

Self-transformations through Yoga Psychology and its related practitioners

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Abstract

Contemporary life is full of challenges at the environmental, societal, and personal level, for people globally; including a loss of personhood from the onslaught of digital technology (Tonks, 2021). To counteract such losses and subsequent anxiety, depression, and other forms of mental illness, one can turn to theory and the application of theoretical perspectives on human suffering. Yoga Psychology is an ancient theoretical system of inquiry that transcends time and cultures. Paranjpe (2024) provides a rich account of this theoretical system as an engaged and practical set of teachings that fosters personal transformation and self-realization. It is further shown that this Indigenous psychology from India has been compared to modern Western psychologies of self-affirmation and denials of self (Paranjpe, 1998). This paper provides a critical review and integration of Yoga psychology along with modern expressions of self-transformational practices such as those by Krishnamurti (1999, 2009, 2018) and De Mello (1991, 1990). Beginning with Paranjpe's account of the Sāṃkhya Yogic system of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, a discussion of the framework of Yoga Psychology is made against the backdrop of the earlier tradition of Vedānta. This is followed by a description of the eight-fold path to enlightenment (Samādhi) as a path to self-realization including: restraints on behavior, observances, posture, breath control, withdrawal of attention, restriction of attention, sustaining attention and higher states of consciousness. With this in place, a further examination contemporary teachings of self-transformation is made by integrating psychological processes such as: awareness, imagination, conditioning, attachment, and memory, with Yogic practices.

Yoga Psychology (Paranjpe, 2024)

- An Indigenous theoretical system of psychology that dates back to (400 CE) in the Sāṃkhya Yogic system of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras*
- Rooted in Ancient Upanishads (1500 BCE) is a non-dualist system of mind-body manifestations of the Self (*Purusa*)
- Focuses on self and *transformation* of self to transform consciousness and alleviate suffering.

Foundations

- Upanashids and Vedas offer the foundation of *Prakrti* (materiality) that is made up of three gunas (strands) of *Satva* (illumination & pleasure), *Ragas* (energy & pain) & *Tamas* (mass & indifference).
- These gunas evolve into mind, cognitive and motor organs as well as the elements of sensation.

Suffering

- The evolution of the gunas and the nature of human life gives rise to suffering and Yoga Psychology is designed to unwind that evolution and bring relief from suffering and a higher state of consciousness
- Modern spiritual teachers from India , such as Krishnamurti & De Mello, also promote the relief of suffering through the development of a state of love and compassion.

Eightfold Path of Aṣṭāṅga Yoga

- The 8 “limbs” of self-realization or spiritual development involve adherence to:
 1. **Behavioural restraints** –avoid violence, telling lies and experiencing lust.
 2. **Observances** – cleanliness, austerity, self-study and attention to what one consumes
 3. **Posture** – as in Hatha Yoga
 4. **Breath control** – as in Hatha Yoga

8 Limbs (con't)

5. **Withdrawing attention** –

(from objects and their control)

6. **Restricting range of attention** –

(concentration)

7. **Sustaining attention for contemplation** –

(experiencing the uninterrupted flow of consciousness)

8. **Samadhi** (higher states of consciousness & complete freedom from desire) – “just being”. (p.88)

kleśas (Afflictions) & *Kriyā* Yoga

1. **Ignorance** (impermanence, impurity & pain)
2. **Egoism**
3. **Liking or loving**
4. **Aversion**
5. **Clinging to life**

Kriyā Yoga resolutions to *kleśas*

- Through meditative practices one can invoke:
 - **Dispassion**
 - **Austerity**
 - **Self-study**
 - **Surrender** to God (all that is)

Modern Practitioners

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986)

- teacher of meditation and spiritual development
- Author of over 70 books

Anthony De Mello (1931-1987)

- Indian Jesuit priest who mixed Christian spirituality, Buddhist parables and Hindu breathing and meditative exercises in his teachings.

Meditation and Cultivating Awareness

Krishnamurti (1999)

“In meditation it must be clearly understood that there is no control of thought” (p. 6)

- “Meditation in daily life is the transformation of the mind, ... in which there is compassion, love and the energy to transcend all the pettiness” (p.8)
- knowing oneself ... “it is not mere selfish investigation, because when you understand yourself and go beyond yourself, a different dimension comes into being” (p. 14)

Meditation and Cultivating Awareness

De Mello (1990)

“spirituality means waking up” (p. 5)

- self observation (p. 35)
- awakening is about detachment (p. 54) ... where there is ... “no comment, no judgement no attempt to change, only to understand” (p. 63)
- “you are always a slave to what you’re not aware of. When you are aware of it, you’re free from it ... not affected by it ... not controlled by it ... not enslaved by it” (p. 71)

The role of Imagination & Illusions

Krishnamurti (2011)

- relationships are built on images (p.8)
- thought is illusory (p. 16)
- One must explore one's own structures of thought and memories (p. 17.)
- suffering is holding on to limited thought and memory (pp. 83-84)

De Mello 1990

- “you are never in love with anyone, you're in love with your prejudiced idea of that person” (p. 8)
- “can you imagine how liberating it is that you'll never be disillusioned again”“Drop your false ideas”“Illusions drop away, fantasies are peeled away and they [you] start to get in touch with facts” (p. 32)

Countering Conditioning & Memories

Krishnamurti (2011)

- memory is my being programmed, being conditioned by culture (p. 18)
- the conditioned brain lives on memories not on facts (p. 50)
- we seek security in the limitation, in memories (p. 52)
- awareness is realizing that we are conditioned (p. 65)

De Mello (2012)

- don't blame programming, understand it (p. 92)

Release from Attachment

Krishnamurti (1999) “when there is attachment there is fear. And fear inevitably becomes authoritarian, possessive, oppressive, dominating” Meditation brings order (virtue) light through understanding of life (p. 23)

De Mello 1990” don’t just renounce the objects of your desire, understand them; see them in their true light. See them for what they are really worth. Because if you just suppress your desire, you are likely to be tied to it” (p. 109)

Release from Attachment

De Mello (2012)

- root of sorrow is desire (attachment) --- the uprooting of sorrow means uprooting, dropping of attachments (p. 37)
- The biggest enemy of love is attachments (p. 100)
- “you will never love until you stop clinging to life” (p. 108)

Achieving Love

De Mello (1990)

- “love is generated through awareness no other way (pp 175-176)
- love is sensitivity, love is consciousness (p. 140)

De Mello (2012)

- Love is not judging, blaming, condemning ... Love is understanding (pp. 95-96)
- “giving in” letting go ... (p. 147)
- the death of me (p. 150)

Achieving Love

Krishnamurti (1999)

- “For love is innocent and fresh young and clear. Then, if one has established this order, this virtue, this beauty, this light in oneself, one can go beyond”
“Therefore you must die to everything that you know psychologically, so your mind is clear, not tortured, so that you can see things as they are” (p. 23)
- “to come upon this love, the whole stream of consciousness must come to an end”... no desire(p. 41)

Thank-you !

References

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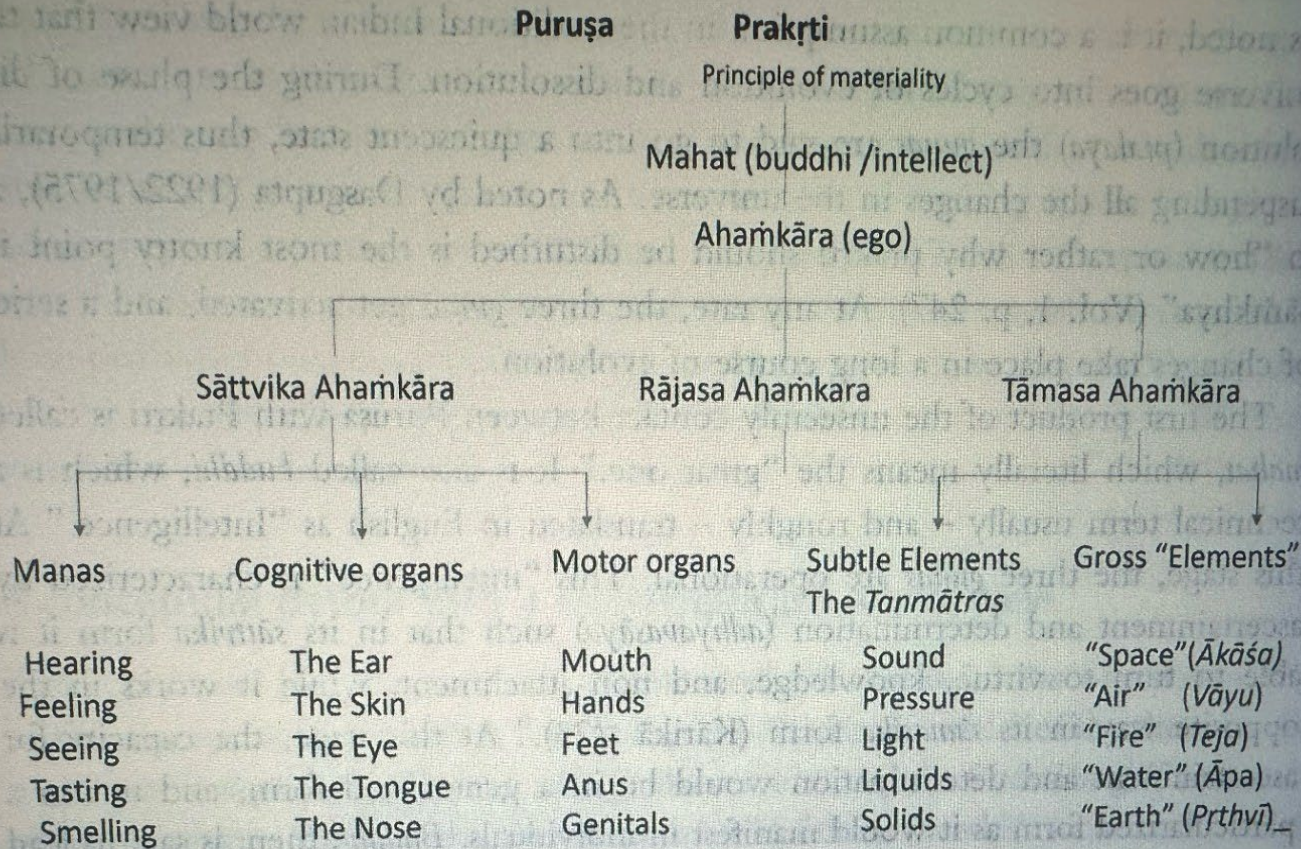


FIGURE 3.1 Schematic view of cosmic evolution according to Sāṃkhya

Source: Author.