Concept of Aparigrah in Ashtaaang Yoga, a Sustainability Perspective

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Abstract— Sustainable consumption (SC) came up as a desirable goal for all countries (Millennium Consumption Goals 2011) from the time when it first received global notice during the Rio Summit of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. This paper links the hot new topic of sustainable consumption with the ancient vedic philosophy of ashtaang yoga. The paper focuses mainly upon the last component of the first ang (part), [namely 'yam' which means to depart] of the famous ashtaang yoga that is Aparigrah. The crucial link has been established to show how the ancient vedic philosophy is enriched with the solutions of today’s world’s serious problems and how simply the aparigrah component of ashtaang yoga can contribute to them. A practical approach is suggested in last to imbibe the sayings of ashtaang yog to tackle with the current environmental issues and to avoid future ones.

Keywords- Ashtaang Yog, Aparigrah, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Consumption, Yog.

I. INTRODUCTION

Assadourian (2010) describes that, the dominant consumer lifestyle and culture in affluent nations is going global in the twenty-first century. He notices that if this lifestyle is replicated even by half of world's nine billion people, then the impact on the human health and well being would be severe. So there is a severe need for people to make sustainable consumption that may help to reduce the negative impact on environment as well as other living being's lives without leaving them unsatisfied and craving for more. And that may only be done with the help of imbibing yoga as a lifestyle. Like air, water, soil, fire, space, food, clothes, yoga is also an inseparable part of human life. If we try to separate it from human life, nothing but the misery remains. Yoga is rooted in the notion of developing a positive personality. Therefore ethical discipline or the practice of correct conduct is necessary for success in yoga. This is the basis of yama and niyama, the two moral backbones of yoga. They define the attributes to be practised in everyday life by a spiritual aspirant.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Jackson (2006, p. 116) states that there are essentially four main strategies that can motivate people to make Sustainable Consumption choices: “government laws, regulations and incentives based, programmes of education to change people's attitude, small group/ community management and moral, religious or ethical appeals.” Saroja Subrahmanyan and Stephen Gould (2013) stated that although spirituality has been linked to ethical and moral behavior, it has not been studied as a strategy for motivating sustainable consumption. White, David Gordon (2014) describes that, The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali was the most translated ancient Indian text in the medieval era, having been translated into about forty Indian languages and two non-Indian languages: Old Javanese and Arabic. Before the 20th century, history indicates the Indian yoga scene was dominated by the Bhagavad Gita, Yoga Vasistha, texts attributed to Yajnavalkya and Hiranyakagbha, as well as literature on hatha yoga, tantric yoga and pashupata yoga rather than the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali. According to Ian Whicher (1998) and Stuart Sarbacker (2011), the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali formulations are one of the foundations of classical Yoga philosophy of Hinduism.

According to Feuerstein George (1978), the Yoga Sutras are a condensation of two different traditions, namely "eight limb yoga” (ashtanga yoga) and action yoga (Kriya yoga). Edwin Bryant (2011) explains that, to Patanjali, “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 consciousness unmixed with any other object.

Arti Dhand (2002) states that Aparigraha (अपरिग्रह) is the concept of non-possessiveness, non-grasping or non-greediness. Sharon Lauricella (2013) explains that Aparigrah is the opposite of parigrah, and refers to keeping the desire for possessions to what is necessary or important, depending on one's life stage and context. The precept of aparigraha is a self-restraint (temperance) from the type of greed and avarice where one's own material gain or happiness comes by hurting, killing or destroying other human beings, life forms or nature.

SC Jain (2012) and N Kazanas (2013) stated that Aparigraha is a concept that is related to and in part...
a motivator of dāna (proper charity), both from giver’s and receiver’s perspective. Wiki3 explains the virtue of aparigraha means taking what is truly necessary and no more.

Jennifer Taylor (2008) states, aparigraha includes the psychological state of “letting go and the releasing of control, transgressions, fears” and living a content life unfettered by anxieties.

H. Sylaja (2015) describes as Aparigraha – Non accumulation of possessions. One should not accumulate goods only in acquire and use what we need to live. One, who has many possessions, also has many worries. We are born without belongings and when we depart from this world we leave everything here. Non accumulation also means to grand other people their freedom, not to hold on to others.

III. YOGA AND SUSTAINABILITY

Yoga brings inner strength and satisfaction and magic tonic for good sustainable health in all respects as per WHO parameters and standards.4 Yoga as integral part of life which develops sustainability for physical, mental, emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual faculties of a human being in all walks of life as an accurate and perfect panacea to face all situations and problems. Yoga does wonders and makes us ‘SATOPRADHAN’ by imbibing seven virtues of the souls as purity, peace, power, knowledge, bliss, happiness and love for ‘spiritual empowerment’ reforming and transforming lives.4 Accumulating things is a necessary phenomenon for all living beings as we need things even when we can’t earn them. But this also has to have a certain limits, and certainly not by snatching the other’s needs for consumption. “One thing is clear,” says Gerda Verburg, the Netherlands Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality.

