

Yoga and Ayurveda*

*Dr. M. L. Gharote***

Introduction :

Any system of health care including modern Western medicine is a product of its history and exists within a certain environmental and cultural context. As this context goes on changing, the health care system also changes, adapting itself to new situations and being modified by new economic, philosophical and religious influences. Hence the usefulness of any medical system as a model for another society is quite limited. Nevertheless, it is helpful to study traditional medical systems because cross-cultural studies will broaden our perspective and help us see current ideas about health and healing in a new light. We shall find that not all traditional cultures have approached health care in a holistic way. Throughout the ages cultures seem to have oscillated between reductionism and holism in their medical practices, probably in response to general fluctuations of value systems.

* Presidential Address for the Co-ordination of Yoga and Ayurveda session at the First World Congress on Yoga and Ayurveda held at San-Marino, Italy from 8th to 11th June '85.

** Principal, G. S. College of Yoga & Cultural Synthesis, Kaivalyadhama, Lonavla.

(2)

In old cultures throughout the world, the origin of illness and the process of healing have been associated with forces belonging to the world beyond material and a great variety of healing rituals and practices have been developed to deal with illness accordingly. Among these we find that the tradition of shamanism has existed since the dawn of the history and still continues to be a vital force in many cultures throughout the world. It is also characteristic of the traditional societies that most adults have some medical knowledge. Self-medication is very common. The outstanding characteristic of the shamanistic conception of illness is the belief that human beings are integral parts of an ordered system and that all illness is the consequence of some disharmony with the cosmic order. Shamanistic therapies emphasize the restoration of harmony or balance, within nature, in human relationships, and in relationships with the spirit world. The universal shamanistic view of human beings as integral parts of an ordered system and the conception of illness as a consequence of disharmony and imbalance is likely to play a central role in the new holistic approach. Such an approach goes beyond the study of biological mechanism and find the causes of illness in environmental influences, psychological patterns and social relations.

Similar insights may be gained from the study of high tradition medical systems which were developed in India and passed on in written texts for hundreds and thousands of years. We refer to Yoga and Ayurveda in which are illustrated the wisdom and sophistication of the ancient traditions. The concepts of health and illness of these systems are extremely relevant in our time and there is a great resemblance in several aspects of these two systems.

Yoga is traditionally recognized as a spiritual system while Ayurveda has been looked upon over thousands of years as an Indian system of medicine. In both these systems we find the acceptance of health as a state of balance, the importance of environmental influences, the interdependence of mind and body and nature's inherent healing power.

The Concept of Health in Yoga and Ayurveda :

The concept of Health conceived by both Yoga and Ayurveda is very broad. It is an undivided and integrated form of body and mind. The definition of man in Ayurveda is the aggregate of body, mind and spirit and its concept of health is not limited to the body but it extends to mind and spirit. Thus the concept of health is holistic. It is an entire concept of life.

The criterion of ideal health in Ayurveda is the possession of equilibrium of the three Doṣas and the best mood in the working of the spirit, senses and mind.

Caraka has given greatest importance to health as a foundation for the fulfilment of the purpose of life which is virtue, wealth, enjoyment and salvation.

The purpose of Ayurveda is to maintain the health of the healthy person and to remove the diseases of the ill. Maintenance of the norm and prevention of deviation from the norm thus becomes the field of Ayurveda.

Health and happiness go hand in hand. Whenever there is a disease it is accompanied by unhappiness and happiness is invariably felt whenever health is reigning supreme in the body.

(4)

The concept of health is individualized in Ayurveda as no two individuals are found alike.

The ancient masters of Ayurveda like Caraka and Sushruta have built up their systems of health and disease on this bedrock of individual constitution or Prakriti which remains as sound as ever in its logic and practical efficacy.

Ayurveda has dynamic and creative view of health, for health can never be a mere static condition. It must grow like life. Hence the need for constant vigilance in its promotion and for revitalizing it as a factor for intensive enjoyment of the delight of living. One should not only add years to life but also life to the years.

