

# Relevance of Yama in Modern Times

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**Abstract:** *General perception of yoga is practice of Asana, Pranayama or meditation technique for therapeutic purposes. The foundational ethical principles of yoga are not considered in the modern time practices. Yama and niyama are not widely known and are not even taught in the yoga classes. This paper discusses the concept of ethical principles of yoga and its importance in modern times. Increasing crimes, family disputes for money, unethical behavior in public places and not to forget fight for the religions, whose aim is to bring peace and harmony in the society. So Purpose of this study is to understand how world can be a better place, if in every school ethical principles are taught, kids are molded in such a way and every individual follows it. Through hermeneutics and intertextual approaches it is seen that the impact of yama (social discipline) helps to move beyond one's natural tendencies of anger, frustration and disappointment. By bringing change in each self, their emotions will bring change in the energy in the body and change in behavior and thoughts. Society will be crime free and more peaceful.*

**Keywords:** Yama, Change, World, Human

## I. INTRODUCTION

Russia invaded Ukraine, missiles and airstrikes hit across Ukraine. Hindu-Muslim Riots, life stress and suicide in children and adolescents, crimes to satisfy greed, lust and what not. These are the highlights in NEWS these days even though there are legal laws in all the countries. But policies, acts, law and punishments are not stopping these crimes from happening. People under authority are miss using their powers. Common man is scared of taking stand against authority, people lack unity because of fear or negligence.

Studies consistently find the rising prevalence rate of mental disorders around the world, with majority of them experiencing medium to high level of emotional pressures.<sup>1</sup> The common mental problems in the major life transition period is not only associated with lower academic performance in students but also with college attrition, workload, bad relationships, emotional stress and anxiety, suicidal thoughts, behavioural and substance addictions as well as general health. It is high time to prevent and reduce emotional pressures<sup>2</sup> among people for them to be aware and active to stand up against unfair practices happening around in a right way through right knowledge. To lead towards right knowledge Maharishi patanjali has explained 8 limbs<sup>3</sup> of yoga. These are Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. One should progress in 8 limbs simultaneously as they are all equally important. Thus the journey of yoga starts even before you step on the mat. Several studies show use of *yoga* for mental and physical well-being, treating spinal problems, anxiety, stress, cardiovascular, digestive, respiratory disorders etc.<sup>4</sup> through practice of Asana, Pranayama or meditation technique but truly Yoga means<sup>5</sup> Union of soul and supreme soul which is called samadhi, a stage where modifications of citta (mind-stuff) are completely restrained. In ancient times the path was followed for liberation, primarily for self-realization. In modern era in the past decades, *yoga* has been widely studied regardless of age. Several studies report increasing use of *yoga* as a complementary health approach for mental and physical well-being which directly depends on the emotional health. According to WHO, health is "a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity".<sup>6</sup> Even the social well-being depends on the emotional state of a person. Without bringing change in the perception, one cannot change the individual concerned. Transformation begins at the root. Root means the foundation from where emotion generates, why they generate. Journey to the inside is needed and that is often taken for granted. Sage Patanjali explains the cause though pancha klesha (poison) in Sadhan Pada (2.3).<sup>7</sup>

Avidya (false knowledge), Asmita (I-ness, Ego), Raga (attachment), Dvesha (hatred), and Abhinivesh (fear of death). These 5 kleshas lead to desire, jealousy, hatred, greed, fear. All of which brings sorrow and pain ultimately. The various emotions are released in different forms like bad choices or addictions, violence, anger or in the form of depression. When

these feelings go out of control, they explode and lead to mental disorders like trauma, eating or behavioural disorder. To overcome 5 kleshas, the root has to be destroyed which is False knowledge by right knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Sage patanjali has given eight limbs for the same in which first and foremost is the Yama.<sup>9</sup> Yamas are nothing but basic social morals an essential part of the human existence.

## **II. CONCEPT OF YAMA**

Yama the first limb of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga. The purpose of it is to form a code of conduct for the aspirant to be a good citizen and a better human being. Yama means to control or restrain, and the sub categories of it are for self-restraint. These are<sup>10</sup> Ahimsa (Non-violence), Satya (Truthfulness), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (celibacy) and Aparigraha (non-possession).

1. Ahimsa – means not causing harm to others, avoid the evil effect of himsa on mind, even thinking of hurting someone is worst than actually hurting. Complete unity with mankind, unity with nature. Love and compassion for all beings.
2. Satya – truthfulness, sat means true essence or true nature. Unchangeable, no distortion something which is pure. Seeing and perceiving how things really are. Complete honesty with ourselves and others. Act or even an idea of deceiving is a breach of satya.
3. Asteya – means not stealing which is not limited to actual taking away of things from others which do not belong to you. Even an intention or desire to possess things belonging to others is steya. Writers and publishers stealing ideas or words of someone is also steya.
4. Brahmacharya – brahma (highest reality) + charya (mode of behaviour) = a mode of behaviour which will lead to the highest goal of spirituality. So brahmacharya is a disciplined life for self realization. Restraining the organs of action and yet thinking of the objects of enjoyment is false mode of behaviour.
5. Aparigraha – means non acceptance of gifts, control over collecting things which are not required and not to get things with a possibility of their becoming useful in future.

The objective of yamas is to purify mind, breaking any of the yamas would disturb it. Observance of yama is for making the inner atmosphere better, and it should be done on 3 levels.<sup>11</sup> These are kayika (by body), Vachika (by speech), and mansika (by mind).

When these yamas are practiced without any exceptions of birth, region or time it becomes Mahavrata<sup>12</sup> ie great vows. Which means yama be practiced in all conditions without any excuse (be it caste or custom, place or an occasion). Sometimes a person may appear to break yama but his/her intentions are not to harm the person nor any selfish interest, such a breach is because of an unavoidable necessity and society's benefit like for instance a soldier fighting for **justice and right cause** or a surgeon operating a patient. What is the reason a person finds himself going against yama. Doing or making someone else do violence, stealing etc. or encouraging someone do the same is possible because of greed, anger, or affection.<sup>13</sup> The three emotions can be of any degree, mild or intense but the result is always pain and misery.

## **III. Yama in Modern Times - A Necessity**

India is called a country of unity in diversity but based on what? Gender, class, color, creed, etc. These are the inequalities created by the society which affects the harmony of society. All are humans, have same soul in the entire world then why social differences like high-low, black-white. Each should have equal respect. Unity in diversity should be in skill, creativity, intellect, capabilities etc. In this way world comes together. These natural differences which contribute to the development of self and the society with peace. Legal laws are made keeping basic ethics of society in mind but half of the population do not follow. Their belief and mind set is different, which has to be changed. These inequalities should not be removed by force or violence. This way no harmony can be developed in the society. Change should be brought by love and truth.<sup>14</sup>

Yama works for the development of human personality, better relations with external world. There are five ethical practices to perform. It is related to interpersonal and social behaviour which would help in promotion of social health.<sup>15</sup>

- First Yama – Ahimsa. It helps build up a society, where there is self-regulation in not harming others. In present society, terrorism, wars, violence, even doctors cheating has built fear in the hearts of humans, where there should be love and brotherhood. The religion which is to establish dharma in every individuals heart, people

have started fighting in protection of it. By practice of ahimsa, every life will be protected and every human will live with a sense of security and peace.

- Second yama – Satya. Do we trust our ministers? False promises has spread unbelief in the society. Many doubts, fear has caused rage among people. Politics, tactics and injustice. Lying in order to sell services and products It is necessary to speak the truth in order to maintain equality and faith in society.
- Third yama – Asteya. Weighing less, taking more than fixed price, giving or taking bribe, black marketing, corruption, adulteration. At the present time, all the above mentioned thieves in the society are on the extreme limit. To keep the society strong, to maintain peace it is necessary for every person to follow asteya keep only what belongs to them and give what other person deserves i.e. his right.
- Fourth yama – Brahmacharya. Brahmacharya is not only for yogis and gurus. Following it is very much necessary while living in the family to avoid coitus by mind, word and action. To control the sexual desires. Women are not feeling safe anywhere be it school, college, workplace, public place or their own home. Characterlessness, sexual abuse, sex trafficking have emerged in the strong form. Through brahmacharya character can be developed in every person of society and women can walk freely in the dark as well.
- Fifth yama – Aparigraha. One of the main reasons for economic inequality, corruption, poverty and hunger in the society. On this planet human beings have unlimited desires and ambitions. We think of fame & money. We plan for our next seven generations. Man is always unsatisfied and unfulfilled, he wants more and more which leads to frustrations and mental tensions. No body is happy, even people with all the amenities of life. An ideal society is one in which human beings receive equal and balanced opportunities for education, employment and practical progress. Practice of aparigraha will ensure access of these resources to all.

#### **IV. RESEARCHES ON PRACTICE OF YAMA**

<sup>16</sup> Study provides preliminary evidence that the practice of Yama and Niyama effectively reduces the stress and may improve psychological health and well-being. The procedure include lectures on Yama and Niyama, trying to implement in daily life and self introspection at the end of the day. Japa writing, Creating positive affirmations and clearing the doubts or solving life problems through counselling.

<sup>17</sup> The studies also show that young adults may advance in psycho spiritual growth with proper introduction to yama and niyama in their practices. It fills a gap in yoga research which often neglects the foundation of psycho spiritual practices in yoga.

<sup>18</sup> Findings show that Yama and Niyama intervention improved the regulation of subtle energy in the body and might balance vital energy in meridians to further promote physiological wellbeing.

Psychological, spiritual well-being and balance in energy brings health in a holistic way. This growth leads to an open mind, patience and positive behavioural changes which benefits the individual and the surroundings.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

Practice of yoga is beneficial for all the dimensions of health, i.e. physical, mental, social, and spiritual and at the same time promotes harmony with nature and helps in conserving environment. Thus, it is important that yama practices are brought forth by Yoga teachers so that a complete psycho spiritual base of yoga is understood and practiced. The practice of Yama may have an indirect effect on attitudes of compassion and nonviolence. From young age this should be taught in the schools as part of the curriculum to ignite a belief system towards self and the society. Because in adolescents or adults as belief is made and the perception is set already, it gets difficult to influence them and change their perception towards society.

Here a belief has to be changed. Yama means the discipline which guides the actions of human beings towards life, towards ethics. It is self-discipline. The human controls his or her whole body by own intentions, senses and behavior. There is no external control over the negative behaviours of man. Yamas are dependent on the individual's self. The person decides his boundaries himself. Further research is required to influence adults to make yama part of their life.

By bringing change in each self, their emotions, the energy in the body, the change in behavior and thoughts will make a difference in society and the world a better place.

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