



Concept of Smriti in Yoga Philosophy: A Critical Study

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Abstract: Smriti (memory) means the reappearance in the mind of past experiences. Memory development is as essential to human life as food, as it enables individuals to recall and utilize knowledge, ideas, and experiences at the right time. Without this ability, a person's life can become challenging and unfulfilling, rendering the world's offerings ineffective in aiding them. Such a person may face frustration and destitution. Therefore, nurturing and enhancing memory is vital for leading a meaningful life. Maharishi Patanjali, in the Patanjali Yoga Sutras, has elaborated on techniques for developing memory to overcome ignorance and cultivate higher mental faculties. Additionally, discussions on memory enhancement are found in various other scriptures, emphasizing its significance in human growth.

The key components of learning include attention and memory mechanisms. Yoga, an ancient practice, is renowned for its ability to enhance both physical and mental well-being. The primary aim of this research is to examine the impact of yoga on the attention, focus, and memory of medical students.

Keywords: memory, enhancement, avidya, ignorance, healing.

Introduction: Anxiety, inner tension, and depression are increasingly common issues among students, significantly impairing their focus, concentration, and memory. Relaxation is a prerequisite for achieving strong concentration and meditation, and yoga serves as an effective tool to facilitate this. The calming effects of yoga have been shown to enhance focus, concentration, and memory. As an ancient practice rooted in Indian traditions, yoga combines body postures, breathing exercises (pranayama), and meditation, fostering both physical and mental well-being. It is widely recognized for its ability to help learners direct their mental energy, process knowledge efficiently, and improve memory retention and recall. Studies highlight that yoga benefits not only physical health but also cognitive functions, aiding students in concentration, self-reflection, and memory development (Singleton, 2011).

Memory plays a fundamental role in social, emotional, and cognitive functioning. It shapes our sense of identity, guides decisions, and influences emotional responses. As a cornerstone of cognitive development, memory enables learning and problem-solving. Stress, anxiety, and mental health issues have been linked to memory impairment. Research has identified the hippocampus as crucial in converting short-term memories into long-term ones, with stress adversely affecting this process (Asaloo, S., 2016). Stress-induced hormonal changes, such as variations in cortisol levels, can lead to dendritic shrinkage (Woolley, 1990), neuron loss (Sapolsky, R.M., 1990), and ultimately memory disorders (Lupien, 2001).

Age-related cognitive decline and conditions like Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI), characterized by noticeable cognitive deficits without severe functional impairments, further underscore the need for effective memory interventions. Symptoms of MCI include difficulty following multi-step instructions, forgetting appointments, and frequent repetition of questions or stories. These issues call for holistic solutions to enhance cognitive health.

Yoga has shown potential in addressing such challenges, especially among adolescents in educational settings. It promotes brain activation essential for cognitive processes and fosters a holistic connection between the mind, body, and spirit. Studies comparing yoga with other physical exercises demonstrate its superior efficacy in improving mental resilience and cognitive functions among school children. For example, research by Luyin and colleagues (2009) revealed that stress significantly impacts the nervous system, causing structural changes in the brain. Chronic stress can shrink the hippocampus, as confirmed by neuroimaging studies of individuals with PTSD (Bemer, 1999; Sarahian, N., 2014).

Incorporating yoga into educational environments aligns with the fourfold maxim—*Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha*—as described in the Upanishads. Swami Vivekananda emphasized the importance of spiritual socialism, advocating for a value system that promotes holistic development. Such an approach addresses the rising levels of stress, anxiety, and moral challenges among students. Indian adolescents, facing deteriorating ethical discernment and increased rates of substance abuse, violence, and mental health issues, can greatly benefit from a reformed education system. As envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi, education should aim to develop a child's body, mind, and soul, fostering their complete personal growth.

In conclusion, yoga's integration into academic settings provides an effective means to improve focus, concentration, and memory while addressing stress-related cognitive impairments. Its holistic approach promotes a balanced and enriched educational experience, paving the way for healthier minds and brighter futures.

memory loss according to patanjala yoga philosophy

"अविद्यास्मितारागद्वेषाभिनिवेश पञ्च क्लेश - (गोयन्दका, 2017) योग सूत्र ' 2/3

The five fundamental causes of suffering in life arise from a lack of memory and the inability to live life correctly, leading to the erosion of positive qualities and increased distress. These are identified as the five afflictions: avidya (ignorance), asmita (egoism), raag (attachment), dwesh (aversion), and the fear of death, which culminates in abhigyan (lack of awareness).

(Goyandka, 2017)

' अनित्याशुचिदुखानात्मासु नित्यशुचिसुखात्म ख्यातिर्विद्या (योगसूत्र 2/5)

The verse from the *Yoga Sutras* (2.5) can be translated as:

"Ignorance (avidya) is the perception of the impermanent, impure, painful, and non-self as permanent, pure, pleasurable, and self."

This sutra sheds light on the nature of ignorance, which is considered the root cause of suffering in human life. It emphasizes how distorted perceptions lead individuals to misinterpret reality, causing attachment and pain.

1. Impermanent as Permanent (Anitya as Nitya):

- People often believe that temporary things, such as material possessions, relationships, or physical health, will last forever. This illusion creates attachment and disappointment when these things inevitably change or fade away.
- Wisdom lies in recognizing the transient nature of all worldly experiences.

2. Impure as Pure (Ashuchi as Shuchi):

- Things that are inherently impure, such as the body or material objects, are often perceived as pure or perfect. For instance, while the body may appear beautiful, it is subject to decay, illness, and imperfection.
- True understanding involves seeing beyond superficial appearances to acknowledge the reality of imperfections.

3. Painful as Pleasurable (Dukha as Sukha):

- Temporary pleasures derived from sensory experiences are often mistaken for true happiness. These fleeting joys can lead to long-term dissatisfaction or suffering when they end.
- **Real joy comes from inner peace, not from external sources.**

4. Non-Self as Self (Anatma as Atma):

- Mistaking the body, mind, or ego for the true self leads to attachment and a false sense of identity. These external aspects are transient and not the essence of who we are.
- Self-awareness involves recognizing the eternal, unchanging self that exists beyond physical and mental layers.

5. True Knowledge (Vidya):

- Knowledge arises when one perceives reality as it truly is, free from these distortions. Understanding the impermanent, impure, and painful nature of the external world, while focusing on the eternal and pure inner self, leads to liberation.

Practical Application:

This sutra teaches us to:

- Cultivate awareness of the transient nature of life and develop detachment.

- Redirect focus from external possessions and appearances to inner self-awareness.
- Reflect on and question our habitual perceptions, striving for clarity and truth.
- Recognize the eternal, unchanging nature of the true self, fostering a sense of peace and freedom.

By applying this wisdom, one can transcend ignorance, alleviate suffering, and move closer to a state of inner liberation and understanding. (Goyandka, 2017)

'दृक्दर्शन शक्त्योरेकत्मता अस्मिता' (योगसूत्र-2/6)

The experience of oneness between the seer and the seen is called asmita. The seer means the soul, the visible means the whole nature. (G, 2017)

The pursuit of happiness creates harmony in life, as moments of joy bring a sense of connection and fulfillment. This attachment to happiness generates feelings of passion. Conversely, dissatisfaction with sadness amplifies sorrow, leading to disillusionment when happiness is unattainable in love. The anxiety stemming from an intense fear of death and the struggle to preserve the material body is known as **Abhinivesha**. This fear is a universal concern, troubling both scholars and the unwise alike.

Maharishi Patanjali, in the *Patanjali Yoga Sutras*, explains stress and mental challenges through the concept of the five **kleshas** (afflictions). At the root of these kleshas is **avidya** (ignorance), which leads to misperceptions and distorted understanding. Excessive negativity, lack of awareness, and preoccupation with the fear of death contribute to the weakening of memory and mental clarity. These afflictions disrupt the mind's harmony, highlighting the need for self-awareness and spiritual practice to overcome them.

Memory development according to Patanjali Yoga philosophy

तपस्वध्यायेश्वरप्रणिधानानि क्रियायोगः (योगसूत्र 2/1)

Tapa (discipline), **Swadhyaya** (self-study), and **Ishwar Pranidhana** (devotion to God) together constitute **Kriya Yoga**, which is a practice aimed at overcoming the five afflictions. According to Maharishi Patanjali, engaging in these practices helps eliminate the obstacles that cause suffering in human life.

Ignorance (avidya) leads to the gradual erosion of positive thoughts, actions, and memories in individuals, resulting in confusion and distorted thinking. This state of forgetfulness can give rise to incorrect perceptions and thoughts. Maharishi Patanjali suggests specific remedies for addressing this serious condition. He emphasizes that when a person suffers from sorrow or memory loss due to these afflictions, certain corrective actions, symbolically likened to the structured approach of a wedding procession, can help alleviate such suffering.

Through such measures, an individual learns to discern between right and wrong, identify beneficial thoughts, and refine their intellect. This clarity fosters the acquisition of true knowledge, enabling personal growth and the development of memory. By following these principles, one can regain mental harmony and achieve a balanced state of mind. (AWGP, 1985)

विवेकख्यातिरविप्लवा हानोपायः॥२.२६॥

Clear and distinct discriminating knowledge is the means of destruction of ignorance.

Conclusion- In Patanjali Yoga philosophy, the elimination of ignorance is considered essential for the development of memory. In everyday life, false knowledge often distorts our memory, as individuals tend to adopt negative thoughts quickly, allowing these thoughts to dominate and disrupt their lives. To lead a balanced and fulfilling life, it is crucial to cultivate memory power and focus on uplifting positive aspects. This book on yoga aims to guide readers in enhancing their memory and fostering a positive mindset for a smoother and more harmonious life.

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