Caraka draws a beautiful picture of the life of a man in possession of ideal health who not only enjoys the life fully for himself, but at the same time adds to the happiness and comfort of the whole world:

The concept of health (Arogya) in Yoga is also very wide and is stated in terms of absence of the factors that disturb the mind. It is the theory of Yoga that mind is responsible for the bondage or liberation and for the happiness or unhappiness.

The concept of Yoga is explained in terms of 'Samādhi' which etymologically means 'Integration of personality at all possible levels'. It is the state of balance, harmony, equilibrium or homeostasis. In order to help develop such an integration, various techniques are employed, all of which are aimed at controlling the mind. As against 'Samādhi' we have the term 'Vyādhi' which etymologically means 'disintegration.'

(5)

The factors responsible for disintegration are called 'Vikṣepas' which consist of 'kleśas' and 'Antarāyas'. The purpose of Yoga is to lessen the impact of these factors and to promote the state of integration (Kleśatanūkarapa and Samādhībhāvanam).

So health and disease are explained in terms of 'Sāmya' (balance) and 'Vaiṣamya' (imbalance) of 'doṣas', 'dhātus' and 'Malas'. In Yoga they are explained on the basis of the mental state. Disease follows when the physiological constituents of the body (Doṣas) lose their working equilibrium according to the Ayurveda and due to the disturbed state of mind according to Yoga and that the health results when this equilibrium is restored by suitable means.

Methods of Treatment :

Ayurveda recognises following three methods of treatment as scientific :

1. Daivavyapās'raya Treatment which depends on faith.
 2. Yuktivyapās'raya Treatment which depends on reasoning.
 3. Sattvāvajaya Treatment which depends on self control developed by concentration of mind and detachment.
-
1. The following treatment in the form of good deeds is recommended for disease caused by Daiva. Daiva (fate) includes all those unseen circumstances which relate to past actions.
 1. Mantra- Use of sacred hymns having spiritual potency.

2. Aushadhi- Contact with some potent herbs worn as amulets.
3. Mani- Touch of precious gems and stones.
4. Mangala- Benediction and the blessings of others.
5. Bali- Practice of self-denial and sacrifice.
6. Upahara- Feeding of poors as a symbol of mercy.
7. Homa- Sacrifice of ghee and fragrant substances accompanied by auspicious prayers.
8. Niyama- Practice of healthy habits and religious observances conducive to self-control.
9. Upavasa- Fasting as a means of purification.
10. Swastyayana- Benediction after presentation of offerings.
11. Pranipata- Falling prostrate on the ground as a symbol of humility and self-surrender.
12. Yatragamana- Visiting sacred places of pilgrimage.

The above methods are most effective in the case of those who believe in God and have faith in these methods.

2. Yuktivyapāśraya treatment which depends upon reasoning out the causes of diseases and on devising suitable ways and means for its cure. It deals with the appropriate administration of food and medicines or their combination.
3. Sattvāvajaya treatment consists of controlling the states or the modes of mind and their modifications. The

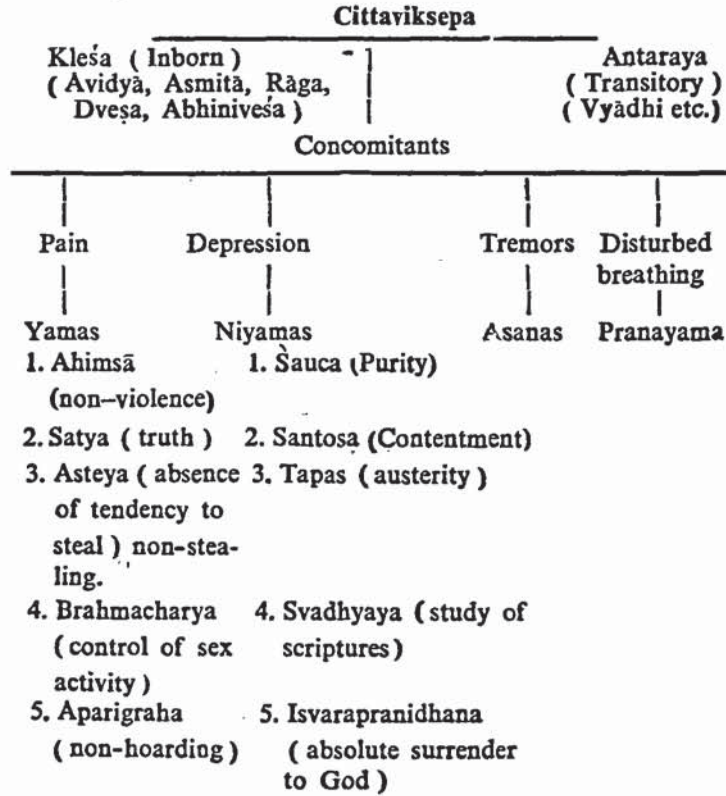
(7)

