



BRIDGING EASTERN PHILOSOPHY AND WESTERN THERAPY: AN ANALYSIS OF YOGA AND HYPNOTISM

Dr. Ch. VAMSEEDHAR,

Assistant Professor, HOD Philosophy, University College of Arts & Social Sciences,
Osmania University, Hyderabad, Telangana, India.

Abstract

We certainly aren't running out of books or articles on Yoga, but all this noise makes it incredibly hard for a beginner to grasp what Yoga actually means. Modern perspectives have shrunk a vast, ancient Eastern philosophy into a simple fitness trend. Because of this, most people completely miss a fascinating connection: modern hypnotism is not a standalone Western invention, but rather a specific offshoot of the master genus that is Yoga. Highlighting this forgotten relationship is precisely why this paper is necessary.

Key Words: hypnotism, philosophy, physical, mental, relationship, spiritually, therapy, yoga

Introduction

In this paper I propose to discuss 'The Triune Power of Yoga' on the one hand, and its 'Impingement on Hypnotism' on the other. The term 'Yoga' has many meanings (mainly connotations), but it primarily means 'Union.' Spiritually it means the Union of the individual soul with the Universal one. In this context, it is interesting, for those conversant with the Western thought, to note what William Wordsworth, the famous English Philosopher-Poet says: "But trailing clouds of glory do we come from God, who is our home...". Clearly implying the divine origin of the individual soul. 'Yoga' also means any one of the several ways by which we can attain union with the Godhead, say, for instance, Bhakti Yoga (The path of Devotion), Jnana Yoga (The Path of Knowledge) and (Nishkama) Karma Yoga (The Path of Righteous and Self-less action) and so on. Secularly, especially in the elite circles, Yoga has come to mean the achievement of perfect co-ordination between the body and the mind. We shall see later why the term 'elite' has been used in this context. Unless the body is sound the mind cannot be sound and vice versa. For, as the Latin proverb goes, 'Mens sana in corpore sano' a sound mind dwells in a sound body. But, as the body is material and the mind is spiritual people tend to work upwards towards (the ideal) state of perfection.

Now, Yoga traverses such a wide long path that it covers the material, mental and spiritual aspects of a human being's life. Consequently, Yoga, the ancient system of three closely related, but graded disciplines has a triune power that is inextricably and permanently bound up with it. Any other system or process of method of conditioning and perfecting (both the body and the mind) must be affected by this classical system, which in the modern times, (re) impinges on the efforts to achieve physical conditioning and thereby mental disciplining. The accent, however, is upon leading a healthy and long life free from physical ailments and

mental problems. In other words, Yoga impinges on Hypnotism, whose (stated) goals are mainly therapeutic. "Modern biology tells us that self-preservation is a basic instinct in all living beings. But why is 'self' or life so dear? The answer is given by the Upanishads. Life is so dear because there is joy. Who would like to live, if there was not joy?" Thus the modern efforts to promote and perfect physical and mental well-being are fully justified. But the Upanishads go further and declare in essence, "The forces of desires take us away from the 'self' and condition our existence the way we hanker after. The more we give up our hankering for objects and try to realise our identity with the 'True self' (Atman) or God (Brahman) the more do we realize 'true happiness'"

Hypnotism is a relatively modern discipline, that is, as it is understood and defined in modern times. It means "(the inducement of) a state like deep sleep in which a person's acts may be controlled by another person." (The Advanced Learner's dictionary of Current English). But it is not as simple as the above definition suggests. This point will become clear as we cover more ground. The pioneering work in Hypnotism was conducted by Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), also known as Friedrich Anton Mesmer, with his method of influencing a subjects' reaction to his suggestions, which came to be called Mesmerism. Mesmer was a German Medical Practitioner, whose early work was in 'magnet therapy' He applied methods of Hypnotism and Psychoanalysis to his patients. He later moved to Paris, where the French Academy disapproved of his methods, because he was far too ahead of his times (in Europe!). However, the good work of Mesmer was carried on by persons like Braid, Elliotson and Charcot. Of these three the last mentioned, namely Martin Charcot (1825-1893) was the teacher of the great Sigmund Freud, Father of Psychoanalysis. Charcot did the pioneering work in the understanding of the (human) nervous system, though Mesmer may rightly be called the 'Father of (modern) Hypnotism'. It is well known that Freud considers all artists including poets to be neurotics, who must elevate their (emotive) desires and passions through allowable forms of expression to find social-acceptability. (The point is, social-acceptability has always been an ideal).

