to be impure, insincere, untruthful and harmful to others and at the same time try to practice yoga.
- Thus one has to be rooted in goodness, purity, truthfulness, self-reliance, patience and preservation, sincerity and honesty, contentment and in selfless services.
- Unfortunately these virtues are ignored in the contemporary times.

Asana

Patanjali defines it as '*sthiraasukhamasanam*' (PYS II/46) '*to sit steadily and comfortably*' came to be accepted (by the commentators) as the characteristics, as well as, the technique of '*asana*'.

As a consequence of this interpretation, it seems the next sutra (P.Y.S.II/47), which really provides the technique of '*asana*', has lost its real significance in its practice i. e. effortlessness (*prayatnashaithilya*) and engrossment with infinite (*anantasamapatti*). Due to which '*asana*' is generally taken to be related solely to the physical body or body positioning.

This could be the reason that in contemporary times, we have lost the purpose of asana as *yoganaga* in which we even transcend the body and therefore, person is not overpowered by the pairs of opposites.(P.Y.S.II/48).

Asana

This part is missing today in the practice of *asana* and *asana* is limited to the physiological aspects and being practiced in the health clubs as it contributes towards endurance and flexibility of the body and has become superficial only for physical beauty.

In fact, the term '*sthira*' should directly qualify the term '*sukham*' (as '*sthira*' seems an adjective of the term '*sukham*') so as to get the meaning of '*sukha-sthirata*' i.e. 'continuous flow of comfort'. If we accept this, then the meaning of '*sthirasukhamasanam*' would be '**a state (of mind)** wherein the continuous flow of comfort is maintained' which could automatically lead to the manifestation of '*asana*' as *yoganga*..

Pranayama

- ***Pranayama*** (expansion of breath) Patanjali has given emphasis on silencing the activities of chitta by way of prolonging and silencing the process of breathing activities to stand still.
- '*tasminsati shvasaprashvasayor gati-vicchedah pranayamah* (PYS II/49) – it shows that intense practice of '*asana*' automatically leads to '*pranayama*'.
- The '*shvasa-prashvasa*' which is one of the indicatives of '*cittavikshepas*' (PYS I/31) gets 'broken off' '*vicchedah*' in a specific manner in '*pranayama*'.
- That, in turns, helps in removing all coverings of consciousness (P.Y.S. II/52) and mind becomes fit instrument to enter into the field of dharana i.e. concentration (P.Y.S. II/53).
- This aspect of pranayama, in contemporary times, is neglected and used only for overcoming a few disorders.

Pranayama

In Hatha yoga, when nadis are purified by the regular practices of Pranayama, Prana is made to enter into the mouth of Sushmana with the help of various practices of Hathayoga (like bandhas and mudras etc.) and moves upward leading to the state of Manonmani, the highest level of Yogic Consciousness. (H. P. II/41-42).

Unfortunately, this aspect of pranayama (kumbhaka) is not given any importance in contemporary times.

Pratyahara (PYSII/54-55)

- Withdrawal of senses from their respective objects.
- Refining the human instincts
- Mind attached to worldly pleasures through senses therefore, yoga recommends that we can control the mind through the control of the sense organs.
- This classical practice of making the consciousness introvert stands totally neglected in present scenario.

Dharana/Dhyana /Samadhi (PYSIII/1-3)

- ***Dharana***(Concentration) in this stage, mind develops an ability to cultivate its scattered focusing power on an object of concentration through willful consistent practice.
- When this unbroken concentration process is continued then this concentration culminates into ***dhyana*** (yogic meditation).
- ***Dhyana*** is an uninterrupted flow of consciousness towards a chosen object.
- When consciousness expands to its still higher stages it is termed as *samapatti-a* complete fusion into the chosen object and then it goes beyond conscious and subconscious levels and assumes the super conscious flow and there arises a *prajna* known as *rtambhara* (intuitive wisdom).