mind should be trained by constant practice of developing detachment from all evil habits and thoughts.

It will be seen from the above description that although Ayurveda recognises 3 methods of treatment in actual practice to-day only the "Yuktivyapāśraya treatment" is resorted to. The "Sattvāvajaya treatment" comes entirely under the purview of yoga.

A remarkable feature of Ayurveda and Yoga is the spiritual motive and the reward of the highest integration which underlines them.

The whole problem of health and disease in the broadest sense tackled in Yoga may be represented in the following scheme :



Texts on Hathayoga refer to more specific line of treatment on the principles of Vata, Pitta and Kapha advocated by Ayurveda. While refering to Yogic treatment Hathapradipika (Kaivalyadhama edition) considers the disorders like chest pain, pain in the sides, back-ache, head-ache, asthma, hiccup, skin disease, partial blindness, tremors etc. which are caused by erroneous practice of Yoga. The terminology of the diseases as well as their etiology is Ayurvedic. These diseases are caused by the faulty coursing of the Vayu in the upward direction and blocking the Pranic energy. The suggested treatment is in the form of visualization technique. The other suggested methods of treatment are :

- i) Practice of regulated inhalation and regulated exhalation (controlled Puraka and Recaka).
- ii) Taking a lubricating diet.
- iii) Practising holding of breath 2-3 times after taking the meals.
- iv) Warm food prepared in milk or milk with ghee and practising varuni dharana.
- v) Liquid food with ghee.
- vi) Increasing the intensity of Yogic practices.
- vii) Massage with oil and bath with hot water.

As will be seen the nature of the treatment is not a sophisticated one. It has also been suggested to take an adequate help of medicine wherever necessary along with yogic treatment.

Scattered references indicating the therapeutical nature of Yoga and the relation of Yogic practices with health and disease are found in various texts of Hathayoga like Goraksasataka, Hatha-pradipika, Gheranda Samhita, Siva Samhita and other unpublished literature. While describing particular Yogic practice these texts give its benefits in the

form of effective removal of particular disorders. Often the claims are seen exaggerated. But such descriptions do indicate utility of Yogic practices in maintaining the proper function of the body and mind. It seems that some Yogic practices were traditionally utilized for removing the abnormalities in the function of the body and mind. But the therapeutical aspect of Yoga is a modern trend which is not developed systematically as yet when compared to the Ayurvedic treatment. But the evidence is accumulating about the beneficial effects of yogic treatment, especially, in the psychosomatic disorders. The nature of yogic treatment consists of : (i) Postures, (ii) Controlled respiration, (iii) Internal locks and holds, (iv) Purificatory processes, (v) Relaxative techniques, and (vi) Meditation.

Some Striking Parallels In Yoga And Ayurveda :

There are certain striking similarities between Yoga and Ayurveda which may be considered now.

1. Origins of both Yoga and Ayurveda can be traced to Vedas.
2. Ayurveda considered Yoga practice a sure and sacred remedy for relief from all kinds of bodily pain or mental agony.
3. Ayurveda accepts the contribution of Yoga towards the attainment of the final goal of life which is liberation or self realization.
Caraka Samhita gives a succinct and lucid description of the path of renunciation for the ultimate liberation from the world in two chapters.
4. Ayurveda included the basic eight essentials of Yoga, viz. Yamas and Niyamas and used yoga as a pragmatic science, dealing with moral, mental, ethical, social and spiritual well-being

of man as a whole till he lives a worldly life. When he matures and begins to long for liberation Ayurveda lays down specific regime and the practical path of Yoga discipline for his ultimate liberation. Ayurveda gave the greatest importance to this stage of ultimate liberation of yoga and designated the epithet of supreme physician who showed this path of liberation from the bondage of passions of good or evil act.

5. The daily routine advised by Ayurved is indicative of self discipline strongly advocated in Yoga.
6. The concept of Prana has been given great importance both in Yoga and in Ayurveda.
7. Principle of moderation is held in high esteem both by Yoga and Ayurveda in respect of food as well as exercise and behaviour.

The concept of moderation of diet in Yoga is technically termed as Mitahara. It not only signifies moderation in quantity but also in quality. The food to be eaten should be nourishing, sweet, lubricating, containing milk and milk products and pleasing to oneself.

Ayurveda and Yoga both prescribe regular exercise to be taken in moderate quantity. Exhaustion as a result of over exercise should not occur.

8. The identity of Patanjali with Caraka brings Yoga and Ayurveda together. There is a theory that Caraka was the same as Patanjali which is held by Bhoja, Vijnanabhiksu, Ramabhadra Diksita, Nagesabhatta, Bhavamisra and Swami Kumara.

9. There is a similarity of Yoga and Ayurveda in dividing the science into eight parts. Astanga- includes : Yama, Niyama. Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. The Astangas of Ayurveda are eight specialised branches enumerated by Caraka as : Medicine, The science of special diseases of the supra-clavicular parts of the body, Surgery, Toxology, Psycho-therapy, Pediatrics, Rejuvenation, and Virilification.

Differences between Yoga and Ayurveda :

Some of the differences between Yoga and Ayurveda may be mentioned below :

1. In Ayurveda is discussed Pancakarma cikitsa. The pancakarmas consist of Vamana, Virecana, Basti Nasya and Rakta moksana. These differ from the Shatkarmas in Yoga not only in respect of the great number of purificatory processes evolved in course of time but also in their technique and purpose. Pancakarma is resorted to by the physician for removing the causative factors of the disease in the patient. The patient remains passive. Shatkarmas in yoga are undergone by the individual himself, i.e. he is actively participating in them. The objective is not only to purify a particular part of the body but also to bring in the conditioning effect on the psychophysiological plane.
2. In Ayurveda animal food is permitted while in Yoga only selected vegetarian diet is allowed to be taken by the practitioner. There is no restriction on consuming food which is bitter, sour, pungent, salty, oily in Ayurveda as is found in Yoga.

3. The nature of exercise conceived in Ayurveda is more physical whereas in Yoga it is more psychological. In Yoga all exercises are of mild type and they lead to the peace of mind.

Conclusion :

Attempts are being made to understand the old concepts in Yoga and Ayurveda in the light of modern science. Both the disciplines are now being subjected to scientific research. This is necessary to understand their utility in modern times. Yoga and Ayurveda are not very distinct disciplines but they are the systematised attempts towards leading an ideal life. If we trace the origin and development of Ayurveda we shall find that great many names of the spiritual seekers (R̥sis) have been associated with Ayurveda. They never believed that death caught hold of man at a definite time which he cannot avoid with his own efforts. They held that living or dying was but a voluntary effort left to choice of an intelligent person and the time of life on earth can be set for oneself. This is an underlying approach of both Yoga and Ayurveda.

With the varying phases of Ayurveda, Yoga also suffered downfall. But following the rhythmic law of Nature, there is again awakening for the knowledge of Yoga. Both are now gaining their popularity. On this background efforts need to be made to understand again the relationship of Yoga and Ayurveda by synthesising these two disciplines for the benefit of humanity.

Let me finish this talk with an apt quotation emphasising the synthetic view of Yoga and Ayurveda.

“Be a Saint following Yoga. Health automatically follows. Be healthy following the principles of Ayurveda and accept Sainthood as a gift of God”