Psycho-analytical methods were developed to tackle complex mental problems. Efforts were directed towards the prevention and cure of pathological conditions of the mind, which may (also) result in psychosomatic disorders affecting the physique and cultivation of bad and anti-social habits. Psychosomatic disorders were thought to be preventable and curable through hypnosis. Hypnotism, therefore, cannot be viewed apart from Hypno-therapeutic pursuits, even though there may have been rare cases of hypnotism being misused (say, by inducing subjects to play pranks on others during hypnosis etc.). However, a hypnotist's views on the last point may be illuminating. Says Mr. L.C. Young, "The findings disclosed consistently the failure of all experimental measures to induce hypnotic subjects, in response to hypnotic suggestion, to perform acts of an objectionable character, even though many of the suggested acts were acceptable to them under circumstances of waking consciousness." 4.

As for auto-suggestion (i.e., self-induced hypnosis), a branch of hypnotism, Mr. William J. Ousby has the following things to say about it, "Self-hypnotism, or auto-suggestion is a means to an end. The life of any individual should be lived, arranged and organized, in full waking consciousness. Self-hypnotism and suggestion are only a means of building the habits necessary to live in a healthy, balanced manner. "History reveals that Mesmer had visited Calcutta in the year 1776 (20 years after the Black Hole incident) and visited several ashrams and met many rishis. He might have interacted with Yogis and Sadhus and picked a few tips on Yoga. John Elliotson, in his magazine, 'The Zoist' confirmed the visit of Mesmer to India. He also reported that several hundred sessions were conducted by Yogis in his presence".

Further, this practicing hypnotist is of the firm view that the roots of hypnotism lie in Yoga Sutra of Patanjali (2nd 3rd centuries B.C) and even prior to that work in the Bhagavad Gita, where Lord Krishna conditioned the mind of Arjuna, psychologically and prepared him to undertake his natural task, one that is appropriate to him according to Yuga dharma, or law of the times. In this connection it is very pertinent to note that the very opening words of the Gita suggest a solemn remedial or therapeutic action (on the spiritual plane, at the deepest layer of meaning) by pointing out impending clash between the dark forces of evil (the materialist Kurus and the spotless (Pandava) forces of virtue against the backdrop of the field of action, which must also be a field of duty a righteous one at that.

Thus far, we have seen in brief the fundamental goals of Yoga on the one hand and Hypnotism on the other. Now we can go to a simple analysis of the systems one after the other.

Now, let us consider the system of 'Yoga' in a little more detail. This system, exemplified by Patanjali consists of eight limbs, namely (1) Yama (2) Niyama (3) Asana (4) Pranayama (5) Pratyahara (6) Dharana (7) Dhyana & (8) Samadhi,

Here it must be borne in mind that since Yoga may mean any method of spiritual discipline and since its basic meaning is the union of 'jivatma' with 'paramatma', the origins of 'Yoga' may go back to millennia. Lord Krishna, who is stated to belong to 'Dwapara Age' is credited with the title, The Lord of the Yogis (Yogeshwarah(yide: The Bhagavad Gita, 18-78; "Yatra Yogeshwarah Krishna.

The first limb of Yoga is 'Yama', which literally means the restraining or the controlling of passions, strong irresistible feelings that prompt us, more often than not to go astray. Yama is further divided into (a) Ahimsa (non-violence) or (respect for life) (b) Satya (abstaining from the lying habit) (c) Asteya (refraining from the anti-social habit of stealing) (d) Brahmacharya (observing continence and propriety in sexual relations) (e) Aparigraha (non-acceptance of gifts etc..) because it may lead to a life of corruption.

The second limb of Yoga is Niyama, which again is divided into (a) 'Saucha house and the (observance of cleanliness by washing oneself, keeping garmets house and surroundings clean, taking clean food etc.) (b) Santosha (practising contentment and happiness) (c) "Tapas or Penance (cultivating the habit of enduring the rigours of cold, heat' etc.,) (d) 'Svadhyaya (the habit of reading the scriptures, especially those that relate to one's own mental and spiritual disciplines) and (e) "Iswara pranidhana (contemplating the Godhead or meditation).

The third limb is Asana, which lays stress upon adopting the right physical posture during meditation etc./ The right physical /postures not only increase the stamina and strength of the body but also cure certain ailments caused by a crouched, crampy gait, improper circulation etc. There are various kinds of Asana, namely Padmasana (Lotus posture), Mayurasana (peacock Posture), Sarvangasana, chakrasana etc which, however, must be learnt under the guidance of a teachers a yogi so to speak (The relation between the hypnotist and the subject under hypnosis). (Of these asanas the shavasana is the most relevant for the purpose of this paper).

The fourth limb of Yoga is Pranayama (regulation of breath) and it consists in three types, or rather steps in doing the breathing exercise, namely Purakn (inhaling air into lungs)

Kumbhaka (retaining the air in the lungs) and Rechaka (exhalation). For these three processes a gradual temporal ratio has to be established among them under the guidance of a well versed teacher.

The next step i.e., the fifth stage of yoga is Pratyahara or withdrawal of senses from distracting influences like external objects and forces. This is what the Indian scriptures call drawing the mind inward. In this process the mind moves from the external objects to reason. Dr. Radha Krishnan says. "In this state there may be sounds around, but the ear does not hear them. There may be colors in front, but the eye does not see them. So in this state the mind is not disturbed by sounds, sights etc., but keeps all of them under perfect control. This stage is very difficult, although not impossible, of attainment. It requires a resolute will and a long practice to gain mastery over one's senses.

It is from this point psychological yoga begins and is called "Antaramga sadhana" (Internal practice). The first four of the eight limbs of Yoga are called physical Yoga Bahiranga Sadhana (external practice). External practice is only an aid to internal practice, which is of primary importance. The three disciplines directly related to Samadhi are said to be Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi.

Dharana or 'holding on consists in fixing the mind on the desired object. In this state (the) mind knows only the object of concentration and nothing else.

Dhyana or 'Meditation' is the steady contemplation of the object without any break. In (the) Dharana state also the object is held continually before chitta, but it is done only with effort. When Dharana matures, it becomes dhyana and when dhyana matures, it becomes 'Samadhi'.

Samadhi: (It) is the mind's absorption in the object of contemplation. Samadhi is often translated as trance etc., It should be noted that Samadhi is not the completion of Yoga, which is complete cessation of all the functions of citta. But since in this Samadhi, the object is present and since the object is a modification of citta, we cannot say that the functioning of citta is completely stopped. Only a strong control of citta has been achieved. The functions of citta can be said to have completely stopped, only when consciousness goes back to its origin, the atman or purusa. The yoga psychologists admit that concentration is a general characteristic of all states of mind, though it is formed in its intense form in the state of Samadhi."

Samadhi is of two kinds: Conscious one or Samprajnata and Supra Conscious one, or Asamprajnata. In the former consciousness, the object of meditation persists (savikalpa) and in the latter it is transcended (Nirvikalpa), or the former is Ekagra and the latter is Niruddha. It is the former state that is resembled by hypnotic trance, of which later.

Now Samprajnata state of Samadhi is of four kinds:

A) SAVITARKA: Where the gross object of meditation is like the tip of the nose, or mid-point of the eye brows, or the image of the deity concerned.

B) SAVICHARA: The mind is concentrated on a subtler object of meditation like the pancha tanmatras i.e., sabdadi in this state.

C) SANANDA: The mind is concentrated on still subtler objects of meditation that produce joy in this state.

D) SASMITA: Here the chitta (mind) is concentrated on the ego substance with which the self is generally identified. Here we have conscious ecstasy, where individuality persists.

Asamprajnata Samadhi (nirvikalpa Samadhi) is that state where the meditator and object of meditation are fused together and there is no consciousness of the object of meditation, because there is no duality. The Yogis who attain (to) this state cannot be in the physical body for long. The nuts unscrew, the bolts and joints fall off and the Yogis attain Kaivalya or complete liberation. Thus we see that this second part of the last part of Yoga goes far beyond the stated and achieved scope of hypnotism. Yoga may be called a complete system of therapy for the body, the mind and the soul, whereas hypnotism is a system of therapy for the body and the mind. One is generic and the other is specific.

It is stated that Yogis attain certain super human powers (the Asthasiddhis) but they should brush them aside and concentrate on Kaivalya. For the present I shall say here that the first four steps of Yoga purify the physical realm, the next three and a half the mental realm and the last half-a-step the spiritual realm (other divisions are possible and will be attended to). The statement will be added on to and suitably modified later. The yoga psychology assumed, much before the advent of hypnotism on the scene, that besides the conscious mind, there is an unconscious but psychically active region, and tapas (one of the wings of Niyama) aims at the control of the contents of this unconscious region. What happens above the threshold of consciousness is symbolic of the play of the forces underneath it. Adepts in Yoga explore in cases of nervous disease and 'possession' what is normally hidden in the unconscious by letting it come to the surface through yogic (hypnotic) trace. Such methods, wide spread in India, anticipated modern psycho-analysis.

The Bhagavad Gita defines Yoga in many ways and these ways refer to the physical, mental (or psychological) and spiritual aspects of an aspirants' life. Some simple examples will prove this fact.

The Gita says, 'Yogah Karmasu Kauslam' (The Gita 2-50) and it means that the doing of one's actions in a flawless and blemish less manner is Yoga. This may relate to 76 a person's material, mental or spiritual life, the last in the sense that all our actions should ultimately tend towards the Highest Goal.

We are once again told, 'Samatwam Yoga uchyate' (The Bhagavad Gita 2-48), which points towards the perfection of one's mind in such a way that it enjoys perfect equanimity, neutrality and equipoise, which leads to the development of mental powers through an impartial and un-regimented frame of mind, which may, once again, take the sadhak to the highest goal, namely spiritual bliss. Finally, the second of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali says, 'Yogah cittavritti Nirodhah' referring both to the Samprajnata and Asamprajnata states, which are the two last steps to 'Kaivalya' or complete realisation.

Now, as we know, it is through the physical body that we have to reach all the stages of human perfection, namely the physical, mental and spiritual ones. That is why the scriptures say 'Sariramadyam Khalu Dharmasadhanam' (The body is verily the prime source of dharmasadhana, or the leading of a perfect life.) It is here that hypnotism take the cue from Yoga. The hypnotist, of course, tries to cure the subject through influencing his unconscious mind and activating it to overcome diffidence, mental complexes, bad habits like drunkenness, valetudinarianism, psychosomatic disorders and so on.

In the ultimate analysis, it is, however, not a wise practice to straight jacket the limbs of Yoga into physical, mental and spiritual compartments. They are all limbs of an organic whole.

They are also like links in one chain and each link connects up with the other and leads up to one ultimate goal, namely the attainment of spiritual perfection. However, from the nature of the Sadhana, or practice the first four limbs are conveniently called Bahiranga Sadhana (External practice) and the next four are called Antaranga Sadhana (Internal practice). Actually, Dharana, Dhayana and Samadhi are collectively called Samyama, because they all fortify one-pointedness. I shall not be guilty of the sin of repetition, if I say that the ultimate objective of gaining kaivalya (Supreme Bliss) (Salvation) runs like a golden thread through all the parts of the integrated system of yoga weaving all the parts into one colourful garland of 'spiritual sadhana' a symphony.

Now to come to Hypnotism, it is also a system of practical philosophy like Yoga and like Yoga too its aim is to do good to society. The use of hypnosis in surgery, in anesthesia and in psycho-therapy should not be under estimated. It too can be used effectively to promote physical fitness, mental fitness, correction of vices, counselling etc. Here it draws its inspiration from the ancient system of Yoga for the perfection of its tools. To be more exact, hypnotism takes its origin from Yoga, develops on its own lines in the West and once gain looks to Yoga for renewed vigor and inspiration. It is here Yoga re-impinges on Hypnotism.

To prove the above stated points the relationship between the eight limbs of Yoga and Hypnotism is worth mentioning essentially both hypnotism and yoga are voyages of discovery itself-discovery, the one right now trying to gain its mental and moral moorings, the other to establish the spiritual ones. Both are altruistic in the sense that they try to perfect the subjects of their disciplines. However, in Yoga the relationship is that of the Guru and the apprentice and in Hypnotism it is the one between the hypnotist and the amenable subject, for we are told that "5% of people cannot be hypnotized" (8) - it is interesting to note that the benefits of Yoga cannot be immediately gained by the extroverts, who must spend a lot of time in the earlier stages. In Yoga, after the first few sets of instructions, the aspiring Sadhak can proceed on his own. Only he should hate the desire to have spiritual liberation. As a matter of fact Yoga is really an affair between every individual soul and its ultimate goal, namely the over soul. The initial help above mentioned impinges on hypnotism in the sense that the hypnotist can train the subject in self-hypnosis, which however, is not a practical proposition for many average persons. The tapping of the invisible power within, the source of the light within is the goal of both Yoga and Hypnotism. Far greater benefits can be derived from Yoga by hypnotism (the latter discipline) by a proper study of the triune power of Yoga, for a general system can always enhance and broaden the scope of a specific one. The deep hypnotic state nearly approximates to the samprajanata state of Samadhi and its scope can be enlarged to become identical with the latter.

Yama and Niyama are concerned with the perfection of a person's external habits as also correcting traits that affect society adversely. In hypnotism the very first step is that the practitioner has to control his emotions and maintain self-discipline in order to achieve a tranquil state. Asanas, or bodily postures are important, because the body should enjoy perfect health by the result as well as the activating of all the glands, organs and circulatory systems and nerves and muscles by adopting a posture that is either convenient, pleasant or comfortable. The subject undergoing hypnosis should also lie down on the floor comfortably and adapt the posture known as Shavasana in Yoga to achieve perfect relaxation of the body and that of the mind.

The fourth state, namely breath control, or Prana Yama and the idea implied therein inspires the hypnotist or the subject to practice deep breathing before the commencement of the

session. He inhales for 4 seconds, retains for 6 seconds and exhales for 5 seconds. While inhaling he imagines that an invisible energy enters his body while he imagines or rather visualization that the energy is spreading all over his body and purifying. Finally, while exhaling the hyperactive anxiety and other worried thoughts are leaving his body. The Yogi goes on beyond this and learns to stop breath for some time, gradually increasing the time to surprising extents of duration.

The fifth state Pratyahara involves a deliberate proceedings action and withdrawal of the senses from the turmoil of the outside world. In hypnosis the practitioner has to close his eyes and concentrate on the suggestions of the prevention of any outside disturbance. It is the responsibility of the hypnotist to teach the subject the techniques of concentration through withdrawal.

The sixth state is Dharana, or concentration, i.e., fixing the mind on a single object to the exclusion of all else... In a small way everyone has Dharana. In hypnosis the practitioner concentrates the suggestion of the hypnotist and tries to imagine that his entire body is relaxing and fixing the mind on the object suggested. This state is known as Light Hypnotic state.

Dhyanam is a later state of the same process. The eighth state of Yoga is Samadhi, whose first part namely the Samprajnata State (as distinct from the Asamprajnata) is closely approximated by the deep somnambulistic state in hypnosis.

Thus we have seen clearly that all the eight limbs of Yoga impinge upon the eight parts of (steps in) hypnosis and this impingement is no coincidence. All ancient/ earlier systems have a pervasive influence upon the later systems. However, in these materialistic times, the spiritual import may have been lost in certain processes and it has to be rediscovered and re-infused into systems that have become less comprehensive. Between Yoga and Hypnotism there is more of difference in degree than in kind. For both are altruistic and perfectionist. However, there is some difference in kind too, namely the emphasis laid on goals. Hypnotism aims at here and Yoga at hereafter. However, there is no bar to achieving perfect synthesis between the two systems on two planes, namely the physical and mental (ie, moral & spiritual) and hypnotist can benefit from the classical and time-tested Yogis' in this respect.

The modern interpretations of Yoga especially in the west tend to distort and resent by presenting yoga as a system of physical postures and breathing exercises with half-baked interpreters assuming the role of the yogi. However, this may not affect either of the status of Yoga and Hypnotism or their mutual interaction.

References:

- Chatterjee. S and Dutta, D.M., An introduction to Indian Philosophy published by the University of Calcutta, 8th reprint edition, 48, Hazra Road, Calcutta-19, 1994, P-359.
- Ousby, William J 'The theory & practice of Hypnotism', Thomson Publishing Group p.p. 190.
- Radhakrishnan S. Indian Philosophy, Vol-II, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, Tenth impression 1977, p. 348.
- Wordsworth: Ode on Intimations of Immortality.
- Young, L.C. The Science of Hypnotism (A Universal Publication) pp. 161.
- Young L.C., 'The Science of Hypnotism - (A Universal Publication) pp. 22.