Continued-

Dharana/Dhyana /Samadhi (PYSIII/1-3)

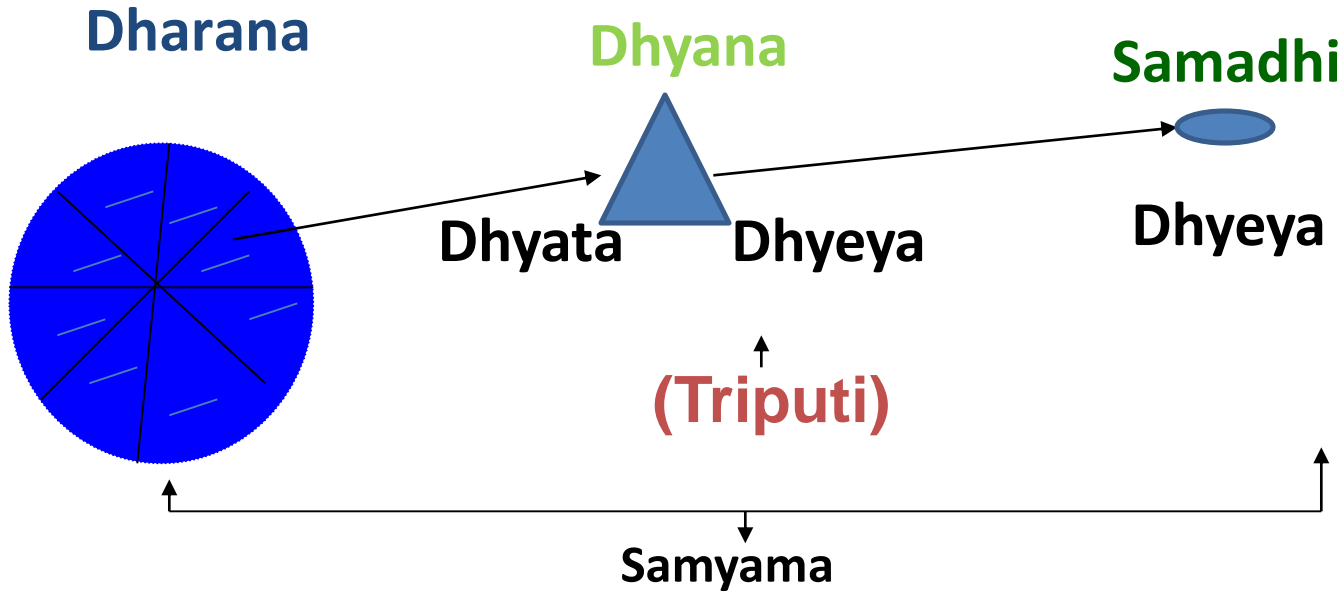
- All classical approaches/dimensions of yoga prepare the sadhaka to eventually reach to this higher stage of *dhyana*.
- In this state of dhyana, *Triputi* (meditator, meditation and object to be meditated) is still maintained however, prolonged and intense *dhyana* ultimately leads to the state of **Samadhi** wherein object only shines as if meditator and the process of meditation have been dropped.
- Thus the sadhaka regain the true awareness of that oneness with the infinite and attains peace, perfection and tranquility.

Continued-

Dharana/Dhyana /Samadhi (PYSIII/1-3)

- A person who has achieved this stage of Samadhi lives his life as spontaneous expression of the unhindered flow of supreme consciousness and transcends all divisions of culture, caste, creed and color.
- When one becomes aware of the infinite consciousness then the whole life is transformed that is what the purpose of classical yoga understood in both senses- Unification or Integration.
- The true import of meditation in classical terms is unfortunately, missing in contemporary times in so called meditational workshops

Dharana/Dhyana /Samadhi (PYSIII/1-3)



What is needed?

- What we need today is to incorporate the essence of a few classical practices of yoga which can help us in re-channelizing our nature from passion to purity, from untruth to truth from hardness to kindness and shedding of our ego etc.
- These are the primary acts, which are missing today in our practice, which must be cultivated through various disciplinary methods and systematic recourse of the yogic way of life-
 - i. consisting of wholesome food habits,
 - ii. wholesome activities,
 - iii. purity in thought etc. (Gita VI/17).
- We can achieve contentment and a serene state of mind that can help us to perform our life's duties with utmost love and dedication.

Concluding remark

- In short, the group of people who has reduced yoga to physical exercises should know that Yoga deals with body, breath and mind but is aimed at that beyond mind.
- Be it borne in the mind that *Asana, pranayama* are just the part of the Whole (Yoga) and that Whole is considered to be science of achieving the true purpose of life and realizing our Divine Nature.

THANK YOU