“We have neglected agriculture too much for many years. At the same time we are confronted with ever rising trends in energy consumption and climate change. These trends are and should be a major concern to us, as they will have a huge impact on our future. We use far more of our natural resources than our planet can regenerate. The world population would reach nine billion in 2050.”5 Population is increasing as people want children even when they don’t know why, because everyone else is engaged in doing so; there need not be any logic behind it. People are getting married so we need to (ignoring the divorce rates and the other married life complications) they are producing children, so we should too (ignoring our variety of health problems that we know will certainly transferring genetically to our children), they are making their children doctors and engineers so we have to, to maintain our stand in the society (ignoring our child’s capabilities and interests). There are uncountable things people are doing just too keep pace with a race which no one knows where it’s heading. And then comes the most interesting as well as crucial part of the race: the stress of lagging behind. We actually need to sit calmly and think about what is actually needed in our life. What is essential and what is not. Yoga tells us about this very closely. Patanjali, an ancient sage, defined yoga as the ‘restraining of thought waves’. He compiled ‘Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras’, the aphorisms of yoga, in which he provides an eight-limbed approach for the well-being and purification of body, mind and soul.7 The eight limbs are2: a. Yama (which consists of ahimsa (non-violence), satya (truthfulness), asteya (not stealing, cheating or being envious), brahmacharya (retaining vitality or sexual fluids, abstinence or continence) and aparigraha (moderation)); b. Niyama (containing shauca (internal and external cleanliness, or clean body and clean thoughts), santosha (contentment), tapas (discipline of body and sense organs), svadhyaya (prayer) and ishvarapranidhana (surrendering to God)); c. Asana (the physical postures); d. Pranayama (breath control); e. Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses); f. Dharana (fixing the mind on one point); g. Dhyana (meditation); and, finally, h. Samadhi (absorption).

According to Lars Jørn Langlien (2013), Hebdige (1999), spectacular subcultures are concerned with consumption, and operate within the leisure sphere. Yoga as spiritual seeking is more comprehensive in many practitioners lives (although as a form of exercise it not necessarily is), but still an adherence to yoga might be communicated through various commodities such as a certain way of dressing and a special diet. The holistic outlook of a lot of yoga philosophy also has an impact in an age where environmentalism and sustainability has become not only vital, but also fashionable. Aparigraha is the opposite of parigraha. Parigraha is covetousness or greed. Aparigraha is a mental state in which the sensual craving is dead. Parigraha leads to anxiety to preserve fear of loss, hatred, anger, untruthfulness, stealing, etc. Aparigraha puts an end to all these and bestows peace and contentment. It removes at one stroke fear, attachment, disappointment, anxiety, jealousy, anger, lust and depression. Aparigraha is indeed an aid to the practice of ahimsa, satya and asteya. When the craving is not satisfied you become angry, you hate the person who stands in your way of attaining things. You harm him in different ways, speak untruth and begin to steal things. Aparigraha removes all these. It is the foundation of all yogas, just as dhyana or meditation is the meeting point of all yogas.6

IV. APARIGRAHA

Non-possessiveness refers to not being greedy, accumulating, selfish and materialistic. In today’s world mostly people are after social fames and financial gains. They think that money is everything. Some are ready to go to any height to gain social
status; till the extent of being emotionally stressed. The reason for turning for yoga and other relaxation techniques is only the unbearable stress in life of almost every individual. But people give a damn to the root cause of the stress. It is the possessiveness. If we talk about the middle or the higher income group of people, they are already having more than they need and still want more just to satisfy their greeds despite of the fact that greed can never be met. A possessive individual will have “status anxiety” and therefore stress. Whereas a non-possessive individual understands about his needs and becomes happy and contented with his possessions. From environmental point of view also Non-possessiveness is essential. An individual, who inspires for more, may want a more expensive car, a gas-guzzler. That car means more fuel than a car with smaller engine, and higher emission of pollutant gases. Going frequently from planes or private jets for business or leisure trips further contribute to the carbon-dioxide emissions. Some people go for a foreign trip just to show that they are of high social status, and some to keep pace with that of a friend or so. Social status, therefore, comes with sky-scraping environmental costs. There are also economic dimensions to non-possessiveness. In the UK, for example, real-estate property prices have been rising consistently over the last decade, so much so that it is impossible for average-salary earner to afford to buy a house. The problem is exacerbated by high-income earners investing in a second property, in some cases several. This has caused economic crisis of sorts to the first-time property buyers who have to borrow much more money than they can afford to pay off. In a sustainable society, non-possessiveness would be essential at individual level, which, hopefully, will have positive environmental and economic repercussions leading to sustainable development of all sections of the community (Shonil A. Bhagwat, 2008)

V. CONCLUSION

By choosing a path of spiritual living we can easily feel the interconnectedness of all living beings as well as the matter on the planet, and then we may see the non-requirement of accumulating things and of sustainable consumption. The Ashtang yoga’s concept aparigrah is extremely required to save our planet. We need to acknowledge and consider its wider application to alter our lifestyles for better and creating meaningful and purposeful lives.

References


Citations: